Staging Canlit: Reinterpreting the Canadian Literary in English-Language Stage Adaptations of Canadian Fiction and Poetry from 1975-2011

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines theatrical adaptations of Canadian fiction and poetry performed on Canadian stages between 1975 and 2011. Treating the phenomenon of Canadian literary stage adaptations as a response to specifically Canadian environments of production and reception, this study considers how contextual pressures – whether the result of broad national, economic, and aesthetic trends, or unique material factors – have shaped adapters’ and audiences’ “horizons of expectations” in ways that promote the prioritization of particular visions of “Canadian literariness.” Through the use of three primary case studies comprising five theatrical adaptations, I identify several formal preoccupations that emerge in theatrical adaptation as the result of the Canadian theatre’s engagement with the perceived “literariness” of Canadian literature.

In my first case study, I read the 1978 NDWT touring production of James Reaney’s adaptation of John Richardson’s novel Wacousta; Or, The Prophecy as a response to the concerns of thematic criticism, cultural nationalism, and related narratives of cultural maturation prevalent in the period. I then turn to the Canadian Opera Company’s 2004 adaptation of Margaret Atwood’s The Handmaid’s Tale, and the 2007 National Arts Centre and Royal Shakespeare Company co-production of The Penelopiad. I argue that in the unique case of Margaret Atwood, as a result of the author’s literary celebrity and cultural iconicity, the success of stage adaptations based on Atwood’s novels is linked to adaptive strategies that prioritize the creation of a literary surrogate for the author on stage. Then, using Necessary Angel’s 1989 adaptation of Coming Through Slaughter and their 2011 adaptation of Divisadero by Michael Ondaatje, I consider how Ondaatje’s experimentalism has contributed to adapters’ decisions to mine the transmedial and experiential possibilities that “poeticity” offers the
theatre. Finally, synthesizing the points of connection that emerge from my case studies and the broader body of Canadian literary stage adaptations, I propose features that frame a range of contemporary adaptive practices, including the priority given by adapters and audiences to Canadian stories (or narrative content), Canadian storytellers (narrators, and the process of narration), and Canadian storytelling (in the form of metatheatrical, intermedial, and interdisciplinary approaches).
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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# Table of Contents

**Acknowledgments**  
iv

**Table of Contents**  
v

**List of Appendices**  
vii

1. Finding the Right Fit: Canadian Literary Stage Adaptations as Responses to Canadian Environments of Production and Reception  
   - Reconsidering Adaptation: From Fidelity to Cultural Fit  
   - Why Canadian Literariness?  
   - What is Canadian Literariness?  
   - Overview  
   1

2. The Adapter as Explorer: Canonization, Thematic Criticism and the Performance of the Canadian Literary Tradition in James Reaney’s Wacousta!  
   - The Historical Context  
   - The Adapter  
   - Reaney’s Aims  
   - Valuing Richardson – Thematic Criticism  
   - Updating Richardson – The Quest for The Peaceable Kingdom  
   - The Development Process  
   - Native Characters and Plot Lines  
   - The Scotland Plot  
   - Conclusion  
   47

3. Authorship, Narration and Surrogation: Performing Margaret Atwood  
   - The Special Case of Margaret Atwood  
   - The Author as Paratext  
   - The Paratext of Literary Celebrity: Atwood’s Star Image  
   - Adapting the Author from Page to Stage: Narration as Surrogation  
   - Conventions of the Dramatic Narrator  
   - Surrogating Atwood  
   - Authorizing the Adaptation Through Presence  
   107
## 4. Experimentalism, “Poeticity” and Literary Affect in the Necessary Angel

### Adaptations of Michael Ondaatje’s Fiction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ondaatje, Author Intertexts and Alternative Narratives of Canadian Literariness</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theatrical Fit: “Non-dramatic” Texts and “Intermedial Imitation”</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literarizing Theatre, Performing Poeticity: “Thinking” and “Feeling” Tensions in Experimental Practice</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Necessary Angel and the Late 1980s – <em>Coming Through Slaughter</em></td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Necessary Angel and the Present – <em>Divisadero: A Performance</em></td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance, Intermediality, and New Directions in Theatrical Adaptation</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## 5. Canadian Literariness, Theatrical “Fit”: Formal Tendencies and Current Directions in Canadian Literary Stage Adaptations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staging “Our” Stories: Canadianness, Narrative Content and Authenticity</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storytelling and Staging Voice: The Memory Play</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storytelling and Metatheatricality</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermedial “Literariness”: Interdisciplinary Explorations in Literary Affect</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Appendix I: Stage Adaptations of English-Language Canadian Fiction and Poetry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1970-2011</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Works Cited

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF APPENDICES

I. Adaptations of Canadian Fiction and Poetry Produced in Canada between 1970 and 2011
Since 1975, when plays based on Canadian fiction and poetry first began to appear on Canadian stages with regularity, the number of Canadian literary stage adaptations has grown significantly. In the past thirty-five years over one-hundred adaptations based on Canadian sources have premiered on the professional Canadian stage, many of which have gone on to receive multiple productions (see appendix 1). This figure does not include the many other Canadian literary adaptations that have been workshopped in staged readings, produced in large play festivals or staged by amateur theatre companies. Almost four decades later, Canlit adaptations appear to be well entrenched as a stable feature of the Canadian theatre landscape. Since 2000, Canadian stages have seen original adaptations of books including Margaret Atwood’s *The Edible Woman*, Jane Urquhart’s *The Whirlpool*, Carol Shields’ *Larry’s Party* and *Unless*, Alistair Macleod’s *No Great Mischief*, Austin Clarke’s *The Polished Hoe*, Carol Corbeil’s *In The Wings*, and Timothy Findley’s *The Wars*. At the time of writing (late 2011), new or remounted productions were planned for adaptations based on the poems of Robert Service [*Wanderlust*, Stratford Festival, 2012], Margaret Atwood’s novella *The Penelopiad* [Nightwood Theatre, 2012], Michael Ondaatje’s novel *Divisadero* [Necessary Angel Theatre, 2012], Derek McCormack’s novel *The Haunted Hillbilly* [Centaur Theatre, 2012], as well as Cathy Ostlere’s creative non-fiction *Lost* [Neptune Theatre, 2011]. It is fair to say that at present theatrical adaptations of Canadian literature not only constitute a significant sub-category of Canadian adaptive activity, but also a substantial area of new Canadian play development.
If this proliferation signals growing interest in theatrical adaptation and a desire to revisit some of Canada’s most well-known literature, it also draws attention to the cultural context in which these adaptations are produced and received. The rise of Canadian literary adaptations for the stage is obviously not an isolated phenomenon. The past four decades have seen a marked increase in the number of Canadian works adapted to radio, theatre, film, and dance. The adaptation rights of hundreds of additional Canadian works have been optioned, but never produced – the number of speculative adaptations pointing toward the current strength of this trend. Although the rise of adaptations in Canada over the past four decades parallels a broader historical increase in the cultural circulation of adaptations globally – a trend motivated by economic, aesthetic, and cultural factors that transcend the specificities of a national context – in many ways the current national “reign of adaptation” appears to be a particularly Canadian phenomenon. That is to say, several key motivations behind, and pressures upon, the production and reception of adaptations in this country appear to be generated by historical and cultural contexts specific to Canada.

In fact, one could interpret the trend toward the adaptation of Canadian works within this country as a response to a number of conditions that have made Canada a particularly fertile environment for adaptation of late. The cultural and historical developments of the past four decades, for example, have produced an institutionalized and industrialized demand for recognizably Canadian stories. As Ryan Edwardson argues in *Canadian Content: Culture and the Quest for Nationhood*, preoccupations associated with the cultural nationalism of the mid-to-late 1960s and ‘70s have not disappeared, but have rather morphed into new, and frequently less visible cultural discourses. Edwardson contends that over time Canadian nationhood has been defined and pursued by cultural means by “[s]ignificantly different and even ideologically opposed generations of intelligentsia, operating upon conceptions of national direction and
culture prevalent at the time [who have] identified and mobilized cultural outlets – the arts, publishing, broadcasting, film and academia – for the sake of vesting a political construct with the feel of an inclusive familial entity or, in other words, of turning a federation into a nation” (Canadian Content 5). From the Masseyism¹ of the fifties to the cultural nationalism² of the late sixties and early seventies, through the cultural industrialism³ of the eighties, and up to the contemporary demands of post-national cultural “branding,” the economic and cultural prioritization of the creation of new Canadian cultural products, and the canonization of established Canadian works, have been ongoing features of the creative landscape. The rise in adaptation – the rise in the re-circulation of known stories – speaks to this historical development.

In a sense, Canadian novels have only become “available” sources for adaptation relatively recently. The appeal of adaptations as adaptations, after all, is largely dependent upon recognition (Hutcheon, A Theory 6); to experience the characteristic doubleness of adaptation one must have (some degree of) prior familiarity with the adapted text to be able to compare it to the adaptation. That a particular work of Canadian literature would be sufficiently recognizable to draw an audience is an assumption that could not be made forty years ago. When Margaret Atwood set out in 1972 to identify the characteristics of Canadian

¹The stage of “Masseyism,” Edwardson suggests, “saw support for the arts and cultured mass-media content as a means of negotiating the colony-to-nation transition amidst the upheavals of modernity experienced in the first half of the century” (6).

²This second stage of “new nationalism” “sought to empower multi-brow cultural outlets and employ quotas, subsidies, and regulations in the struggle against imperialism (mid-1960s to mid-1970s)” (6).

³“Industrial nationalism,” Edwardson explains, was a movement “advanced by Pierre Trudeau’s liberal government in 1968 (and continuing today under the leadership of the Department of Canadian Heritage), which radicalized the relationship between the state and culture for the sake of federation” (6).
literature in *Survival*, for example, she, like Northrop Frye and Hugh MacLennan before her, bemoaned the absence of an identifiable body of works that could be referred to as representing a Canadian literary tradition. The process of literary canonization that took place in the decades that followed effectively made a group of particular works known to the Canadian public and simultaneously introduced the category of Canadian literature as a framework of reception. Insofar as Canadian audiences are now “knowing audiences,” (Hutcheon, *A Theory* 120-28) audiences familiar both with particular Canadian novels, and with the idea of a Canadian literary canon, they are so because these works have been selected for consumption by social institutions.

The same set of historical developments have also fostered an environment in which it is possible for other media to re-tell familiar Canadian stories. In the case of Canadian theatre, the drive toward the establishment of cultural institutions that would testify to the presence of a national identity laid both the cultural and economic groundwork for the increased development of adaptations based on Canadian literature. Forty years ago, the widespread, institutional production of Canadian theatre – that is, of plays written by Canadian playwrights and performed by Canadian actors in a Canadian theatre – was also the unrealized nationalistic

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4 My reasoning here adapts a version of the “artworld” argument about the recognition and canonization of artworks. The Institutional Theory of Art, a critical movement initiated by George Dickie, addresses the question of what constitutes art by proposing a definition that is entirely subjective and contingent. Dickie asserts, “works of art are art because of the position they occupy within an institutional context.” He grounds his theory both in the production of the artist, defined as “a person who participates with understanding in the making of a work of art,” and in the production of the receiver: “a work of art is an artifact of a kind created to be presented to an artworld public” (96). Key to Dickie’s definition is the fact that there is no artistic creation outside of a socially determined context. This context also mutually defines the ‘artworld public’. A public, as Dickie explains ‘is a set of persons, the members of which are prepared in some degree to understand an object which is presented to them” (96). The nomination of Canadian literary “artworks” and the creation of a Canadian literary “public”, I suggest, were mutually shaping events.


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dream of artists and policy-makers alike. The historical desire for a national theatre, which led to governmental funding structures and production quotas, to the development of an infrastructure of regional theatres, and to the nationalistic theatre mandates of many of the so-called alternative theatres that emerged in the 1970s, has produced a contemporary environment in which the development of original Canadian drama continues to have cultural cachet and economic support. While the production of original Canadian work is eligible for government funding, the development of new, unknown work is financially risky. Adaptations of Canadian literature for the Canadian stage allow for the minimization of financial risk associated with the unknown, while maximizing opportunities to tap into an infrastructure that rewards the development of new Canadian works.

On the level of audience reception, too, it seems that adaptation finds a welcoming environment in the Canadian theatre. The robust ticket sales for many recent high-profile theatrical adaptations, including for some that were widely panned by critics, indicate that the attractiveness of adaptations to audiences may also factor into an economic explanation for the increase in these types of works. The evidence complementing these sales figures suggests that the appeal for audiences may also have roots in a national context. The status of these performances as adaptations of Canadian literature, as well as the cultural status and literary celebrity of authors like Margaret Atwood and Michael Ondaatje, for example, often feature prominently in marketing campaigns. Indeed, since the mechanism of Canadian literary fame is a great deal more powerful than the mechanism of Canadian theatrical fame, the incentive of familiarity for audiences may be greater for adaptations than it is for even the most well-known plays.

These various circumstances – economic, political and cultural – point toward an ideological fit between the process of adaptation and the preoccupations of the nation. As
Daniel Fischlin, Director of the Canadian Adaptations of Shakespeare Project argues, the capacity of adaptation to be a process of cultural revision and renegotiation makes it a creative form that is particularly suited to the aims of many Canadian artists. The link between adaptation and identity negotiation is most often stressed when the adaptation involves a Canadian response to a canonical, non-Canadian text or author such as Shakespeare. As Fischlin indicates, the engagement with a perceived authenticity and authority, such as Shakespeare’s, has “particular relevance in a national entity like Canada, still dealing with a colonial legacy and the effects of a less-than-complete decolonization” (313). For this reason, Fischlin suggests, it is possible that “adaptation is a genre, if one takes the significant increase in adaptations produced in Canada over the last thirty years as any indication, that suits the aesthetics of Canadian self-representation” (315).

Building on the premise that the phenomenon of Canadian stage productions based on works of Canadian Literature is the product of a specifically Canadian context, this dissertation explores how individual adaptations can be seen as responses to particular historical, ideological, material and aesthetic environments within the past thirty-five years. In tracing the complex network of conditions that influence the formal decisions that adapters make, and the way in which their creative products are received, I attempt to identify key frameworks of interpretation that can be traced to a broad national context, while also acknowledging the unique circumstances at play in any given adaptive process. I argue that the response of adaptations to a national context can be seen most consistently in the demonstrated preoccupations of theatrical adapters and audiences with the idea of “Canadian literariness.” That is to say, since English-language adaptations of Canadian Literature first appeared on stages with regularity in the mid-1970s, they have consistently been shaped in important ways by perceptions of what has made works of Canadian fiction and poetry valuable as literature.
and as expressions of Canadian culture. I advance the general argument that historically Canadian adapters have prioritized those elements of a source text that are perceived to be Canadian literary characteristics both as a means of connecting to the “authenticity” or cultural cachet associated with celebrated works of literature or their authors, and as a means of innovation and creative exploration.

**RECONSIDERING ADAPTATION: FROM FIDELITY TO CULTURAL FIT**

It has become common practice to begin studies of adaptation with an acknowledgement of the problems and limitations of fidelity-oriented approaches. The basic assumptions of “fidelity criticism,” namely that an adaptation’s proximity to, or coincidence with, a “source” text should be both a criterion of judgment and focus of analysis (Hutcheon, *Theory* 6), have been widely challenged on a number of fronts. Many scholars have objected to the moralistic nature of the rhetoric of “betrayal” and “violation” that characterizes much of the discourse about adaptation. Others have exposed the central biases of fidelity criticism: the priority of the word over the image, the hierarchy of the arts, and the privilege of the “original” over the “copy.” This now conventional denunciation of what was previously critical orthodoxy in adaptation studies is a signal of the significant theoretical shift that has recently taken place in this field. At the same time, however, the fact that fidelity criticism maintains its position as a key point of departure testifies to the tenacity of our long held assumptions about adaptation.

Indeed, while academic study of adaptation has recently attempted to shift attention away from the issue of fidelity, the idea of proximity as a privileged goal of adaptation still frames many of the expectations surrounding the production, interpretation and reception of adaptation.

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6 For a more detailed enumeration of negative rhetoric surrounding adaptation, see Stam 3.
adaptations. Qualifying the magnitude of this theoretical shift, then, is the fact that critical practice and audience tendencies often split over the issue of fidelity, as many receivers of adaptations still play the “comparison game,” where proximity to the “original”, however interpreted, becomes the standard for success. Perhaps most importantly, for many theatre spectators and theatre artists, the expectation that an adaptation should be “true” to its source, or should recreate aspects perceived to be “essential,” continues to be a significant, and perhaps even defining, frame of reception. As film scholar Robert Stam points out, the idea of fidelity may universally “retain a grain of experiential truth”:

> When we say an adaptation has been “unfaithful” to the original, the very violence of the term gives expression to the intense sense of betrayal we feel when a film adaptation fails to capture what we see as the fundamental narrative, thematic, or aesthetic features of its literary source. The notion of fidelity gains its persuasive power from our sense that (a) some adaptations are indeed better than others, and (b) some adaptations fail to “realize” or substantiate what we most appreciated in the source novels. Words like “infidelity” and “betrayal” in this sense translate our feeling, when we have loved a book, that an adaptation has not been worthy of that love. (14)

If, as Stam’s observation implies, the notion of fidelity speaks to the way in which “we” (universally) intuitively evaluate adaptations, then the subject of fidelity undoubtedly still has a place in adaptation study. Because, as this dissertation assumes, meaning is not contained within, or passively communicated by a text, but is rather actively constructed by its receivers, identifying the expectations of spectators or readers (including adapters) about what should be “realized” by an adaptation is essential to a discussion of what and how adaptations mean, in a specific time and place. Moreover, individually held and culturally held expectations about fidelity – about what and how an adaptation should “transfer” from a prior source – effectively
shape what it is possible for an adaptation to say or mean, in a given context. The rhetoric of fidelity, where it continues to appear, can thus act as a pointer toward the conditions of what is “sayable” in production and “thinkable” in reception in a particular cultural and historical environment.

There are, of course, precedents for reading the inevitable formal and narrative transformations that take place in adaptation in terms of what they tell us about the environment. In attempting to trace the contextual pressures that determine what interpretations get made in a particular culture and time, this study follows the direction of a number of recent adaptation scholars who have called for adaptation study to take a sociological turn. This was the explicit appeal of Dudley Andrew who, in his seminal 1984 essay suggested: “Adaptation is a peculiar form of discourse but not an unthinkable one. Let us use it not to fight battles over the essence of the media or the inviolability of individual artworks. Let us use it as we use all cultural practices, to understand the world from which it comes and the one toward which it points” (469). In the years that have followed, the significance of context in the creation and reception of adaptations has increasingly become a crucial subject of investigation for adaptation scholars. To understand “the world from which” an adaptation comes is to understand the ways in which an adaptation, like the work it adapts, is framed by particular and complex contexts of production and reception. To study adaptation, as Andrew suggests, is also necessarily to study the distance between contexts; from its situated position in a particular place and time, an adaptation also gestures back toward the context of the “source” or adapted work. The ways in which changes of context can affect the ways in which stories are reinterpreted, and how adapted texts can perform new ideological work as a result, has been of particular interest to Canadian adaptation scholars.
Peter Dickinson, for example, cites both Andrew’s proposal and Brian McFarlane’s model of film adaptation as being particularly relevant to the study of Canadian adaptation. McFarlane urges a consideration of the intertexts surrounding adaptation that extend beyond narrative echoes, including the conditions of production within a particular industry and the prevailing cultural and social climate at the time of production. His suggestion that adaptation studies consider the whole expressive apparatus that governs the presentation and reception of the narrative is taken up by Dickinson, who argues that in a Canadian context “attention must be paid not only to the indeterminate system of narrative borrowings and transformations that occur between and across different media, but also to how those borrowings and transformations are registered by different cultures” (*Screening* 40).

Dickinson suggests we attend not only to the “more or less measurable indices” of political, economic, and cultural issues, such as financing, distribution, and audience and critical reception, but also to “more abstract concepts like canonicity and institutionality – especially in terms of which texts are deemed representatively ‘Canadian’ and how that representation necessarily transfers [in adaptation]” (41). “In the case of Canada” he argues, “one must speak of such issues precisely because one cannot speak of a monolithic and monological national literature and/or cinema” (41).

A common assumption for these studies is that adaptation lends itself to this kind of inquiry because of the ways in which it draws attention to the relationships amongst changing forms, contexts, and discourses. Robert Stam, for example, argues that adaptation be seen as: a work of reaccentuation, whereby a source work is reinterpreted through new grids and discourses. Each grid, in revealing aspects of the source text in question, also reveals something about the ambient discourses in the moment of reaccentuation. By revealing the prisms and grids and discourses through which the novel has been
reimagined, adaptations grant a kind of objective materiality to the discourses themselves, giving them visible, audible, and perceptible form. (45)

The prismatic nature of adaptation, to follow Stam’s metaphor, allows us to see, from one angle, newly illuminated aspects of previously known works, and from another angle, a clearer vision of the particular historical, ideological, and aesthetic contexts that produced that adaptation.

Of the approaches to adaptation that seek to explore the relationships between adaptive change and the context in which it takes place, however, I find that one of the most provocative is in the exploration of the connections between cultural adaptation and biological adaptation. Near the beginning of *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon, searching for an alternative to the idea of “fidelity” as a frame for the contemporary theorization of adaptation, suggests that the dictionary meaning of “to adapt” – “to adjust, to alter, to make suitable” – offers a more productive way to understand the variety of transformations, causes, and motivations that constitute adaptation as both product and process (7). This definition brings to mind possible parallels between narrative adaptation and Darwin’s theory of genetic evolution, in which adaptation is understood to be a biological process whereby something is fitted or “made suitable” for survival in a particular environment. Indeed, the homologous relationship between biological adaptation and narrative adaptation is a topic that Hutcheon returns to at

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7 “Therefore, we would like to propose for the sake of argument and the purposes of debate a homology—not an analogy, not a metaphoric association—but a homology between biological and cultural adaptation. By homology, we mean a similarity in structure that is indicative of a common origin: that is, both kinds of adaptation are understandable as processes of replication. Stories, in a manner parallel to genes, replicate; the adaptations of both evolve with changing environments” (Bortolotti and Hutcheon 444).
several points in her book, and that she explores in greater depth in an article co-written with biologist Gary R. Bortolotti.

Hutcheon and Bortolotti build on Richard Dawkins’ concept of the “meme,” a proposed cultural equivalent to the biological gene, as “a self-replicating element of culture passed on by imitation,” but instead of accepting Dawkins’ concept of a meme as an idea, they substitute the idea of narrative as meme. They propose that like genes, narratives “are ‘replicators,’ defined by Dawkins as ‘anything in the universe of which copies are made’” (447). Replicators require a vehicle, which both interacts with the environment and acts as means of preserving the replicator. Just as organisms are the vehicles for genes, Hutcheon and Bortolotti argue, “the literary texts or the stage performances we call adaptations are the vehicles of narrative ideas – that is, their physical embodiment in some medium” (487).

Both narrative adaptation and biological adaptation, then, are understandable as processes of replication, which necessarily involve “mutation” to optimize suitability in a specific environment. Thus, as Hutcheon observes in *A Theory of Adaptation*, “like biological adaptation, cultural adaptation involves migration to favorable conditions [...]. Stories do get retold in different ways in new material and cultural environments; like genes they adapt to those new environments by virtue of mutation—in their ‘offspring’ or their adaptations. And the fittest do more than survive; they flourish” (31).

Like Hutcheon, I find the scientific analogy appealing for the ways in which it reframes adaptation by drawing particular attention to the material, historical, and ideological conditions in which adaptations are produced and received. Understanding adaptation as a process of “mutation” or transformation in response to the demands of particular environments allows us

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8 See, in particular, pp. 30-33, 167, 176-177.
to emphasize the fact that adaptation is a creative and interpretive activity that is created by particular individuals, in specific locations, for specific audiences, within specific economic, aesthetic, and practical constraints. It is, in other words, a process that is always contextually pressured. What an adaptation “can” and “should” look like is subject to the sometimes explicit and frequently implicit demands of producing and funding institutions, the market forces of “real” audiences, the perceived preferences of anticipated audiences and the internalized expectations and personal motivations of adapters, as well as broader cultural and historical influences. The analysis of an adaptation in terms of its particular “fit” within its environment, therefore, demands a materialist and historicist as well as a formal reading.

One of the most significant aspects of this conceptualization of adaptation is that it provides a way to reconsider the concept of success. This approach, as Hutcheon suggests, provides a possible way of moving beyond the evaluative frameworks of “fidelity discourse,” in which an adaptation is judged based on its perceived proximity or “faithfulness” to its source. Within the terms of biological adaptation, successful features are those that ensure the survival of an organism, or species; hence Darwin’s famous phrase “the survival of the fittest.” Genes, as Richard Dawkins famously suggested in his seminal 1975 study,⁹ are “selfish”; that is, they act only in the interest of their own replication, to ensure that they are passed on to the next generation. A biologically-informed understanding of cultural adaptation would suggest that we shift our attention to identifying those attributes of a story that allow it to be copied in new texts, and across different media, and thus to “thrive” in a particular culture. Whether a narrative is culturally propagated (is successful) or is culturally abandoned (is unsuccessful)

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⁹ Dawkins’ book *The Selfish Gene* from which this term comes, was seminal in its claim that evolution is best understood in terms of the competition between genes, rather than in terms of selection for the good of the species. There is still debate as to the level at which selection takes place.
depends upon the specific changes (mutations) in the narrative, or in the text in which it is embodied. As Hutcheon and Bortolotti point out, drawing from a scientific understanding of mutation, we can think of adaptive changes as being beneficial, deleterious, or neutral, depending on the context of the environment in which they occur. In cultural terms this means that some mutations, a shift in the location of a narrative for example, might be seen positively in one culture but not in another (449). Hutcheon and Bortolotti explain:

Not all mutations or changes over time are adaptive, because not all are meaningful with respect to allowing a better fit to an environment. For instance, the musical might also change the color of the protagonist’s shoes. When that color is without symbolic or narrative value, the change is not adaptive; in biological terminology, it is neutral with respect to selection. But if we are adapting the movie called *The Red Shoes*, any such change is significant in that it has the potential to be selected for or against. What we then end up with is the product of cultural selection; what have survived are mutations that allow the story to better fit (adapt to) its culture or environment.

Thus, for Hutcheon and Bortolotti, who see narratives as the basic unit of replication, a story that “thrives” is one that occupies a place in a culture, while a story that “fails” is one that is forgotten and no longer (currently) passed on. Successful narratives are thus those that compete effectively for the limited time, attention, and material resources available in a given culture.

What I would like to take away from Bortolotti and Hutcheon’s argument are the key observations that it is the interaction with the environment that influences what components change, remain, or are abandoned, and that environmental fit, or suitability, is the necessary condition for persistence, or success. My more flexible, and necessarily less rigorous, use of the comparison to biological adaptation also allows me to pursue one of the apparent differences between the cultural and biological processes. As Hutcheon and Bortolotti note,
while cultural evolution involves directed change, biological evolution is necessarily random and undirected:

The natural environment cannot induce the changes necessary for biological adaptation: mutations are random with respect to the direction of adaptation required for the environment. Some fail and some succeed. But culture, on the contrary, at least potentially, directs changes […]. [I]n culture, unlike biology, changes “are not truly random, but are designed to solve specific problems” and so are “purposive and intelligent.” In other words, it is people who change stories and do so with particular intentions. (453)

Considering adaptation as a directed, culturally implicated, process of change allows a second shift in focus; this approach balances formal, comparative analysis with a greater acknowledgement of the activities of situated, culturally constituted individuals. As Linda Hutcheon suggests in *A Theory of Adaptation*, adaptation can be defined from a number of perspectives. First, she observes, seen as a formal product, adaptation can be defined as an acknowledged and extensive transposition of a recognizable other work, or works. Seen as a process of creation, however, adaptation can be understood as “a creative and an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging” (8). Finally, seen from the perspective of its process of reception, adaptation is a form of intertextuality, and thus can be defined as “an extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work” (8).

**WHY CANADIAN LITERARINESS?**

My choice to focus on the pursuit of Canadian literariness through theatrical adaptation builds upon an existing body of research on Canadian adaptations. In particular, it is rooted in the concept that the creative process of adaptation in Canada has strong connections to the
ongoing formulation of cultural identity, an idea that is a recurring preoccupation in the field of Canadian adaptation studies. As Ric Knowles observes in his recent introduction to *The Shakespeare’s Mine*, an anthology of English Canadian adaptations of Shakespeare, adaptation “is an ongoing and self-perpetuating process in Canada rather than a canon of works. It is a process of subject formation, of working out—negotiating—who, as a collective, ‘we’ is. And there is no better site for such a negotiation than the live, public forum that is theatre” (vi). This idea is echoed in Canadian adaptation studies across many different media.

Peter Dickinson, in his book *Screening Gender, Framing Genre: Canadian Literature into Film* (2007), and as editor of a 2002 special issue of *Essays on Canadian Writing*, for example, pays particular attention to the ways that adaptations interpellate the viewer or reader, and how they are interpolated in turn (*Screening* 10). Although Dickinson’s book-length study focuses primarily on gender, the national context remains an important frame for his analysis. In *Screening Gender, Framing Genre*, for example, he indicates that one of his corollary aims “is to examine how a specific focus on the Canadian adaptive contexts necessarily disrupts a reading of both our literatures and our cinemas as generically homogeneous, especially in terms of the hegemonic and counter-hegemonic national identifications they produce” (8). Dickinson’s introduction to the special issue of *ECW* is, to date, the most extensive overview of film adaptations of Canadian literature. In it, Dickinson likewise emphasizes the importance of paying attention “to more abstract concepts such as canonicity and institutionality, especially in terms of which texts are deemed representatively ‘Canadian’ and how that representation necessarily transfers to the screen” (29). For, he argues, “in terms of the state-sponsored discourse around ‘telling our own stories’ that has emerged in this country in recent years, especially where government regulation of film and television production is concerned,
adaptation studies are crucial: for their examination of which stories are being told, how they are being told, by and for whom they are being told” (36).

In *Stage-bound: Feature Film Adaptations of Canadian and Québecois Drama*, André Loiselle similarly examines how Canadian plays that have been adapted into films have responded to a Canadian environment. Loiselle suggests that the relatively few Canadian plays that have made the transfer to the screen “are generally works that embody the struggle that the filmmaker experiences in the very process of adaptation,” and thus are chosen “as a means to tackle the issue of confinement and constraint in terms of both dramatic theme and filmmaking practice” (11). This approach, Loiselle argues, has its roots in a response to the material environment of Canadian production, which favours “writers-cum-directors who manage to produce their personal films only through their unshakeable determination and the benevolent condescension of bureaucrats working for governmental funding agencies such as Telefilm Canada” and where the process “for a Canadian filmmaker is thus a struggle wherein independent creativity clashes with the rigid parameters of the pre-existing dramatic text” (10-11). Loiselle thus sees national parallels in the filmmakers’ engagements with adaptation, interpreting their efforts as responses to “a feature of the Canadian imagination that has been variously labeled: ‘Wacousta syndrome’ (McGregor); ‘pulsion d’agrippement,’ clinging impulse (Harel, 257); and ‘garrison mentality’ (Frye, *The Bush Garden*, 225)” (16).

In the introduction to the anthology *A Certain William: Adapting Shakespeare in Francophone Canada*, Leonore Lieblein offers what I think is an apt observation that may account for the Canadian fascination with adaptation as means of exploring identity and difference. Lieblein writes: “The word [adaptation], from the Latin *adaptare*, means to alter or modify so as to fit for a new use. However, it is not unlike ‘appropriation,’ which contains within it, from the Old French, the notion of taking for one’s own, or taking to oneself. Both
terms emphasize the new context in which adapted works find themselves and the new point of view from which they are seen” (*A Certain William*, iv). Adaptation thus lends itself to the negotiation of identity because it marks the position of the interpreter as “other” from that which is interpreted. As Lieblein observes, “adaptations are invariably written from elsewhere. In part their importance lies in where they are not” (v).

As this brief survey of the handful of major studies dedicated to Canadian adaptations suggests, adapters and their interpreters alike have seen in the process of adaptation a tool for self-definition. The imaginative “other” or external authority against which the interpretive “we” has been defined is in some cases – as in Shakespeare adaptations – the cultural and literary tradition of another nation. In other cases, it is the medium itself, its formal possibilities, its material conditions, and its cultural resonances, that act as the mirror of difference.

While the studies of Dickinson and Loiselle theorize and summarize film adaptation of Canadian novels and plays, and Knowles and Lieblein comment on the theatrical adaptation of plays, currently we have no equivalent exploration of the theatrical adaptation of Canadian fiction or poetry. In terms of scholarly research, a small number of articles have been written that offer analyses of individual case studies, but these do not attempt to make observations about the general topic of theatrical adaptation of Canadian literature. Similarly, little attention has been paid to the construction of a history of Canlit stage adaptations. Glen Nichols’ bibliography of Canadian stage adaptations, which includes Canadian and non-Canadian sources, is certainly the most thorough and helpful resource in this regard. My own bibliography (see appendix 1) draws heavily on Nichols’ research and builds upon it by adding new information for the years from 1999 to 2011. Although annual reports like those published in the *University of Toronto Quarterly* do occasionally include references to, or less frequently
brief assessments of, individual adaptations, I have found no source that synthesizes stage adaptation in Canada as a particular historical trend or offers an analysis of it as a sub-category of theatrical production. Nor do assessments of adaptation as a literary or theatrical phenomenon appear in reference titles such as Benson and Toye’s second edition of *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature* [1997], *The Cambridge Companion to Canadian Literature* [2004], or Nischik’s *History of Literature in Canada* [2008].

The lack of scholarly attention may not be surprising given the historical denigration of adaptations in general. Indeed, the only published acknowledgements of Canadian literary adaptation as a growing theatrical trend on Canadian stages have appeared in theatre reviews, most often as indictments of the “perplexing,” “questionable” and “pointless” practice (Portman, “Novel Ideas”). Despite the dearth of analysis of stage adaptations of Canadian literature, however, it seems clear that when Canadian theatre artists turn to works of Canadian fiction as sources for the development of new plays and performances, their efforts are of cultural, aesthetic and hermeneutic significance. In many cases the adaptation of Canadian literature has offered a new way of reading who “we” – as artists, audiences, and Canadians – are to ourselves through the lens of the theatre. In this sense, the theatrical adaptation of Canadian literature has been used as a way to engage with the question of what has made specific works, or a body of works, culturally and aesthetically important. Often, as in the case of James Reaney’s *Wacousta!* or James W. Nichols’ *The Stone Angel*, adapters have explicitly engaged with the idea of canonicity and with definitions of Canadian literariness. Even when adapters have eschewed the politics of national representation, however, as in the case of Necessary Angel’s *Divisadero: A Performance*, from an artistic or institutional perspective, adaptation has also often been an interpretation, and negotiation, of who the “we” of the theatre is to the “other” of Canadian literature.
The histories of Canadian literature and Canadian theatre are at once deeply intertwined and distinct. Many of the theatrical adapters of Canadian literature have engaged professionally in fiction or poetry writing as well as in theatrical production. As overlapping and yet discrete fields of cultural production, Canadian literature and the Canadian theatre are engaged in an ongoing cultural dialogue. Although what Canadian literature represents to theatre adapters – a historical cultural tradition, a source of authenticity and recognizability, or an alternative “toolkit” of formal strategies – varies widely depending on context, literary sources have consistently been used by adapters as a means to innovate within the theatre. In addition to exploring cultural and thematic continuities, theatre artists have used adaptation to explore material and formal differences between the arts of fiction and theatre. A second and corollary hypothesis of this thesis, then, is that what the engagement with Canadian works of fiction and poetry has implicitly offered Canadian theatre adapters is a means to negotiate the changing cultural, institutional, and formal identities of the Canadian theatre.

In choosing to give this study a national framework, I acknowledge that “Canadianness” is one construction of identity among many. Although I believe that the response to a perceived Canadian literariness is a dominant characteristic of theatrical adaptations of Canadian source texts as a group, the adapters of any given adaptation are also responding to numerous other textual cues and intertexts, and applying additional interpretive strategies. Similarly, the ways in which these adaptations and their source works interpellate their respective audiences anticipate multiple and heterogeneous communities. Adaptations also negotiate the politics of gender-based, racial and ethnic identities, leading to interpretations that at times overlap with the negotiation of national cultural identity, and at others oppose it. Thus for any individual adaptation, there are inevitably other interpretive frameworks that would be equally relevant for analysis as that of the pursuit of Canadian
literariness. For example, the stage play of Margaret Atwood’s *The Penelopiad*, which I look at primarily as a response to the paratext of Atwood’s public image as a Canadian cultural icon, might also be productively considered as a feminist adaptation. Numerous factors, including the production’s funding support through the collaboration of “The Penelope Circle,” an all-female group of donors, its all-female thirteen member cast and subsequent emphasis on cross-casting, and Atwood’s reputation (and intentions) as a feminist author, all warrant exploration in relation to the explicit politics of the retelling of the myth of Odysseus from the perspectives of Penelope and her twelve maids. Indeed, the upcoming [2012] production of *The Penelopiad* by Toronto’s Nightwood Theatre suggests that the legacy of the adaptation may well be primarily as a piece of feminist theatre, rather than as a Canadian classic (although such categories are not mutually exclusive).

While I have attempted to point toward the ways in which the construction of “Canadian literariness” intersects with discourses surrounding non-national identifications including gender, race, ethnicity and class, my choice to consider how literariness is defined in relationship to the idea of the nation is prompted by my sense that this is one of the most significant historical frameworks for the body of stage adaptations based on Canadian works of fiction and poetry. My perception is based not only on the conclusions that I’ve drawn from the close consideration of my case studies, but also on my observations of general trends within the history of Canlit adaptations.

For example, the moment when English-language adaptations of Canadian literature first begin to appear with regularity on Canadian stages is a telling one. In 1975, Robertson Davies’ *Leaven of Malice* (1954) was produced at the Shaw Festival; *Anna Jameson*, an adaptation of that author’s *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada* (1838), was produced at Toronto’s Art Gallery of Ontario; *Riverlisp: Black Memories*, based on Frederick
Ward’s 1974 novel, was produced at Montreal’s Centaur Theatre; and the Blyth Theatre produced an adaptation of the novel *Mostly in Clover* (1961) by local author Harry J. Boyle. Additionally, in the same year the Mummer’s Troupe of Newfoundland produced an adaptation of the contemporary Canadian non-fiction book *Dying Hard: The Ravages of Industrial Carnage*, titled *Dying Hard: The St. Lawrence Widows and Miners Speak*, making all this the greatest concentration of Canadian-based adaptations in one year to that point. Prior to 1975 only around a dozen Canadian books had found their way onto Canadian stages, including *Whiteoaks: A Play* (1936), based on Mazo de la Roche’s *Jalna* novels, *Love and Libel*, an earlier adaptation of Robertson Davies’ *Leaven of Malice*, which appeared at the Royal Alex Theatre after an unsuccessful Broadway run in 1960, and *Turvey*, a musical theatre treatment of Earle Birney’s *Turvey: A Military Picaresque* (1949), produced by Don Harron and Norman Campbell for the Charlottetown Festival, one year after the 1965 premiere of their highly successful musical version of L. M. Montgomery’s *Anne of Green Gables* (1908). After 1975, however, there is no single year in which an adaptation of Canadian Literature has not appeared on a Canadian stage, and there are few years that have not seen multiple adaptations produced.

The increase of stage adaptations based on Canadian works is clearly connected to the broader increase in the number of new Canadian plays created in this period. As Don Rubin states in the inaugural issue of *Canadian Theatre Review*, more than two hundred new Canadian plays received productions in the 1971-72 and 1972-73 seasons (“Creeping” 319). The dramatic increase, Rubin observed, was “indicative of a new awareness, a new interest in Canada and its people. Canadian writers are beginning to speak with their own voices and they’re demanding that Canadians listen to them” (319). Undoubtedly, the turn to existing Canadian material as a source of inspiration was driven by the desire on the part of many
adapters to generate “their own” stories. With their doubled emphasis on nation, the emergence of Canadian stage adaptations of Canadian literature was emphatically a product of the preoccupation with cultural self-representation that characterized the theatre of the period.

My decision to focus on “Canadian literariness” also reflects a history of adaptation in which the growing concern of many academics and practitioners with the experience of actual individuals and the increased attention given to marginalized communities and voices notably did not translate into explorations of diversity and difference through adaptation. Interestingly, the expansion of theatrical activity by, and critical attention given to, companies dedicated to particular communities, such as Toronto’s Buddies in Bad Times, Cahoots, Obsidian, and Nightwood, is not reflected in a corresponding increase in community-oriented adaptations of Canadian fiction. Although the first play performed by Nightwood in 1979 was a collectively created adaptation of Sharon Riis’ novel, *The True Story of Ida Johnson*, the upcoming 2012 production of *The Penelopiad* will be only its fourth Canadian adaptation in 33 years. Similarly, Asian-Canadian theatre company Fu-Gen began development of *Banana Boys*, based on the 1999 novel by Terry Woo, one year after the company was founded in 2003, but despite the success of this play, the adaptation remains the only one in the company’s history. Finally, in the decade since its founding, Obsidian theatre has produced an adaptation of *The Polished Hoe* (by Austin Clarke, 2002). This is not to say that adaptation, as a process, has not been relevant to explorations of ethnic, racial or sexual identity in Canada; works like Djanet Sears’ *Harlem Duet* and the growing body of Canadian Aboriginal adaptations of

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10 In 1988 Nightwood also staged an adaptation of Ann McLean’s poetry collection *A Nun’s Diary*, adapted by Banuta Rubess, and in 2004 they staged an adaptation of Helen Humphrey’s *Wild Dogs* by Anne Hardcastle, in association with CanStage.
Shakespeare\textsuperscript{11} demonstrate that adaptation has been an important process. But, it does seem to suggest that the adaptation of Canadian literature specifically has thus far not been perceived as a productive site for such theatrical explorations.

**WHAT IS CANADIAN LITERARINESS?**

The term “Canadian literariness” as I use it here, is to be understood not as a collection of inherent traits but rather as a set of conceptual schema applied to a socially constructed body of work. Specifically, I use it to describe those attributes deemed (by individuals or communities within a given place and time) to be both Canadian and literary. As such, the term conjoins two subjective, contingent, and historically fraught concepts. For the sake of definition, however, we can begin with the term “literariness.” There is, and perhaps can be, no consensus on the exact characteristics of the “literary.” At the broadest level the term may be applied to anything composed of letters. Although this material definition of the literary is not without relevance to the process of adaptation – the materiality of writing is certainly of interest to some adapters – the “literary” is more commonly understood to describe particular, culturally valued kinds of writing. As the *Oxford English Dictionary* suggests, the word literary means “pertaining to, or having the characteristics of that kind of written composition which has value on account of its qualities of form.” Literature, the OED also suggests, is, in its restricted sense, a term “applied to writing which has claim to consideration on the ground of beauty of form or emotional effect.”

Implicit within this definition is the fact that what these characteristics might be are subject to the tastes and perspective of an unidentified evaluator, and hence are always various and contingent upon context. In attempting to come to terms with the subjective and relative

\begin{footnote}{11}{For a current list see <http://www.uoguelph.ca/shakespeare/spotlight.cfm>}

\end{footnote}
nature of the concept of the literary, several scholars have proposed criteria based on the activities of interpretive communities, rather than on the qualities inherent in any particular text. Taking a similar tack, rather than propose any stable features of “literariness,” we can instead attempt to define it by asking what are the characteristics that have been valued, on what account, and by whom?

What I find most useful about the OED definitions, in comparison to other criteria-based definitions, is that they offer three interrelated categories of ways in which the literary is often perceived: the literary may be understood as an achievement of recognition or cultural capital; it may be perceived as a set of formal qualities; and the literary may be perceived as a particular effect, or experience of reception.

As an example, in the 2004 Tarragon production of Alistair MacLeod’s 2004 novel, *No Great Mischief*, playwright David Young and director Richard Rose structured the events in the long history of the Clan MacDonald as a two-act memory play. A distinguishing feature of the adaptation was its emphasis on story-telling through structural, thematic, and scenographic means. The opening line, “As I begin to tell this it is the golden month of September in southwestern Ontario,” frames the performance as a story being told as it is remembered. As the memories of main character Alexander MacDonald [R. H. Thomson] move the story

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Jim Meyer, for example, taking a linguistic tack, proposes a prototypical definition in which works of literature are recognized by most individuals to be written texts, marked by careful use of language (such as creative metaphors or elegant syntax), in a literary genre, read aesthetically, intended by the author to be read aesthetically, and deliberately somewhat open in interpretation. H. Porter Abbott, similarly, summarizes five of the qualities typically identified with the literary as being “non-instrumentality” (having no immediate practical use), “reflexivity” (it calls attention to itself as language), “fictivity,” “significance” and “originality.” As Meyer and Abbott both point out, an individual’s perception of each of these criteria can be influenced by external factors such as familiarity with genres or conventions. While their location of the definition in the interpretive practices of communities is helpful, none of these models serves to identify the features that appear to be of greatest relevance to adapters and audiences of theatrical adaptations of Canadian literature in Canada.
backward and forward in time between recalled events, the five other performers assume the roles of numerous other characters, including a dog and a horse. The importance of telling stories to the preservation of cultural memory and vitality is thematized through insistent references throughout the piece. Variants of the phrases “Do you remember” and “Have I told you the story” often catalyze scenes depicting past events. Stories told through dialogue and action are sutured together through the central recollection of Alexander and his brother. This episodic structure is supported by the integral use of song and music in the piece. In his preface to the published script, David Young describes the traditional Gaelic music as “a trellis for the ancestral truths” (11). As the Tarragon study guide suggests, “[t]he play itself becomes a kind of ‘theatrical ballad’ taken from the literary form the folk ballad” (7). The importance of the stories and “old songs” is thematized through recurring references throughout the piece. When Alexander’s grandfather tells him the story of Calum Ruadh’s 1779 voyage to Cape Breton from Scotland, he insists that the story is not about dead people: “No, our history is alive. When we tell the old stories we’re tending a fire here” (25). Later, when Alexander is older and bemoaning the fact that he did not know his parents, his grandmother tells him, “Everything you need to know about your people is inside the old songs” (41). The intentional blurring of memory and present experience, reality and fictive reconstruction, is emphasized in Alexander’s repetition of the phrase “Not a ghost. Not a dream.” In performance, a staging designed to signal that the play takes place in a primarily mental landscape reinforced these textually expressed ideas. As Young’s production notes indicate, “[i]n our production the memory play unfolds on a bare stage with six chairs that are moved here and there to suggest a world. Minimal props are hung on Shaker pegs. The story is told in rapid transitions – past/present/future coexist in a single moment. Lighting design drives the telling” (11).
Rather than describing the ways in which these strategies are faithful to MacLeod’s novel, we might consider the various frameworks of literariness that shape the adaptive priorities of the play. The book, which won numerous literary awards, including the Trillium Award [1999], the Thomas Head Raddall Atlantic Fiction Award, and the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award [2001], was the much-anticipated first novel by Alistair MacLeod, a celebrated and much-anthologized author who, to that point in his thirty-year career, had published only two collections of short stories. The perceived literariness of the novel is thus attached to the cultural capital of its canonized author. Accordingly, the formal priorities of the adaptation reflect features that are consistently valued in MacLeod’s writing. Macleod’s depictions of Cape Breton life, which frequently blend the mundane and the epic, the quotidian world and the worlds of myth and folklore, are known for their literal and figural explorations of the relationships between “old world” and “new world” cultures. MacLeod’s short stories, which often pose questions about the location of identity – as carried through individuals’ blood lines to ancestors in a lost world, or as defined by geographical hardship – are frequently included in anthologies and taught as being representative of Canadian (and post-colonial) themes of dislocation or hybridity. The adaptation thus prioritizes the thematic and stylistic “literariness” associated with this narrative of MacLeod’s literary relevance, through the means discussed above and through certain deletions of features of the source text – the character of Alexander’s twin sister, and the musings on the changing faces of multicultural Toronto in particular. The perceived literary effect of MacLeod’s writing, the community affirmation and cultural preservation that the storytelling performs, can similarly be seen to shape the production’s structural invocation of the ‘folk ballad’, a form which, as the study guide observes, “was passed along orally from singer to singer, from generation to generation, and from one region to another.”
In the case of *No Great Mischief*, a unifying adaptive strategy – the form of the “theatrical ballad” – is used to bring together different perceptions of the source’s literariness. The prioritization of those elements considered to be the defining literary characteristics of the source text, however, in some cases can lead to competing and contradictory interpretive strategies and adaptive emphases. James Reaney’s *Wacousta!*, an adaptation of John Richardson’s 1832 novel *Wacousta: Or, the Prophecy*, the subject of the first case study considered here, is an example of this. Reaney’s simultaneous desire to emphasize John Richardson as an author whose prescient cultural observations are evidence of a Canadian literary tradition, to place *Wacousta!* formally within a broader literary history, and to update the text, making it more accessible for Reaney’s contemporary theatre audience, ultimately pulls his adaptation in multiple directions. Such adaptations point toward the multiple lenses through which “literariness” may be interpreted.

As my analysis of the *No Great Mischief* adaptation suggests, I use the term “literariness” to describe a perceptual framework that may be applied to any textual object. In saying that theatre adapters prioritize the literariness of their sources when creating new dramatic works, I suggest that “literariness” can also be a characteristic of dramatic performance as much as it is a characteristic of novels or dramatic texts. The assumption underlying my application of the concept “literariness” to both written and performance texts is that the idea of the literary is constructed as part of the larger processes of reception and creation. Considered from the perspectives of both artistic creation and audience response, the process of adaptation is always one of interpretation and construction. When a theatre spectator watches an adaptation *as an adaptation* – that is, when he/she watches it with an intertextual awareness both of the performance unfolding in front of him/her, and of the memory of the prior text – the “texts” that form the poles of his/her palimpsestic experience are not the
“inexhaustible material objects” of the book and the theatrical event, but rather “objects of thought” or “theoretical objects” constructed out of the experience of each text. In other words, the spectator compares and forges connections between the products of her own interpretive activity, between “texts” not as they exist in the material world, but rather as they are constructed in her mind. “Literariness,” then, belongs not to the “raw data” or collection of signs that make up the novel and the theatrical performance, but rather to the text as produced through the activity of interpretation.

This distinction is made clearer if we think of the concept of the performance text, as articulated by Marco DeMarinis. DeMarinis suggests that “to speak of a /performance text/ means to presume that a theatrical performance can be considered a text, even if an extreme example of textuality. This also implies that we conceptualize the semiotics of theatre in terms of textual analysis” (47). In using the term “text,” he employs the generalized semiotic conception of the term, in which the word “text” “designates not only coherent and complete series of linguistic statements, whether oral or written, but also every unit of discourse, whether verbal, nonverbal, or mixed, that results from the coexistence of several codes [...] and possesses the constitutive prerequisites of completeness and coherence” (47). The concept of the “performance text,” according to DeMarinis, does not coincide completely with that of “theatrical performance.” While theatrical performance involves theatre as a material object, “the phenomenal field that is immediately available to perception and to an analytical approach” (48), the “performance text” is the theatrical event as considered in terms of its meaning (its “semiotic-textual pertinence”), as it is “assumed and constructed” by the spectator. The performance text, then, is a theoretical or conceptual object created in order to explain a performance “as a phenomenon of signification and communication.” It is, as
DeMarinis points out, a theoretical model of one particular aspect of “the performance-object,” namely its textual aspect (48).

When we add the term “Canadian” to the concept of “Canadian literariness” the ideological nature of the literary becomes immediately apparent. As the conjunction of these terms suggests, the idea of “Canadian literariness” brings together the changing evaluative criteria by which works are judged to be valued works of art and discourses surrounding the construction and contested embodiment of a national identity. As a historically and geographically situated concept, “Canadian literariness” has thus been defined in different ways at different times and in different places.

For the purposes of my own selection and categorization, the examples studied here are those literary sources (novels, novellas, or collections of poetry) that have been received as Canadian works; they have been marketed, reviewed, taught and given awards as works by Canadians. Nationality is a somewhat nebulous thing. As Margaret Atwood wryly puts it, in her introduction to *The New Oxford Book of Canadian Short Stories* [1997], “[s]ome are born Canadian, some achieve Canadianness, and others have Canadianness thrust upon them” (xiv). Of the authors examined in my case studies, only Margaret Atwood was born in Canada. Although John Richardson was born in Queenston, Ontario, he lived, wrote, and died before Confederation, and so might not be considered, technically speaking, a Canadian author. Michael Ondaatje was born in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), and immigrated to Canada at the age of 19, after spending six years in the United Kingdom. These biographical details, however, are folded into narratives of cultural interpretation that claim all three authors equally in the name of the nation.

Although in some cases the negotiation of identity plays out on a conscious and explicit level, more often the interplay between Canadian theatre and Canadian literature takes place as
a result of contextual pressures. While it may not be possible to talk about the Canadian environment of adaptation as a single, homogeneous context of production and reception, it is possible to trace the ways in which nationally framed historical, material, and cultural contexts intersect with the particular contexts of each individual adaptation to produce a set of commonly shared aesthetic and ideological pressures. Further, it is also possible to outline the range of aesthetic and ideological responses to these shared pressures.

In adaptation, socially determined, evaluative, and totalizing perceptions of a source text’s significance, originality, or even meaning or essence, function as part of the horizon of expectations that shapes the way an individual interprets and creates an adaptation. The process of adaptation is, thus, twice determined by the environment in which it takes place: first, through the process of adaptation, and again in the process of reception. Environment plays an important role in defining an adapter’s understanding of artistic production in general. As Janet Wolff observes:

The forms of artistic production available to the artist play an active part in constructing the work of art. In this sense, the ideas and values of the artist, themselves socially formed, are mediated by literary and cultural conventions of style, language, genre and aesthetic vocabulary. Just as the artist works with the technical materials of artistic production, so he or she also works with the available materials of aesthetic convention (qtd. in Bennett 92).

The same can be said of the audiences of adaptation. As Susan Bennett suggests, just as “the artist works within the technical means available and within the scope of aesthetic convention, so audiences read according to the scope and means of culturally and aesthetically constituted interpretive processes” (92).
When an adapter creates, or a reader or spectator interprets an adaptation, therefore, they bring a socially determined perception of one work into an intertextual relationship with another socially constituted work. The simultaneous influence of context over the perceptual activities of construction and the mental activities of re-construction, has a significant impact on what an adaptation “should” or “cannot” “say” and what it can or cannot “mean.”

When Dave Carley set about turning Margaret Atwood’s novel *The Edible Woman* into a dramatic script, for example, he wanted to select dramatic conventions that would allow him to produce a narrative effect similar to that produced by the novel’s narration. Specifically, he sought a dramatic means of communicating the novel’s major shifts in narration from the first-person perspective of the main character, Marion, to a focalized third-person perspective and then back again. In an interview, Carley acknowledged that as a dramatist, his first instinct would have been to replace the main character’s narration with dialogue. He felt, however, that "[t]hat element of the first person, then losing everything and going into that third person, seeing her whole life from afar and then wrestling back to the first person [...] seemed to be so key to the structure and design of [Atwood’s] writing that I had to keep that; I just couldn't mess with it" (Birnie, “Bringing”).

In order to “keep” Atwood’s use of shifting perspective in his play, Carley selected dramaturgical structures that would allow for a self-conscious emphasis on narration. He chose to do this in two ways: first, by having the character Marian speak to the audience in direct address, initially referring to herself in the first person, then in the second act referring to herself indirectly, as “she”, and finally returning to the use of the first person. Second, in his stage directions Carley advised that the blocking illustrate Marian’s lost and regained agency through changes in her relationship to stage objects over the course of the performance (Carley 8). In the text, and in productions to date, while Marian initially has control over the physical
space – throughout the first act she orchestrates set changes in her role as narrator – by the second act objects move and the set changes without her involvement, bumping, chasing, and temporally pushing her from scene to scene.

The legibility of the props and set as willful narrative agents that usurp Marian’s control over the pacing and direction of the narration by “deciding” when and where a scene will happen is dependent on the existence of similar, primarily comedic, stage conventions. Carley’s formal choice is thus connected to, and motivated by, his choice to employ particular conventions associated with the mode of comedy. In performance, however, these comedic choices appear to have prompted the recurring theme in reviews that the play failed to have the gravity appropriate to an Atwood adaptation. *Globe and Mail* critic Kate Taylor, reviewing the 2002 Canadian Stage production of the play, bemoaned its failure to adequately capture the “black irony” of Margaret Atwood’s feminist critique, and suggested that Carley “hone in on the darker, more enduring side of Atwood’s novel.” Similarly, Peter Birnie’s 2001 review for the *Vancouver Sun* describes the play as “an essentially air-headed piece of fluff,” (“Edible”) echoing a recurring description of the piece as “Atwood-lite.”

As even this brief example demonstrates, at both the levels of production and reception, what an adaptation should “do” and “say” – what formal conventions are understood to be the best to employ in the creation of a narrative, and what interpretive strategies can be brought to bear on that narrative – is influenced by a number of intersecting horizons of expectations. What *The Edible Woman* “can” or “should” look like, or mean, is, in this case, partly a function of contemporary (and perhaps local) assumptions about what Margaret Atwood represents. While it is possible to imagine a movement-based theatrical adaptation of *The Edible Woman*, for example, that contains little or no dialogue, and utilizes only visual images or metaphors inspired by the written text (something to do with bodies and icing, perhaps), in practice it has
been much more likely for stage adaptations of Atwood’s writing to instead give unusual priority to language, as in Clare Coulter’s adaptation of *Good Bones* as a monologue for one actor, an example I return to in greater detail in chapter four.

Further, while the process of adaptation is shaped by broad commonly shared social and cultural expectations – including, significantly, assumptions about the kinds of proximity an adaptation should have to an adapted text – the so-called horizon of expectations for an adaptation is never a single horizon, but is always multiple. The environment of creation and the environment of reception are always made up of many environments. This is perhaps best demonstrated by the diversity of theatre companies producing adaptations, and by the diversity of audiences that attend them. Not only do these institutions bring together individuals in abstract networks of “interpretive communities,” they are the means by which meaning is produced in a material environment. In other words, theatres, in their architecture, organizational structure, rehearsal and creative processes, financial realities, etc., further shape what an adaptation can or can not “say” or “mean.” For audiences too, the material theatre not only shapes the performance itself, but also shapes the surrounding experience of the performance, further influencing the available “readings” for spectators.

To summarize briefly, then, this study considers how contextual pressures – whether the result of broad national, economic, and historical trends, or unique material factors - have shaped adapters’ and audiences’ “horizons of expectations” in ways that promote the prioritization of particular visions of “Canadian literariness” through the choices made in the process of adaptation. It asks, in other words, what formal preoccupations emerge in theatrical adaptation as the result of a fascination with the literariness of Canadian literature. Because of the necessarily multiple environments of adaptation, what “Canadian literariness” means is variable, depending on the perceiver’s location in time and place, and his or her identification

~ 34 ~
with particular interpretive communities. However, the interpretive strategies used to evaluate “Canadian literariness” typically involve some combination of the recognition of cultural capital, or literary significance, the identification of specific formal strategies, or a literary aesthetic, and the perception of a literary experience, or effect. The intention of this study, therefore, is not to produce a definition of what adaptations “really mean,” nor of what “Canadian literariness” “really is,” but to understand how the interaction between text, context, and individual functions to select particular narratives for reception, to constrain and encourage particular forms, to produce particular meanings, and, in so doing, to ultimately perform particular interpretations of “Canadian literariness.” Because such constructions are often the product of institutional, privileged, and sometimes politically driven readings of works and authors, the pursuit of “Canadian literariness” is understood to be an inherently ideological one. The interpretive strategies of adaptation are thus never purely formal or stylistic; when Canadian theatre practitioners turn to Canadian literature for source material, the process of adaptation can be seen as a negotiation of cultural and institutional identity.

**OVERVIEW**

In the next three chapters, I present specific case studies that illuminate the broader set of issues explored in this chapter. In each case study I identify a particular interpretive model of “Canadian literariness” as prioritized by individuals within a specific historical and material context. Moving from the historical background of each case to an analysis of the adaptation, each chapter then focuses on the dominant formal, thematic, and stylistic priorities demonstrated in the process and product of adaptation.

In the first of my case studies, I consider how the 1978 NDWT touring production of James Reaney’s adaptation of John Richardson’s novel *Wacousta; Or, The Prophecy*, can be
read as a response to the concerns of thematic criticism, cultural nationalism, and related narratives of cultural maturation. Locating the production within the processes of canon formation that took place in the late 1960s and 1970s, I suggest that Reaney’s adaptation *Wacousta!* emerges as part of a contemporary effort to construct the literary history of Canada as a defining narrative of Canadian culture. The motivations articulated by Reaney as he documented his own process of adaptation suggest that his ambitions were two-fold. He hoped to recuperate what he called Canada’s “native tradition” – by which he meant its national literary tradition – by making it available to Canadian audiences across Ontario, and he hoped to advance this tradition through theatrical innovation. As part of this combined strategy of renewal and preservation, Reaney performs a simultaneous critique and affirmation of his source, “correcting” racial depictions to be more in line with a progressive 1970s view of cultural nationalism, even while celebrating the “symbolic” binaries of Richardson’s text as markers of a distinctly Canadian thematic heritage. A student of Northrop Frye, Reaney uses the adaptation of Richardson’s *Wacousta* to position his own work as the maturation point in a national narrative of cultural arrival.

In chapter three I argue that in the unique case of Margaret Atwood, the most significant framework of “literariness” for adaptation has been the paratext of the author’s literary celebrity: to respond to an Atwood work is to respond also to the idea of what Margaret Atwood represents. Atwood’s image not only as a successful international author, but also as an outspoken public figure on issues of national culture, has led to her public interpretation as a symbol of Canada’s literary tradition, and of its “arrival” on the world stage. As a result, I argue, the success of stage adaptations based on Atwood’s novels is linked to adaptive strategies that prioritize the creation of a literary surrogate for the author on stage. Employing the vocabulary of narratology, I examine the formal strategies that make such surrogacy...
possible in the 2004 Canadian Opera Company production of *The Handmaid’s Tale*, and the 2007 adaptation of *The Penelopiad*, a co-production between Ottawa’s National Arts Centre and the Royal Shakespeare Company. In these two high-profile adaptations, I suggest, the strategies of surrogacy enable an affective experience of “authorial” presence, that when conjoined with Atwood’s celebrity, allows the productions to be received as “Canadian” cultural events, despite the global origins of their development. As all of the adaptations of works by Atwood were created after 1999, this vision of “literariness” reflects a shift from the cultural nationalism of the 1970s to the “industrial nationalism” of the past two decades.

In chapter four I consider the two adaptations of Michael Ondaatje’s work that have been created by the Necessary Angel Theatre Company, *Coming Through Slaughter* [1989] and *Divisadero: A Performance* [2011], as key examples of engagement with the experiential aspect of the literary. Authorship is again a key framework, but in this case Michael Ondaatje is associated with poeticity and experimentalism. The question of “Canadianness” remains relevant, but is diffused by an environment in which the politics of Ondaatje’s writing are read in contradictory or ambivalent ways. The fit that Ondaatje’s work has found within the Canadian theatre is within the changing aesthetics of experimental or “avant garde” theatre. In particular, both the adaptations considered have mined the experiential possibilities that “poeticity” offers the theatre. Poeticity, I suggest, is an instance of transmediality, which in certain situations can be perceived as intermedial experimentation. Consistent across the historical contexts in which *Coming Through Slaughter* and *Divisadero* were produced is an engagement with poeticity expressed in exploitation of tension between affect and imagination.

Given the interdisciplinary nature of adaptation as an object of study, my methodology reflects an attempt to respond flexibly to the material of my analysis. As such, in each case
study I employ a combination of literary theory, performance analysis, archival research, and materialist analysis. While the interpretive models I employ in my formal analysis of the adaptations are case-specific (and therefore elaborated in subsequent chapters), I have attempted to consistently frame each reading with information about the historical and material contexts of production and reception. Drawing in particular on Ric Knowles’ theoretical model of a materialist semiotics that is concerned with “the meanings – the social and cultural work – produced and performed by theatrical productions in negotiation with their local audiences in particular cultural and theatrical settings and contexts,” (Reading 22), I examine how performance texts function as the “products of a more complex mode of production that is rooted, as is all cultural production, in specific and determinate social and cultural contexts.” Accordingly, I have adopted a number of Knowles’ research methods. For example, I consider adaptations in performance and as dramatic scripts, though never exclusively as printed texts. Where possible I have restricted my case studies to performances that I have seen myself, and where not possible, I have tried to draw on as much evidence as possible to reconstruct a performance in relation to its context of production and reception. In order to do this, I also draw on local reviews, and where the same production has been staged in different locations across Canada, reviews from a variety of locations, as “evidence of receptions and interpretations – readings – that were enabled by particular local stagings for specific local audiences” (21). Because of the particular national scope of this study, I do not consider the reception of productions that have traveled internationally, but only the Canadian reception.

In attempting to construct evidence of what interpretive, and creative, strategies were available to particular audiences and artists, and what “readings were more or less possible or likely as negotiated meanings” for particular communities, (21), I also draw on my own and others’ interpretations and responses. I attempt to contextualize and locate the reviews,
interpretations, and responses within their particular historical, geographical and cultural setting. Significantly, where possible, I draw on public interviews with a selection of artists involved in the productions examined in my case studies. My decision not to conduct personal interviews was motivated primarily by a desire for balance – since all collaborators can be considered adapters and many adapters were not accessible to me, I didn’t want to decide whom to exclude.

I have conducted the materialist analysis of my research with awareness of some of the limitations of this approach. As Janet Staiger has observed in her discussion of the challenges to a historical materialist approach to reception study in film, the method “assumes an interaction among context, text, and individual in which a perceiver’s socially and historically developed mental concepts and language may be only partially available to self-reflection and are most certainly heterogeneous” (79). As a result, “the verbalized manifestations by a subject are not equal to the original experience or its memory” (Staiger 70). I also acknowledge that, as a researcher, I am as susceptible to the subjective contexts of interpretation as those individuals being studied.

The five very different adaptations considered in these case studies allow me to highlight not only the range of formal issues involved in adaptation, but also the diversity of performance sites, developmental models, and audiences (anticipated or actual) as well as the different historical moments in which these works were made and received. They have been selected, in other words, in order to create a picture of the spectrum of adaptations that have been created in Canada, as well as to imply certain historical trajectories.

Material factors including budgetary constraints, the size of performance venue, the length and structure of the rehearsal process and so on can have as great an effect on the choices made in adaptation as any inherent restrictions of medium. Robert Stam’s observations
about film in this regard seem to be equally applicable to theatre: “While a novelist’s choices are relatively unconstrained by considerations of budget – all the writer needs is time, talent, paper, and pen – film production is from the outset immersed in technology and commerce. While novels are relatively unaffected by questions of budget, films are deeply immersed in material and financial contingencies. [...] With the novel, questions of material infrastructure enter only at the point of distribution, while in the film they enter at the very start of production” (16). In the theatre, as in film, every material aspect has budgetary implications, from the number of actors on stage to the complexity and period of costumes, to the spatial and material demands of rehearsal space, set production, sound and lighting. This inevitably has an impact on the kinds of choices that can be made in theatrical adaptations. It is no coincidence that of the adaptations considered here, the one with the largest cast, most elaborate scenography and greatest technical demands, the Canadian Opera Company’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*, is also the production with the largest performance venue and budget. Performed in Toronto’s Hummingbird Centre [now the Sony Centre for the Performing Arts], a 3191 seat theatre, the material conditions of *The Handmaid’s Tale* stand in sharp contrast\(^\text{13}\) to those of the touring production of *Wacousta!*, which played in small and technically limited venues including high school gymnasium and local recreation centres. While elaborate costumes, multimedia projections, sophisticated lighting, and a rotating stage could be used to create spectacle and to signal the shifting time frames of *The Handmaid’s Tale*, the adapters of *Wacousta!* relied on staging techniques that could be produced using minimal set and props as

\(^{13}\) Indeed, General Director Richard Bradshaw indicated that the costs of producing the show were prohibitive even for the Canadian Opera Company, until a Toronto-wide festival of contemporary Danish culture made available additional funding for the project. Maersk, a worldwide shipping company also assisted by shipping the set free of charge (Pacienza).
well as the actors’ bodies to create the same effects, in order to be flexible enough to accommodate different environments. Similarly, although the decisions to create *Divisadero: A Performance* as a language-centered piece for five actors, with extremely minimal set and costumes were not primarily budgetary, they were likely more practically and financially feasible, given the venue of Theatre Passe Muraille’s 185 seat theatre, than would have been a more elaborate realistic dramatization of the multiple locations, characters, and periods depicted in Ondaatje’s novel. Each of the adaptations considered demonstrates ways in which in the development of a production, budgetary and aesthetic goals are mutually informed.

In addition to representing different economic and physical environments of production, the case studies also represent different models of creation, development, and production. Notably, many of the development processes considered here depart somewhat from the most common practices of Canadian new play development. This is significant if we accept Ric Knowles’ argument in *Reading the Material Theatre* that the dominant practices of English-language theatrical production tend to militate against the production of experimental theatre that works to challenge or subvert traditional ideologies. Whatever the conscious aesthetic, thematic, or political intent of a production, he suggests, the “political unconscious” or naturalized ideological assumptions inherent in the structures and processes of production tend to be fundamentally conservative. The hierarchical structures of the production team and the rehearsal process, for example, tend to reproduce a capitalist model of creation in which “theatrical productions are conceived as ‘products’ for the consumption of audiences who are understood to be the consumers of the theatre industry” (25). The limitations of rehearsal periods that are typically quite short and intensive, combined with the exigencies of funding, tend to reinforce the design of the rehearsal process as a delivery system for finished goods. The demands of this shortened, market-oriented process make it difficult, indeed unfeasible, to
pursue alternative models of development, and so most productions tend to fall back on
normative expectations developed through training and conventional practice. As a result, at
each level of the creative collaboration, from direction and acting, to design, technical creation
and stage management, the structure of the rehearsal process tends to prioritize the goals of
unity, clarity, and control.

While the development processes of The Handmaid’s Tale, an imported production
originally created and designed for the Danish Royal Opera, and of Coming Through Slaughter
follow the model of adaptation in which a script is produced first as a separate stage, followed
by a traditional period of rehearsal with the aim of producing a defined product for
consumption by audiences, those of The Penelopiad, Divisadero: A Performance, and
Wacousta! do not. In rehearsal of The Penelopiad, director Josette Bushell-Mingo placed
significant emphasis on physical exploration, improvisation, and choral exercises to establish
the relationship between the twelve maids. Specific character roles were not initially assigned
to the performers playing the maids, but emerged out of these explorations (Hennig). And
while Atwood wrote the adaptation of her own novella, the final script of the adaptation
reflected discoveries made as a result of rehearsals. The development process of Wacousta!, in
which James Reaney adopted elements from models of collective creation to conduct
workshops with volunteer, amateur actors, and the non-hierarchical, and non-product-oriented
model of exploration and development employed in the creation of Divisadero: A
Performance, depart even further from traditional models of adaptation and rehearsal.

These particular case studies offer models of production that, to greater or lesser
degrees, attempt to work within different developmental structures and creative processes, and
toward different creative or political goals than those employed in traditional models. They are
more in line, for example, with Montreal based SaBooge theatre’s devised adaptation of
Michael Ondaatje’s *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, titled *Days Above Ground*, than with the many productions of James W. Nichol’s adaptation of Margaret Laurence’s *The Stone Angel*. SaBooge defines itself both in terms of a collaborative model of creation and in terms of a particular theatrical aesthetic as an “ensemble whose filmic, image-based physical performances combine rigor, pedagogy, and a boundless collective imagination to create a dark and richly aesthetic theatrical universe” (SaBooge). *Days Above Ground*, for example, is an imagistic piece, “devised”, or created through a collaborative process of generation and improvisation, which uses Ondaatje’s text as the inspiration for a series of encounters between Billy and a number of other characters. Where narrative is present, it is secondary to the visual aesthetic of the performance. When a character is shot, dust pours from the wounds. In between scenes, bright lights are shone directly in the eyes of the audience, perhaps approximating, given the company’s stated interest in the filmic, a punctuating fade-to-white. As an adaptation, it could be considered experimental both in the sense that the production takes risks in exploring the formal and narrative relationships between adaptation and adapted text – it is less bound to traditional assumptions about proximity and textual priority – and in the sense that it explores the possibilities of the theatrical medium.

The significance of such alternative environments for adaptation is not that they produce “better,” more artistically rigorous, or more politically engaged adaptations of Canadian literature, but rather that they open up different possibilities for interpretation. If “mainstream” practices of adaptation tend to intersect with prevailing discourses about canonicity, literary celebrity, and national identity to produce a vision of “Canadian literariness” that is homogenous it may be that alternative practices tend to envision “Canadian literariness” as being aesthetically innovative, interdisciplinary, and the product of heterogeneous communities.
Finally, the different adaptations studied here can be connected to a corresponding diversity of theatre audiences, as well as a diversity of reading audiences. As Susan Bennett observes, “[w]hatever takes place at the production stage is bound not only to mediate the work available to audiences, but also to determine – at least in part – the characteristics of the audiences which are likely to attend” (115). While inevitably economic factors play a role in what audiences attend what performances, there are also a number of additional factors that influence the audience’s selection. Many of the signals that serve to indicate to the spectator the kind of performance they will be attending also serve to construct horizons of expectation about the relationship between the adaptation and its adapted text. Similarly, many things contribute to a spectator’s experience of an event that are not, strictly speaking, part of the performance itself. As Bennett points out, theatre is an economic commodity which “promises the audience two performances: one is the show itself and the other is the experience of being in a theatre” (118). The collection of external frames that contribute to this sense of the theatre as a certain kind of cultural event include the price of the ticket, the geographic location of the theatre, the time at which the performance takes place, and the availability of nearby pre-and post-theatre dining and drinking. The architectural features of the theatre, including the front of house, foyer, lobby, and lounge areas, also function in important ways to frame and prepare audience horizons of expectations (Knowles, Reading 71). 14

Significantly, the signals that produce expectations surrounding theatre as a high-culture event often combine with expectations surrounding the cultural status of the adapted novel, or in some cases, with the literary celebrity of the author. The presence of an author like

14 For a more extensive discussion of the way in which these factors contribute to theatrical reception see Bennett 106-138 and Knowles Reading the Material Theatre 70-88.
Margaret Atwood at the premiere of a theatrical adaptation of her novel, for example, can contribute to the social cachet of the performance experienced as social event. In contrast, geographic, architectural and economic cues can also produce the sense that an event is edgy, subversive, or hip. The location of DD Kugler and Richard Rose’s adaptation of Michael Ondaatje’s *Coming Through Slaughter*, performed at Toronto’s Silver Dollar Tavern on Spadina Avenue, for example, would have set up very different expectations for its audience.

Stories published in many local newspapers in advance of the *Wacousa!* tour announced the production as a rare opportunity to take part in a professional (and urban) theatrical experience, but the actual performance venues may have signaled something quite different.

In my final chapter I attempt to highlight the points of connection that emerge out of my case studies, and to begin the process of mapping some of the key formal tendencies and theoretical preoccupations that appear to persist across the broader body of Canadian literary stage adaptations. Re-examining the priority given by adapters and audiences to Canadian stories (or narrative content), Canadian storytellers (authors, narrators, and authorial surrogates), and Canadian storytelling (in the form of metatheatrical, intermedial, and interdisciplinary approaches), I propose several trajectories that indicate the range of contemporary adaptive practices. Without attempting to fit these trends into a potted history, I present these preliminary observations as a way of pointing toward issues that would reward further study. As entry points for future research, these categories, along with their attendant examples and issues, offer ways of reframing the initial questions that animated this study: How do adaptations respond to a particularly Canadian environment? How do they reflect a focus on national literature, or preoccupations with the idea of “Canadian literariness”? How, in turn, do they represent interpretations of what has defined Canadian literature (formally, thematically, and/or in terms of its affect/effect)? What insights do they offer about the
relationships between Canadian theatre and Canadian literature at different moments? What has the process of adaptation offered Canadian theatre artists? And finally, what new directions, innovations, and explorations has adaptation opened up for directors, writers, performers, designers, and other collaborators?
2. **The Adapter as Explorer: Canonization, Thematic Criticism and the Performance of the Canadian Literary Tradition in James Reaney’s *Wacousta!***

*I think also that any sensible person would say that what you do with a tradition, after picking out the part of it that seems to go well with you, is follow it. That is, do it over again. I don’t mean turning out facsimiles but related works.... The native tradition, then, is something that repays inquiry, repays it as I’ve tried to indicate not only with the acquisition of interesting heirlooms but with imaginative life that can still beget more imaginative life, with some passages even that can change your life.*

(Reaney, “Predicament” 38-39 [1957])

Created during the first flourishing of theatrical adaptations of Canadian literature, James Reaney’s 1978 play *Wacousta!* offers an illustrative historical entry point into the practice of Canlit adaptation. Based on John Richardson’s 1832 novel, *Wacousta, or, The Prophecy*, the play *Wacousta!* is one of several adaptations of early Canadian literary works produced in the 1970s, can be seen as a response to the cultural nationalism of the period and to the canonization of Canadian literature taking place at the time. James Reaney, a playwright, educator, and scholar of English literature, saw the adaptation as actively participating in both the creation of Canada’s literary history, and in the development of the emerging Canadian theatre. Reaney had two primary ambitions for the piece, which he expressed in a number of publications following the adaptation process: he hoped to revive Richardson’s text – to make Ontario audiences aware of a historically and culturally significant work of literature – and he hoped to update it. To achieve these ends, Reaney structured the development process as a series of community workshops and toured the final production to twenty-three communities.

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1 Development on the piece began in January of 1976. The finalized version of the play toured in the spring of 1978.
across Southwestern and Northern Ontario. In re-imagining the story for a 1970s audience, Reaney sought not only to mine those elements of Richardson’s story that would speak to contemporary spectators, but also to use the text’s imagery and structural oppositions as springboards for theatrical innovation.

_Wacousta!,_ moreover, is one of the clearest examples of theatrical adaptation being used to engage consciously with the idea of Canadian literariness. In adapting _Wacousta_, Reaney responded imaginatively not only to the historical tale of the Pontiac conspiracy, but also to the narrative of the Canadian “native tradition” (by which Reaney meant a national, rather than aboriginal, literary tradition) that Richardson, as “the father of our literature” (_Wacousta!_ 6), represented to him. Within this narrative, as articulated within the discourse of thematic criticism that was prevalent at the time, the novel _Wacousta_ represents an early stage of Canadian cultural expression. Reaney’s narrative and formal choices demonstrate the significant influence of thematic criticism on the adaptation. Many of the structuring oppositions that thematic critics interpreted as literary evidence of a shared cultural psychology (civilization/wilderness, garrison/forest, British/Indian, etc.) were emphasized in the adaptation through both narrative and scenographic means. In addition, Reaney, who was deeply influenced by the ideas of Northrop Frye, his doctoral supervisor, viewed his own creative process as participating in the “maturation” of Canadian theatre and literature. In his dual aims to reaffirm the value of his source and to reinterpret it as a contemporary theatrical work, Reaney implicitly positioned his own adaptation as the product of a moment of cultural “arrival.” In the process he both celebrated and critiqued Richardson’s work, at times approaching Richardson as a visionary whose writing anticipated the cultural developments of the 20th century, and at other times offering a corrective “progressive” reading of Richardson that ironizes his historical distance.
In its multiple and often contradictory priorities, *Wacousta!* illuminates the differently perceived statuses of Canadian literature and Canadian theatre. Reaney’s adaptation prioritizes the perceived literariness of Richardson’s novel by focusing on several perceived sites of authenticity and value. First, the adaptation pursues the idea that the Canadian literary tradition is rooted in the particularities of time and space by prioritizing those elements that indicate the local historicity of Richardson’s story. Second, it pursues the idea that literary authenticity is textual, or found in particular prose patterns of convention, by placing emphasis on melodramatic and romantic formal strategies and themes. Third, it pursues the idea that an authentic literary tradition is rooted in the shared myths of a culture by prioritizing a recreation of the text’s structural oppositions, according to the interpretations of thematic criticism. Reaney, like many of his peers, perceives the Canadian theatre of the 1970s to lack a significant theatrical tradition. Disregarding the history of dramatic literature in Canada, Reaney attempts to find an appropriate performance style by drawing on a number of contemporary models, primarily those that invoke ritual and the tradition of communal storytelling.

Ultimately, the competing “fidelities” at play in *Wacousta!* result in a number of the play’s major weaknesses. Hampered by excessive length, a convoluted plot, and a melodramatic style that proved not to be very successful with audiences, the play is historically significant not on account of its formal achievements. Rather, *Wacousta!* is an important adaptation because of what its numerous ambitions reveal about the early field of CanLit theatre adaptation.
THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Two events took place in the period immediately before work on *Wacousta!* began that define Reaney’s environment in crucial ways: the initial publication of the *New Canadian Library* series by McClelland and Stewart and the appearance of the *Literary History of Canada*. Together these works transformed the writing of Canadian literary history, and legitimized the institutional discourse of Canadian literary study. As the first “comprehensive reference book on the (English) literary history” of Canada (Klinck ix), the latter offered the first systematic, authorized and definitive enumeration of “those works regarded as the best” (ix, xi) by twenty-nine contributing scholars. As such, its express intention was to “encourage established and younger scholars to engage in a critical study of that history both before and after the appearance of the book” (ix). Work on the *Literary History* began in 1957, the same year in which McClelland and Stewart began publication of the *New Canadian Library*, the first paperback series dedicated exclusively to Canadian literature. By the time that the *Literary History* was published, many of the titles described in Klinck’s history as major works of Canadian literature were available for the first time to Canadian audiences. The simultaneous availability of Canadian titles and authorization of a definitive reference guide did much to consecrate the newly selected works. The timing, of course, is not coincidental, but in large part the result of a building cultural nationalism that was manifested in the support of government funding agencies. As Robert Lecker points out, Klinck’s volume was written with the support of the Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Canada Council, and received “twenty-two separate short term grants in aid of research” (*Making it Real* 25).

The publication of the *Literary History* is the most tangible product of a groundswell of scholarship dedicated to Canadian literature that developed through the ‘60s and ‘70s. The
growing institutionalization of this field of study is also evident in the development of Canadian learned societies in the early seventies such as the Association for Canadian and Quebec Literatures in 1973, the Association for Canadian Studies in 1973, and the Association for Canadian Theatre History in 1976.

What emerges out of this period of increased scholarly attention is an explanatory narrative that takes on a life of its own as a kind of cherished cultural text. As Imre Szeman observes, in the wake of state funded developments in the 1950s and ‘60s, “it is in literary criticism rather than in literary production itself that it is possible to see the explicit creation of a national literature” (17). While individual works may be read as nationalist texts, since, as he suggests, “any text can be read as an allegory of its national context,” there are few examples of Canadian fiction that aspire to write the nation into existence (163). Thus, he argues, “[i]n the absence of a Canadian literature whose intent it was to produce the national ‘imagined community’ it is hard not to see literary criticism as a kind of symptomatic substitute: yet another example of the technologies by which Canadian space has been sewn together – the high cultural equivalent of the Canadian National Railway” (164).

This “symptomatic substitute” appears to have offered the theatrical adapters of the period an authenticity – simulacral as it was – which could be imported into an emerging national theatre hungry for its own cultural tradition. Defined by the same cultural moment, the theatre of the late ‘60s and ‘70s was equally influenced by the politics of cultural nationalism. As Alan Filewod explains, in the mid-1970s the anxiety surrounding the necessary construction of a national theatre is identifiable in “the common references to a need for an ‘indigenous’ or ‘native’ theatre – meaning, in the early 1970s, a theatre that was authentically Canadian, but usually in a sense that was unknown and had to be found through a re-examination of theatrical process” (64). While both scholars and creators of Canadian literature shared similar
preoccupations, however, theatre artists faced the particular challenge of reconciling what tradition did exist - a body of fundamentally literary plays - to the needs of contemporary performance. As playwright George Ryga wrote in 1977,

> The emergence of our contemporary theatre owes less to esoteric tradition than it does to political and economic realities outside the stage door. This is not to suggest criticism of earlier Canadian theatrical literature – as literature it offers valuable study. As theatre, it is unlikely to ever find acceptance again. As a dramatist, I wish it had been otherwise – that some continuity might have been maintained to enrich and deepen the field in which we work. That some additional light might have been thrown on the character, habits, agonies and laughter of those people who were our ancestors in the English-speaking parts of this country. (341-42)

The perception articulated by Ryga that the existing tradition of Canadian *dramatic literature* did not provide an authentic *theatrical* tradition highlights a major contrast between the fields of literary production and theatrical production in the 1970s. That contemporary practitioners felt that the Canadian theatre was in some ways defined by the absence of a theatrical tradition speaks to the different chronologies of Canadian literary history and Canadian theatre history. While by the 1970s Canadian literature was perceived to have an established historical tradition, Canadian theatre was perceived largely to be inventing itself without effective “native” models. The suggestions offered by playwrights at a special Canada Council-sponsored conference in Gaspé, Quebec in 1971, for example, reveal the efforts of theatre practitioners to create an infrastructure for production that, they perceived, already existed for Canadian literature. The manifesto that resulted from the conference, drafted by Jack Gray, highlights the lack of an existing tradition and the need for the cultivation of new plays, arguing that “quality will grow from quantity”: “[w]hat the Canadian theatre needs now
is a constant supply of new work, both from the novice and the established playwright, and in all forms and styles” (“A Strange Enterprise” 293). To this end, the playwrights recommended that “the Canada Council and other grant giving agencies make it their policy that the theatre in Canada become predominantly Canadian in content” and furthermore that grant agencies stipulate that “any theatre receiving funds will be required to include in its repertoire at least one Canadian work in each two works it produces.” (294).

As Robert Wallace observes, although the Council endorsed this recommendation, it wasn’t until 1978 that the Council issued policy statements giving priority to Canadian plays, artists, and candidates for senior artistic and administrative positions (6). Wallace suggests, therefore, that the interest that preceded and prompted the Council’s eventual shift was fostered by a confluence of factors outside of the theatre, including, notably, the presence of the model offered by the more established Canadian literature: “Analysts of these theatres generally agree that a major reason for their rise to prominence was ‘a groundswell of interest in Canadian history, culture and institutions.’ A new emphasis on Canadian studies in schools and universities stimulated this interest, as did the increased publication of Canadian literature that the Canada Council helped to fund” (7). Although playwrights and practitioners were eager to bring about this phase of institutional and canonical nationalism in theatre, the infrastructure and funding for the production and interpretation of Canadian fiction and poetry were significantly further developed. A telling example of this disparity is the fact that comparable major anthologies of Canadian plays were not published – and thus efforts toward canonization were not realized – until the early 1980s.

2 Interestingly, they also suggest that “adaptations of existing stage works not be considered Canadian,” (294) signaling anxiety about a potential loophole that would allow for the dilution of Canadian content with imperial content, or with the preoccupation of Canadian writers in derivative practices.
In addition to offering a model of a significantly more developed production infrastructure, Canadian literature also offered established models of critical interpretation. In particular, the influence of literary thematic criticism appears to resonate in the discourse on Canadian theatre several years after its initial introduction, and to linger in the rhetoric surrounding the rise of the so-called alternative theatres. In an article published in Canadian Theatre Review in 1977, George Ryga’s call for a distinctive culture rooted in the shared experience of nature re-iterates the arguments of thematic criticism as applied to the theatre:

[T]he issue in national survival is development of a popular, genuine people’s culture... whether it be literature, theatre, music or film.[…] And foremost in this is a re-examination of our history and lore for discovery of that distinctive mythology which reflects in our habits and ways a popularly agreed-on interpretation of who we are and how we got that way. Past experiences, climate, the distances of our geography, the role of winter... the colour, nature and tone of our storms and sunlight – determine the nature of our language, speed of movement and potential of our physical and spiritual appetites. And we should never accept substitutes, either at discount prices – or wrapped in colourful packaging. (348)

A product of the desire within the Canadian theatre to stage more Canadian content and to explore distinctly Canadian themes, stage adaptations of Canadian fiction and poetry in this period also participated in the consolidation of a native literary tradition by nominating certain Canadian authors and titles as being worthy of “doing over,” and by putting forward a set of significant historical works that mirrored those identified in seminal works like Literary History of Canada. Indeed, Richardson’s novel is one of several nineteenth-century prose works identified in Carl F. Klinck’s seminal 1965 survey that were given theatrical treatments in a very short period. A year before James Reaney began work on Wacousta!, Pauline Carey
revisited Anna Jameson’s 1838 travelogue *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada* in a play titled *Anna Jameson*, performed in 1975 at the AGO in Toronto, and in 1976, Mermaid Theatre, an east coast puppet theatre, adapted Susanna Moodie’s 1852 *Roughing it in the Bush*. Perhaps more than any other adapter of the time, however, Reaney approached the process of reinterpreting historically significant Canadian literature for the Canadian stage from a perspective that was heavily influenced by contemporary ideas about the cultural significance and defining formal characteristics of the Canadian literary tradition.

**THE ADAPTER**

James Reaney, who had already received two Governor-General’s awards for poetry (1949, 1958) and completed a PhD in English (under the supervision of Northrop Frye) in record time before he first turned his pen toward the writing of drama in 1960, is not an altogether typical theatrical adapter of Canadian literature. He is certainly the most high-profile playwright of the mid-1970s to create an adaptation based on Canadian fiction, having published and produced over a dozen plays by then, and won a third-Governor General’s award for Drama. He is also the most scholarly: Reaney is the only adapter (of an adaptation that was both produced professionally and published) who was also a full-time university professor and published scholar. Nonetheless, despite Reaney’s unique background, which makes his interest in Richardson’s text somewhat less surprising, his attraction to this adaptation at this particular moment offers a telling window onto the environment of the time.

Reaney’s understanding of the function of adaptation in Canadian culture is anticipated, and perhaps best articulated, in his 1957 article, “The Canadian Poet’s Predicament.” Published twenty years before work began on *Wacousta!*, at a time when a Canadian poetic tradition “has
really just recently become available”³ (32), “Predicament” poses the question of what the poet’s relationship should be to the “native poetic tradition.” His provisional answer, participating in the already pervasive cultural maturation narrative, is to argue in favor of a position of self-consciousness, developed by uncovering “what the poet’s own countrymen have done with words” (32).

In this early article he is already responding to, and anticipating, a thematic interpretation of what this native tradition apparently is – an interpretation rooted, significantly, in his response to Northrop Frye’s 1956 publication, “La Tradition narrative dans la poésie canadienne-anglaise.”⁴ In his analysis he constructs a “sampler [that] represents the way that the Canadian poet’s most imaginative ancestors and contemporaries saw and see the world; it represents a distinctive vision but it cries out for more development, just as the poet’s innermost self probably cries out for some sort of ancestral pattern to go by” (35). Reaney’s expressed desire to follow the tradition or, as he says in the epigraph to this chapter, to “do it over again” (38) is explicitly linked to a number of nationalistic preoccupations. The engagement with tradition offers Reaney an alternative to the position of a colonial inferiority, a perspective from which to write other than that of the metaphorical “British Museum Reading Room” (32). It also offers a view of the poet’s process as belonging to a national context, and thus expresses the ways in which “Canada is a very peculiar and different country” and in which its poetry reflects its “national colour and shape” (31). It offers a nationalistic framework into which the writer can insert himself, just as it helps to identify the

³ Reaney refers to the publication of A.J.M Smith’s The Book of Canadian Poetry, A Critical and Historical Anthology in 1943 and to Louis Dudek’s and Irving Layton’s anthology Canadian Poems 1850-1952 in 1952.

⁴ Originally published in Gants du Ciel in 1946, this article was republished in The Bush Garden in 1971, and gained greater discursive currency at that time.
shaping effect of the country’s imagination upon the poet. Finally, it allows the poet to be aware of the generic, imagistic, and narrative patterns that shape his writing.

Significantly, however, Reaney did not view historical dramatic literature as being an important part of the Canadian literary tradition. Even when Reaney became an established playwright, he perceived the tradition of Canadian drama to be less developed, and thus of lesser historical and cultural significance than Canadian poetry or fiction. In 1978, Reaney, in answer to the question, “Why did I begin to write drama?” names a number of influences, including the Greeks and Shakespeare, Wilder, O’Neil, Eliot, Cocteau, and Beckett (Anthony 143-145). Notably absent from the list of authors is mention of any other Canadian playwright. The “good plays,” the “beautiful structures of our heritage” (141), are those imported from elsewhere. But, as Reaney acknowledges, the interpretation and actualization of any individual production is as influential as the play itself, and in this regard Canadian theatre has been a great influence on Reaney: “I can’t stress enough the division there used to be in Canada between reading the Shakespeare canon and seeing it. In childhood I don’t think it really matters if the only production you can get to of A Winter’s Tale is the local Normal school; but later on it does” (145). While bemoaning the provincial nature of Canada’s theatres, he also celebrates the amateur: “quite often primitive productions force the audience to work out richness in a way that a ‘properly’ designed and ‘competently’ acted version miserably does not” (146). Thus Reaney cites specific interpretations that “in the repertoire of this time […] keep saying things to me” 5 (147). Reaney’s self-described influences thus distinguish between

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5 Specific examples include Pamela Terry’s 1958 production of Epicoene (Toronto), Hirsch’s 1956 Volpone (Winnipeg), Roland Hewgill’s 1972 Stratford productions of Duchess of Malfi and Revenger’s Tragedy, and even a 1964 student production of Samson Agonistes (Marion Woodman, Middlesex College). He also lists theatres where he has had a good theatrical experience: the Royal Alex, Hart House Theatre, the Dominion Theatre and the Playhouse in Winnipeg, the Bastion in Victoria,
the perceived absence of a Canadian tradition of dramatic writing and the presence of a
Canadian tradition of theatrical production. As if to underscore this separation, Reaney posits
an 1840s American adaptation of *Wacousta* in its performance at the Covent Garden Theatre in
London, Ontario as “the possible beginning of a native theatre right here where I live now”
(151). For Reaney, then, the “native tradition” of English literature could be followed, while
the “native theatre” still needed to be established.

**REANEY’S AIMS**

We are lucky to have a stronger than usual extratextual record of an adapter’s stated
intentions, motivations, and interests in the documents that emerged from the *Wacousta!*
adaptation process. Three publications offer the most explicit formulation of Reaney’s
interests: the fall 1976 issue of *Halloween*, dedicated to *Wacousta!* and including the article
“Topless Nightmares: being a dialogue with himself by James Reaney”; the *Wacousta!: Tour
Report*, published by the NDWT Company in 1978, and his author’s notes on the process and
workshops of *Wacousta!* published with the adapted play text in 1979. While Reaney’s
authorial statements must be compared to the actual textual results produced in his script and in
the performed production – his intention, after all, should not be taken as the sole arbiter of
meaning – these paratextual publications do offer significant insight into the environment in
which the adaptation was produced. Out of this extensive documentation and analysis emerges

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Montreal’s Théâtre de Gésu, and Stratford’s Shakespeare Theatre (when it was in the tent) (159), thus
underlining his sense of division between a tradition of Canadian creativity in production, and the
absence of a tradition in dramatic writing.

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6 For an extended discussion of the theoretical anxiety surrounding the question of authorial intention,
and an argument for the relevance of using markers of intention in the study of adaptation, see Linda

~ 58 ~
a clear picture of what attracted Reaney to the story of Wacousta, and what he hoped to achieve through its adaptation.

One of Reaney’s explicit goals was the rehabilitation of the status and popularity of an important text for the history of Canadian literature. His excitement about its significance as history is stated emphatically several times in his published comments. Reaney’s author’s notes for the published script of Wacousta! frame the text as a story that “take[s] us back to our very beginnings,” written by “the father of our literature” (6). He presents Richardson’s Wacousta, and its sequel, The Canadian Brothers, or The Prophecy Fulfilled, as significant in terms of their historical content, covering “the history of Canada from 1763 to 1812,” their contemporaneous thematic relevance, and their historical popularity.

The project of adapting the text and sharing the story with contemporary audiences is thus imagined as both a recuperation of a lost past and as a form of cultural education. The legitimacy of the text as something that should be known and studied is framed by Reaney’s own institutional encounters with the novel. In his introduction to Wacousta! Reaney suggests that the idea of creating a theatrical adaptation first occurred to him around 1972 when, while doing research for The Donnellys, he ran across an 1856 advertisement for a performance of Wacousta the Renegade; or the Siege of Detroit in London, Ontario and thought, “[i]f it had been done here once, it could be done again and I promised myself the pleasure of tracking down this dramatic adaptation” (7; italics in original). Reaney then traces his encounters with Richardson’s novel from his first exposure in Senior Fourth Class in 1934, to a graduate course in Canadian Literature taken with Claude Bissell at the University of Toronto, to his own experiences teaching Wacousta to English students at the University of Western Ontario in the early 1970s (7-8). His introduction not only traces the curricular significance of Wacousta (taught, as his personal history suggests, for over forty years in Canadian classrooms) but also
argues explicitly for the continuation and renewal of its (linked) academic and cultural significance:

In the nineteenth century, Ontario readers knew Richardson through serialization of his tales in local papers; up until 1927, Wacousta was available in cut but fairly readable editions illustrated by C.W. Jeffreys. Then came oblivion and the really abbreviated McClelland and Stewart edition of 1966. With the Beasley biography of Richardson, and with the work of a half dozen scholars, what has been occurring is a Richardson Revival, of which our workshop efforts are only a part. (8; italics in original)

The selection of Wacousta for adaptation thus continues the efforts towards its canonization catalyzed by McClelland and Stewart, and by the publication of the Literary History of Canada. Significantly, In the Literary History, Wacousta is the only one of Richardson’s works that is described as a “masterpiece” and is deemed “his best work” (Klinck 138). The elevation of Wacousta above his “uninspired effort in fiction” (137), The Canadian Brothers, and his metrical romance, Tecumseh: or The Warrior of the West, implicitly devalues the apparently inferior, derivative works, and celebrates those elements in Wacousta that are seen as both on par with recognized canonical works, and fittingly expressive of a particular Canadian aesthetic. Wacousta is notably characterized in Klinck’s volume as a work defined by the writer’s psychological encounter with the environment: “The book is poetic and a romance in a sense which does not belong to Cooper, for Wacousta is essentially a complex of vivid external equivalents (shrieks, surprises, terrors) for the outrages of mind and heart experienced by Richardson when he was a boy at war in the forests of the Canadian border” (138).

7 The official publication date of the NCL edition is 1967.
If the adaptation of *Wacousta* participates in the curricular project of affirming a literary canon, it can also be viewed through another academic lens – that of Reaney’s pedagogical (and almost paternalistic) belief that Canadian audiences should be educated through exposure to art, an assumption that also casts most Canadian audiences as unsophisticated and uncultured. Indeed many have suggested that Reaney’s distinctive interest in childlike “play” as a necessary component of theatre making was a way of making such high-brow culture more palatable. In 1974 Louis Dudek suggested that this is because “faced with an audience of mindless biddies and croquet intellects, such as we may have in Canada in the outlands, the poet has taken drastic means to simplify. His philosophical outlook and his audience relationship have combined to create a childish theatre” (21-22).

Reaney’s own descriptions of his audiences, though not without frustration and some condescension, are kinder, and his attitude about the function of play more hopeful. Reaney’s desire to balance the demands of audience accessibility and the goals of elevating both audience and text, is clear in the observations he makes about the potential and real audiences for *Wacousta*! The play, he suggests, should make audiences aware of the Pontiac Conspiracy, and thus of the history of their own region. It should also function as a kind of theatrical education, giving its spectators exposure to a formal dramatic tradition. Reaney acknowledges that the specialized framework of interpretation may not be accessible to all audience members: “There is a certain amount of skill needed to read [Wacousta] beside the normal suspension of disbelief: you have to go at a fair clip and you have to watch out for doubles – two Clara’s, for example – like the two Cathy’s in *Wuthering Heights*” (*Wacousta*! 8 Italics in original). Highbrow literary strategies and generic conventions must somehow be made palatable, especially in the face of what Reaney perceives as the negative cultural influences of the time. In particular, his commentary suggests that he sees the combined local specificity and
universal appeal of *Wacousta!* as a potential way of staving off the influence of American commercial and popular culture.

In answer to the (self-posed) question “*why choose Wacousta & Baldoon as sources for new plays?*” Reaney writes:

[I]t occurred to me that we should explore this part of Canada, and, too, that we should beat the bounds and show the flag since it’s a part of Ontario that not only is filled with traditions from our deepest past, but is also filled with millions of Canadians who, until just lately, went over to shop at Hudson’s in Detroit…. What we want to say is: ‘Look before Motown and Ford and Chrysler, Detroit was in the French Empire and then the British Empire, in each case part of an entity called the Canadas, a potential nation that stretched down to the mouth of the Ohio River” (“Topless” 2).

Reaney perceives popular culture, as imported from the United States especially through film and television, as a competitive threat to knowledge of Canadian works. The play, in as much as it offers a form of audience “cultivation” (*Wacousta!* 159), is thus an antidote to pervasive, lowbrow, American imports. Reaney suggests that he taught *Wacousta* to students more interested in *Valley of the Dolls* (a popular American novel of the late sixties) than the course material, and later goes on to compare *Wacousta!* to other mass culture hits: “Star Wars, *a simple variation* [of archaic romance], *goes down well because of its millions; but even Three Musketeers and Count of Monte Cristo have to be camped or else met with stupid responses. Give into the story and see what you get. Don’t give into it and go to see Texas Chain Saw Massacre” (159 italics in original). Elsewhere, Reaney is more venomous: “Listen, you idiot questioner, all you believe in is Detroit cars which are all like each other and make us all like each other. I do believe in another world…. Yes, two feet high Indian fairies; no, three ton Chevrolets” (“Topless” 5-6).
At stake for Reaney in the perceived conflict between the romances or myths offered by American popular culture and local myths offered by *Wacousta* is nothing less than the formation of an authentic cultural community. Reaney imagines a ritualistic participatory theatre as an antidote to the consumerist, passive culture of the Hollywood film. The Wacousta story, through Reaney’s eyes, has the potential to foster in others the historical awareness that leads to the experience of “imagined community.” Theatre, like Reaney’s childhood classroom, functions as a venue where Canadians might be educated, and where they might experience the local as something moving and exciting.

**Valuing Richardson – Thematic Criticism**

In addition to educating his audiences as to the local, historical and cultural relevance of the subject matter of Richardson’s story, Reaney aspired to teach his spectators how to value the work as literature. Reaney’s own ideas about the literary significance of his source text were heavily influenced by the predominant scholarly approach of thematic criticism. Thematic criticism offered a way of identifying patterns of identity, commonalities across the disparities of region and culture, and features that were distinct from those of the inherited traditions out of which Canada was produced. The early seventies, as Branko Gorjup succinctly describes them, were years in which “a group of Canadian critics reached a short-lived consensus on the possibility of creating an autochthonous and unified critical approach to the study of the Canadian literary imagination” (9). Out of this short-lived consensus emerged a number of critical works devoted to the identification of the distinctly “Canadian” in Canadian literature, whose collective impact on the study of Canadian literature was unprecedented, including D.G. Jones’s *Butterfly on Rock* (1970), Margaret Atwood’s *Survival* (1972), and Northrop Frye’s *The Bush Garden* (1971). Cultural and psychological rather than purely
aesthetic or literary, the analysis of the thematic critics attempted to isolate the textual evidence of a shared “cultural imagination” (Frye), the “mirror of our imaginative life” (Jones) or a “national habit of mind” (Atwood).

The narrative of cultural evolution or maturation is a common thread in the interpretive approaches of the so-called thematic critics. Margaret Atwood’s four-step model of “victim positions,” outlined in *Survival*, for example, suggests that cultural preoccupation with the issue of survival within a hostile environment can be read from the colonial perspective of a “collective victim.” As such, Canadian authors can assume, or move through, one of four victim positions, the first being total denial, the final stage – that of the “creative non-victim” being the release from the Victor/Victim binary through self-reflexiveness, recognition and creativity (36-39). The maturation narrative that appears to have the most relevance for Reaney’s work, however, is that articulated by Northrop Frye in his seminal essay, “Conclusion to *A Literary History of Canada*.” Early in this article Frye recognizes how powerful the idea of arrival continues to be in Canadian criticism:

Adolescent dreams of glory haunt the Canadian consciousness (and unconsciousness), some naïve and some sophisticated. In the naïve area are the predictions that the twentieth century belongs to Canada […] [T]he more sophisticated usually take the form of a Messianic complex about Canadian culture, for Canadian culture, no less than Alberta, has always been ‘next year country.’ (70)

Frye’s history of the Canadian literary tradition nonetheless presents a similar trajectory of development that sees the Canadian imagination evolving from the restrictions of a garrison mentality to the freedom of The Peaceful Kingdom. In the early garrisons of Canada, Frye suggests, the author writes from within a garrison society that faces the threat to civilization posed by an uncaring wilderness. He, in turn, faces the threat to the individual posed by a
conformist, and oppressively regulated collective society. The mode of writing available to this artist is primarily that of argument. Over time, the development of culture leads to the emergence of individuals who can stand outside their community and reflect on the situation with distance and then move toward irony. Through self-awareness and distance, then, the writer moves toward a state of cultural harmony and utopian maturity, for which Frye offers the metaphor of The Peaceable Kingdom.

Within this trajectory of development, Wacousta, in its depiction of mid-eighteenth-century Canada, represents an earlier state of development, described in Frye’s concept of Canada’s “garrison mentality.” As Frye explains, garrisons are “[s]mall and isolated communities surrounded with a physical or psychological ‘frontier,’ separated from one another and from their American and British cultural sources: communities that provide all that their members have in the way of distinctively human values” (73). The danger of such communities is that concomitant with the necessary respect for communal law and order that such isolation breeds is an inevitably stifling cultural mentality, that is hostile to individual expression and creativity:

A garrison is a closely knit and beleaguered society, and its moral and social values are unquestionable. In a perilous enterprise one does not discuss causes or motives: one is either a fighter or a deserter…. In such a society the terror is not for the common enemy … [t]he real terror comes when the individual feels himself becoming an individual,

8 Frye derives his name for the “pastoral myth” or “vision of a social ideal” (“Conclusion” 85) that lies at the heart of Canadian social mythology on the 1830 painting by Edward Hicks that depicts the treaty between the Indians and Quaker settlers under Penn, as well as a number of peaceful wild animals. “This mood is closer to the haunting vision of a serenity that is both human and natural which we have been struggling to identify in the Canadian tradition. If we had to characterize a distinctive emphasis in that tradition, we might call it a quest for the peaceable kingdom” (95).
pulling away from the group, loosing the sense of driving power that the group gives him, aware of a conflict within himself far subtler than the struggle of morality against evil (78).

Frye examines the effects of this garrison mentality on the development of early Canadian literature, and observes that it produced, on the one hand, a tendency toward the production of rhetorical or argumentative works that serve as “an illustration or allegory of certain social attitudes” (78), and on the other, an attraction to popular literary forms such as romance and melodrama, which were useful in consolidating a social mythology (83).

Although Frye does not directly mention John Richardson or his novel Wacoutsta in his discussion of the garrison mentality in the conclusion to a Literary History of Canada, Richardson’s novel is a consummate example of its thematization in early Canadian literature. Set in 1763, during the Pontiac uprising, the novel tells the story of Colonel de Haldimar, commander of the garrison at Fort Detroit, and his children. The conspiracy of the local tribes to infiltrate and destroy the last remaining British forts, Detroit and Michilimackinac (an event based in historical fact), is led in Richardson’s novel by a mysterious, terrifying (and fictional) figure named Wacousta. As the story unfolds, toward the middle of the novel, Wacousta is revealed to be the former friend and romantic rival of de Haldimar, Reginald Morton. Morton, who lost his fiancée and true love, Clara Beverley, to de Haldimar as a result of deception, seeks revenge.

Colonel de Haldimar is the living embodiment of the garrison mentality; he is a rigid authoritarian, who in his attempts to maintain the thin boundaries of civilization against the external terrors of an uncaring, hostile wilderness (and the “savages” who inhabit it) as well as against the internal threat of individual insubordination (or autonomous thought), sets in motion a string of actions that lead to the virtual annihilation of his culture and his offspring.
Richardson’s story begins with de Haldimar discovering the strange figure of Wacousta in his chambers, and sounding the fort’s alarm in the middle of the night. When the gate in the fortress wall is discovered to be unlocked, and the Governor’s son, Captain Frederick de Haldimar is found to be missing, the watchman, Frank Holloway, is brought before a military tribunal but refuses to disclose his motives, saying that one will appear who will clear him of blame. Sentenced to death by firing squad, Holloway is given until a certain hour for his unnamed saviour to arrive. Despite the pleas of Frank Holloway’s wife, Ellen, and the empathy of Holloway’s fellow soldiers, de Haldimar is unrelenting in his judgment. A moment before the determined hour, Frederick returns to clear Holloway, but de Haldimar, startled by the sight of his unrecognized and disguised son, gives the order to fire. This wrongful action, which echoes the wrong committed by de Haldimar against Reginald Morton in Scotland, thus catalyzes the play’s tragic events. In the figure of Wacousta, the white man who has “gone native” the dangers of the individual who steps outside of the rigid strictures of the law and the threat of the vast Canadian nature to western civilization are fused, as the novel recounts with gothic horror the slaughter of every member of the de Haldimar family but one.

In his introduction to the novel, Richardson goes beyond the role of the novelist to adopt that of the historian, framing isolation as the defining characteristic of life in the Canadas, and providing for his readers an introduction to “scenes with which the European is little familiarized” (3). Writing 75 years after the events he describes, Richardson suggests that the condition of being alone in the wilderness remains a defining characteristic of Canadian life in his own era:

Even at the present day, along that line of remote country we have selected for the theatre of our labours, the garrisons are both few in number and weak in strength, and evidence of cultivation is seldom to be found at any distances in the interior, so that all
beyond a certain extent of clearing, continued along the banks of the lakes and rivers, is thick, impervious, rayless forest, the limits of which have never yet been explored, perhaps, by the natives themselves (6).

Richardson’s introduction also conflates the threat posed by isolation in the wilderness with the threat posed by an aggressive indigenous population. The stockade forts, he explains:

were never, at any one period, nearer to each other than from one hundred and fifty to two hundred miles, so that, in the event of surprise or alarm, there was little prospect of obtaining assistance from without. Each garrison, therefore, was almost wholly dependent on its own resources; and, when surrounded unexpectedly by numerous bands of hostile Indians, had no other alternative than to hold out to the death. (8)

Capitulation was an impossibility, Richardson suggests, because no promise of peace or treaty could prevent “indiscriminate massacre” at the hands of the Indians (8). In its almost textbook depiction of these themes, Richardson’s novel was the perfect artifact to be both uncovered and recuperated through adaptation in the mid-1970s.

Between 1967, when the New Canadian Library edition of Wacousta was published, and 1978 when Wacousta! toured across Ontario, significant scholarly energy was dedicated to a re-evaluation of John Richardson in Canada. The mid 1970s in particular saw a significant increase in Richardson scholarship: for example, John Moss explored the concept of “frontier exile” in Wacousta in Patterns of Isolation (1974) and of “tri-sexuality” in Wacousta in Sex and Violence in the Canadian Novel: The Ancestral Present (1977), and Margot Northey considered Wacousta as a Canadian prototype of the Gothic in Canada (The Haunted Wilderness 1976). In 1976 David Beasley’s biography of Richardson, The Canadian Don Quixote, was also published. Reaney was at the centre of much of this scholarly activity.
Perhaps most significantly, in the fall of 1977, a two-day conference was held at the University of Western Ontario in conjunction with Reaney’s development workshops for Wacousta’s sequel, The Canadian Brothers, during which scholars including Carl F. Klinck and Jay Macpherson delivered papers, which were then collected and published as what editor Catherine Sheldrick Ross calls the “first full scale scholarly examination of our earliest Canadian novelist” (7). Considered altogether, academic research of this period offers an insight into the scholarly consensus about those elements of Richardson’s novel that made it a founding work in the Canadian literary tradition. The influence of this research on Reaney’s adaptation, and particularly the influence of those scholars involved in the conference, was quite significant. In the tour report, Reaney names Michael Hurley, Douglas Cronk, David Beasley and Jay Macpherson as the individuals who “respectively assisted with structure, text, biography and parallel gothic romance” in the Wacousta! adaptation (14). Several common threads appear in Richardson criticism of the mid-to-late 1970s. The dominant strand of argument assesses Wacousta in terms of its participation in and adaptation of the literary tradition of the Gothic Romance. Beyond the mere substitution of a Canadian setting and its replacement of towering gothic cathedrals and gloomy castles with the sublimity of the North American wilderness, with its vast forests, “profound ravines” and “endless vistas” (MacLaren 61), Reaney’s contemporaries argue, Richardson’s adaptation of the gothic genre to Canada was evident in psychological and stylistic differences that distinguish his writing from British or American writers of the same period. While Richardson’s tale is built on structural oppositions common in the period, such as nature and civilization, his approach demonstrates a characteristically Canadian ambivalence.
UPDATING RICHARDSON – THE QUEST FOR THE PEACEABLE KINGDOM

While the value of Richardson’s text as set out in the criticism of 1970s was tied to its narrative and textual elements, Reaney also wanted his creative re-interpretation to be valued on the basis of its own merits. What appears to have been influential for Reaney in this regard was not only the roadmap that the narrative of the “native tradition” provided toward a cultural destination of advancement and fulfillment, but also the implicit role that the artist had in both the discovery and the perpetuation of an entire cultural enterprise. As Robert Lecker argues, Frye’s “conclusion” can be read as a biographical narrative in which national pursuits are linked to a personal quest:

If one looks at the ‘Conclusion’ from this perspective, it becomes apparent that Frye is doing much more than establishing some basic terms or theories for the analysis of Canadian literature. He is reading the Canadian literary tradition as a romance that implicates him in its structures….His reading of Canadian literary history as a romance, and of himself as the romance’s reader-hero, anticipates his view that ‘the message of all romance is de te fabula: the story is about you.’ (“A Quest” 261)

Frye’s teleological narrative casts contemporary critics and writers as figures poised at a key moment of historical transition –archeologists of the “buried society” and creators that bring the inherited tradition to its idealized conclusion. Frye’s narrative (read in this way) suggests that the goal of Canada’s quest having been uncovered in the rediscovery of the past, the hero-questers can move the national (literature) forward toward its idyllic, pastoral resolution.
Reaney, who as early as 1957 had seen himself as an artist answering Frye’s call for an engagement with tradition, implicitly assumes the role of the explorer-hero of Frye’s conclusion. His stated intentions for the adaptation of *Wacousta*, as well as his method of development, indicate that Frye’s maturation narrative and other key thematic works were very influential intertexts. In *Wacousta!*, Reaney takes up the vision of Canadian literature as a quest, and of himself as the artist-critic/hero who drives the quest. Reaney uses *Wacousta!* self-consciously to uncover a historical literary tradition, to recuperate it, through the education of audiences, and to reinvigorate it, both by using it as an anticipatory text that foreshadows the central themes and conflicts that continue to define Canadian culture, and by using it to highlight the contemporary text as the culmination of the trajectory of Canadian literary history: the realization of Canada’s cultural progress towards The Peaceable Kingdom.

In the years following the publication of Frye’s “Conclusion,” the idea of The Peaceable Kingdom was taken up as a vision of cultural identity that extended past the boundaries of literary criticism, and would have been circulating in society at the time of *Wacousta!’s* development. William Kilbourn picked up on Frye’s idea, to identify “that which is most essentially Canadian in our literature” (Edwardson 304). The Peaceable Kingdom, Ryan Edwardson suggests, paradoxically offered “both an escape from the complexities of an increasingly transnational world and a new nationhood through which to experience these complexities” (138). In the years following the centennial celebrations of 1967, Edwardson argues:

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9 His article “The Canadian Poet’s Predicament is one of the first published responses to Frye’s article “The Narrative Tradition in Canadian Poetry.”
Canadians were reimagining the ‘imagined community’ into a Peaceable Kingdom, a socialist-leaning nation of equality, multiculturalism, peacekeeping, and a social-welfare safety net directed to ensuring that all Canadians could benefit from the nation’s wealth. This was not only nation-building but nation-reclaiming; turning inwards offered a means of consolidating nationhood in a time of American imperialism….The Peaceable Kingdom was a project that spoke loudly not only of the leftist leanings of these intelligentsia and the influence held by the expanding middle class, but also of new immigration patterns that required facilitating a shift in national design from ethnic to civic nationalism. Pre-existing models for nationhood were incompatible with the needs and interests of this new intelligentsia. Obsolete was the Masseyites’ view of Canada as a ‘two races’ nation built upon its British inheritance; of great threat was the continentalism that the Liberal Party seemingly had in store for the nation. An alternative project was being articulated and orchestrated by those in a position to do so (16).

Mapped onto a political narrative of Canadian history, the idea of a garrison mentality, with its anxiety about individual expression and dissent and its fear of the dangers to civilization posed by a “huge, unthinking, menacing and formidable physical setting” (“Conclusion” 73), becomes synonymous with British imperialism, patriarchy, hierarchy, and cultural domination. In short, it becomes the embodiment of everything that someone invested in the progressive narrative of Canadian cultural development in the 1970s would wish to define himself against.

Part of what engaged Reaney in his project to update Richardson’s work was the fact that in addition to offering a thematization of the psychology of Canada’s pioneer culture, the novel also offered prescient glimpses of cultural critique. Reaney’s peers identified evidence of Richardson’s unique cultural perspective, in particular his seemingly progressive bi-cultural...
awareness and relative sensitivity in depicting Native culture, which they identified somewhat teleologically as being a typically Canadian perspective. The interpretation of Richardson’s work as anticipatory evidence of distinctly Canadian literary patterns had a marked influence on Reaney’s construction of the play script, his organization of the workshop process, and ultimately the staging of professional production.

THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The combined aims of teaching the value of Richardson’s work and making it new are clearly evident in the way that Reaney structured the development process of the adaptation. Descriptions that accompany the published script of Wacousta! suggest a workshop process that was envisioned as being at once educational and community-driven. Experts were brought in to teach specific skills, and exercises or games were devised so that the untrained volunteers could use the newly learned information to improvise and generate physical and verbal material. At the beginning of every session, Reaney would ask for a volunteer to document the progress of the evening’s work. These documents took the form of diaries that were posted the next day on the billboard outside the drama workshop. The content of the diaries ranged from general descriptions of the evening’s events to detailed analyses and goings on. The diaries were written by children and by adults (109). The management and accumulation of material were thus devised as democratic activities, designed to be community-forming. Ultimately, however, Reaney was the central agent responsible for drafting the script and shaping the material into its final dramatic form.

Work on Wacousta! began in the classroom, when Reaney had his English students at The University of Western Ontario read the first act of the 1833 stage adaptation by R. Jones. Workshops in London, Ontario, which began in September 1976, integrated approximately 60
students from local public schools, high schools, and Western, as well as local artists, musicians, dancers, and members of the public. The goal of cultivating awareness outside of London was built into this early process. Several professional actors from the NDWT troupe, including David Ferry, Patsy Ludwick, and Jay Bowen, worked with the amateur collective, with an eye toward eventually reworking the play and touring it across the province. Starting in October 1976, workshops were held concurrently in Timmins. These workshops were also attended at different stages by Reaney and various professional actors from the NDWT.

Reaney explains the rationale for the Timmins workshops by suggesting that the trilingual nature of Wacousta (English, French and Ottawa) might be a natural fit for Timmins since it “also has English, French and Cree students” (157). “What to the young people of Timmins had previously been just plain old boring Timmins, Timmins to be avoided, Timmins to be forgotten,” Reaney writes, “was thereby changed into something exciting and attractive, something to be truly appreciated. It seems to me that it is this sort of appreciation of one’s own home territory, and the expression of it, that is so much the desired goal of a great deal of Canadian writing today, and not only of writing but of Canadian culture as a whole” (157). The Wacousta! workshop, Reaney suggests, was used to “open people’s eyes to the stories and dramas in their own backyard” (158).

Although Reaney’s insistence on having participants take notes about the process enshrines the participatory experience as a kind of subconscious, ritualistic, community experience, rather than an intellectual one, the structure of the workshops reveals the scholarly dramaturgical principles that were clearly at play, and which consistently prioritized the theatrical translation of the novel’s thematic concerns. The game or play model of improvisation created a dynamic in which volunteers were asked to imaginatively research a historical position, for example, by learning what it was like to live in a fort, or an Ottawa
village, and then being asked to be a soldier, a mourning wife, or an Ottawa warrior. Built into this education process were certain creative assumptions. Significantly, because the rehearsal process was broken down into first and second acts which occupied two contrasting worlds, namely the space within garrison life and the space of Native life and the forest, the rehearsal process focused first on developing a variety of scenes and a vocabulary of images and moments that captured the European, military life, and then on developing a distinctly Native world. As participant Catherine O’Grady’s diary entries indicate, this arrangement highlighted the contrast between worlds: “[t]he winter months were spent working on Act Two, which progressed in much the same fashion. Instead of being taught minuets, we learned how to play lacrosse; instead of European words and phrases, Tom Highway taught us Cree” (110).

In the production that emerged out of the workshops, the contrasts between British and Native cultures were expressed in systems of imagery achieved through blocking. Actors’ movements constructed a stage image consisting of squares, lines and angles to represent the British garrison, while the wilderness and Native encampment were defined by circles, curves, and waves. This staging, significantly, gave physical form to the systems of imagery that Richardson employed in the novel, as scholars of the period had recently pointed out. Michael Hurley’s contemporary reading of the significance of circles and squares in Richardson’s Wacousta is the most succinct:

Within this dual universe, each world is defined by its own peculiar shape.

Civilization’s constructs are predominantly square, nature’s circular. Everything on the European or British side of the river in Wacousta is a right-angled monument to rationality. Fort Détroit presents the four equal sides of a square. The military road runs in a straight line from the garrison to the winding river. The soldiers inside the fort form into a hollow square…a square within a square. … The world of nature and the Indian,
on the other side of the ravine, is just as consistently one of circles and curves. The
Indians are camped within the bush in a series of undulating hills crowned with thick
and overhanging forest. A semicircular sweep of forest circumscribes the
fort….Frederic follow[s] his Indian guide Oucanasta along a winding path over the
Detroit ravine. (90)

In the diaries that accompany the published script of *Wacousta!*, documenting the workshop
process, the arrival at this staging choice is naturalized as an organic product of the
improvisational process. Just as Reaney describes the “basic adaptive sculpturing process” as
“forty people tak[ing] turns reading it aloud” until “the play that may be lurking there, appears”
(*Wacousta!* 112), in the workshop record the literary interpretive strategies at work in the
process are somewhat obfuscated, with the effect that the choices are presented as being
intuitive and communal, rather than scholarly or political. Participant Catherine O’Grady’s
comments reveal an internalization of the opposition between the theatrical imagery reserved
for the garrison and nature: “Our Act One vocabulary had been limited to straight lines, with
shoulders square, arms forming right angles when saluting, knees moving up and down with a
regular one, two rhythm. Here, however, we are confronted with a wave where our familiar
patterns must be extended to accommodate the fluid motion of a field of wheat; the grand,
broad circle gestures of the lacrosse game; the violence of the straight line and spinning top
worlds in collision” (135).

Although the participants’ ability to articulate the contrast in this way suggests there
was collective discussion about it, as participant Jean McKay records, to some in the
workshop, the process seemed decidedly unauthored: “The two trumpeters were fooling around
to figure out bugle calls, and it got very fort-like. You suddenly actually felt whiffs of
someplace else. Nice angular sharp bustle of marching and screaming orders compared with
smooth rounded waltzing motions. Sally loved it. Marcus smashed his nose” (116). On October 18th she inquires: “What relationship does ‘playwright’ have to all this marching and forging and whittling that we’re doing?” (123).

The comments of participant Katie Fox similarly suggest a genuine unawareness of the principles driving the adaptation process, while also implicitly pointing to Reaney’s shaping guidance: “I don’t very often jump three times or throw around tennis balls and balls of wool, or lie on the floor pretending to snore, except when I play with kids. I just did all those things and even learned a little about doing a minuet, and it was really good. […] A head thrown out of a lacrosse racquet, a rope dangling from a ladder, soldiers on the watch afraid to say even ‘All’s well’. TRAITOR!, a dulcimer and the minuet: I am trying in my mind to put that all together. Somehow, it worked for me. I enjoyed myself, even forgot that it was London Ontario, and the University of Western Ontario, but I don’t understand it at all” (129).

The guided improvisations of the workshops also yielded what would become a set design that reinforced the structuring oppositions of the piece. The set for Wacousta! needed to be sufficiently portable to be transported across Ontario, and flexible enough to fit into a number of performance spaces with widely varying dimensions, ranging from well-equipped theatres to gym floors. The necessary efficiency of the set placed a great deal of interpretive weight on the few representational elements it included. The key set pieces, described at the opening of the published script, establish a landscape of symbolic binaries:

*The action takes place in forts Détroit and Michilimackinac in the fall of 1763. A backcloth shows the Detroit River banks as if seen by an English water colourist whose profession is that of a military surveyor. In front of that a raked stage with two pictures painted on the floor: stage right an heraldic lion; stage left a shaman pictograph.*
Scaffolding up right. A tall flagpole dominates with its imperial symbol. (10; italics in original)

The watercolour backcloth, painted as if by a military surveyor – which communicated the perspective from which the history is recorded and thus signaled cultural bias as well as historicity – stood in contrast to the stylized convention of using plain coloured fabric to represent the natural environment. A blue cloth was used to create the St. Clair River, a green one to show the grassy quad of the garrison and the green island; green yarn unrolled between actors across the stage created the layers of vegetation of the forest; red streamers of fabric attached to sticks were used as “blood puppets” during scenes of war. The insistent presence of a colonial depiction of nature seen through the strategic eyes of an invading military, represented by the dominating flagpole and its “imperial symbol,” are thus static reminders of the oppressive rigidity of the garrison culture, compared to the organic fluidity of the wilderness.

The most explicit expression of the play’s key opposition, however, is in the use of the two symbols painted on the floor. This staging device entered into the development process quite early, and was well established in the workshops by November of 1976, two years before the production toured: “Now at every workshop two designs were chalked on the floor—an heraldic lion (Britain) and a pictograph shaman (Pontiac). […] Using an overhead projector, Tom [Smart] drew the pictographs as the actor supposedly wrote them on a piece of bark and projected them onto Wacousta’s T-shirt” (Wacousta! 127).

In production, throughout the play characters expressing thoughts about British and Native cultures pointed to the symbols, reinforcing the binary visually. Intended as an alienation device that functioned within the play’s broader self-reflexiveness, these moments, like this element of the stage design, offered the most heavy-handed articulation of the
contrast. When de Haldimar’s daughter Charlotte and the young Ottawa chief Le Subtil share a forbidden moment of inter-cultural romance, for example, the symbols are employed to emphasize the threat that the Ottawa face:

LE SUBTIL: Oh Charlotte, Le Subtil is not my real name. In the Ottawa tribe I am called – he touches the Shaman pictograph on floor What is this called? He catches a dandelion seed floating through the air […]

CHARLOTTE: It is known as the dent-du-lion – the dandelion or the lion’s tooth. Why here it is growing even here, and Le Subtil, if you don’t watch out, his teeth as she touches the heraldic lion on floor will grow over the ground which your forests root in, the farms and the cities underneath which your people will lie buried. (22)

When Charlotte and Le Subtil are discovered, de Haldimar punishes Charlotte, venting fears of miscegenation that in Richardson’s text remain under the surface and unspeakable:10

DE HALDIMAR: Look, girl, get over your romantic thinking you can be this pointing at shaman pictograph You cannot be anything other than your type which is that points at lion and which, like a real name, lies hidden beneath all our personalities’ dust and dirt. When living amid savage scenes and unexplored countries, this lesson must be particularly taken to heart by us all. (25)

10 As John Moss points out, only Captain Erskine makes any direct acknowledgement of a possible romance between Oucanasta and Frederick, joking about it when someone unrecognized approaches, but the narrator quickly corrects him, suppressing the taboo suggestion: ‘Another Oucanasta for de Haldimar, no doubt,’ observed Captain Erskine, after a moment’s pause. ‘These Grenadiers carry everything before them as well in love as in war.’ The error of the good-natured officer was, however, obvious to all but himself.’ (‘Frontier” 464).
In conjunction with the scenographic use of opposing pictographs and contrasting imagery of squares and circles, the workshops also developed contrasting soundscapes to reflect the British and Native environments. As Tom Highway (as he is identified in the script) describes on November 8th, the words chosen for these soundscapes were selected in early rehearsals.

The sound of the garrison was that of structure and law, the regulating order of the clock:

A few new ideas were introduced: the four companies (or dragoons), who are also the four fort walls, march across in turn – east wall, south, west, north, in that order. […] Then the four companies repeat their crossing (the other way now) and say, each company in turn, the first ‘six o’ clock, the second, ‘seven o’clock – and here the third company marches across in quick, tiny little steps, counting furiously but quietly the sixty minutes of the hour. (125)

In contrast, the “‘Frederick-and-Oucanasta-through-the-forest-to-Pontiac’s encampment’ sequence” is set to “atmospheric music from piano, fiddle and percussion, and the suggestive phrases – taken from the novel – uttered by the walls-of-the-forest: ‘twig crackle’, ‘dim and lurid atmosphere’, ‘down, down, down’, ‘underwood, underwood’, etc.” (125).

If the communal play of the elementary-school-style learning sessions was seen as a way to make the literary content of Wacousta! more accessible and entertaining to contemporary workshop participants and audiences, however, it was also a way to reflect on the historicity of Canadian culture. By making Ontarians aware of their cultural past, Reaney hoped they would gain appreciation of history as a continuum leading to the present. As he suggested in 1978, “[o]ne obstacle in the creation of plays today is the mixed-up state of the world; the society one writes about tends to be one seen at an early age. People keep saying mindlessly, ‘But we don’t live like that any more.’ So that one is almost embarrassed to write about Stratford Ontario, circa 1929; it seems archaic. Not quite archaic enough, perhaps. But
not an in-period nor an in-place. You are continually facing a barrage of nostalgia from boobs who don’t seem to have read Proust and never walked *Du côté du chez*— a gas station, let alone a house in a landscape with a century of plowing behind its surroundings” (152).

To recuperate the connection between the past and the present, the workshops’ structure created a detached critical perspective on history, acting always with a firm citational awareness of the “pastness” of the material. Robert Shipley’s description of the combined effort of learning to play lacrosse and learning phrases of Cree, for example, articulates the effect of the educational and entertaining spirit in which this part of the workshop was carried out: “This is Tom’s ancestral language and he showed great patience as the workshop struggled to adapt Cree words to a kind of ‘lacrosse night in Canada’ usage. ‘Kee gatch’ for ‘close’ or ‘almost’ was used both for the approximation of pronunciation and for near misses on the goal as the game progressed […] ‘Ootee-ootee-ootee!’ That’s Cree meaning roughly ‘over here.’ It’s an expression that would have resounded over the ancient forest clearings where Indian clans gathered to play lacrosse and it resounded on Monday night in, of all places, University College.” (141). Both language and sport are historicized, seen in contrast to the contemporary culture of *Hockey Night in Canada*.

**NATIVE CHARACTERS AND PLOT LINES**

The inter-cultural dynamics of the workshop process, described in the diaries as a rather utopian balanced sharing of language and traditions, point to a desired vision of cultural harmony that is also present in Reaney’s contemporary re-imagination of the novel’s Native characters and their roles in the script. Reaney’s textual treatment of the depiction of Native culture in *Wacousta!* offers a corrective updating with aims that might be best described, *avant-la-lettre*, as being politically correct. Many of Reaney’s scholarly peers at the time,
however, had suggested that a progressive attitude towards cultural difference was a key feature of Richardson’s writing. Part of what distinguished his writing from his American and British peers, they argued, was his sensitive bi-cultural awareness, which translated into greater use of realistic detail in his description of Indian culture and characters. I.S. MacLaren, for example, identifies a realism in *Wacousta* that distinguishes Richardson’s writing, stemming not only from Richardson’s personal experience but from the actual history of his subject matter: “The historical underpinning for Richardson’s romance, the haunting awareness that the massacre at Michilimackinac did occur, in this way reinforces the gothic horror of Richardson’s dark vision” (58). Similarly, Richardson’s personal encounters with individuals like Tecumseh, and with Native culture in general are seen as the basis of a “bicentral awareness” that “firmly roots the romance in the Indian community. The scenes describing Indian culture—Oucanasta’s description of moccasins with Frederick de Haldimar, the epic catalogue of Wacousta’s apparel/armour, the portraits of an Indian community, Indian summer, and the process of scalping—enhance the novel’s realistic quality and serve as the counterpoint to Richardson’s attack on the pecking order, hypocrisy, pettiness and isolation of military life” (52). In the same period, Douglas Cronk, who Reaney acknowledges as one of the scholars who assisted him with the adaptation’s text (NDWT, 14), saw in Richardson’s historical introduction to *Wacousta* an expression of a Canadian perspective that stood in marked contrast to American attitudes in the early nineteenth century. This perspective was sufficiently political, Cronk suggests, that it had to be excised from an 1832 American edition of the novel: Waldie eliminated Richardson’s view that Indians were refugees from the aggressively expanding American colonies, and Waldie strikes out any mention of the early French and Indian alliance.[…] Likewise he omits any suggestion of the hatred that the Indians bore against the original colonists and which had been continued to their descendents,
the subjects of the United States. Here Richardson also notes the difficulties that also
arouse because of the Indians’ deep hatred of Americans. The British, and Canadians,
had difficulty in restraining their Indian allies and Richardson admits these warriors
committed atrocities, particularly on prisoners. Waldie’s editing attempts to blot out the
idea that the Indians had cause to wage war against the American colonies or against
the republic once it was formed (46).

These academic arguments about Richardson may overstate the case for his
progressiveness – Richardson, while describing the atrocities committed by retaliatory
warriors, refers to the Indians as “savages,” “monsters,” and “dusky demons” – but in doing so
they reveal a strong desire not only to recuperate Richardson’s relevance, but also to affirm the
Canadian literary tradition as being rooted in a cultural perspective marked from its earliest
days by “bi-cultural awareness” and inter-cultural co-operation. The desire, furthermore, to
read into Richardson an acknowledgement and critique of the injustices of colonialism, tells us
as much about the critical preoccupations of the mid-1970s as it does about Richardson’s
personal opinions.

Reaney’s portrayal of Native characters in *Wacousta!* is thus not merely a corrective to
those elements in Richardson that contemporary audiences would perceive as racist, but also an
interpretation that is very much the product of its time. Reaney expands upon the inter-cultural
romance present in Richardson’s text, not only drawing out the sexual tension between
Oucanasta and Frederick and hinting at the possibility of a future for their relationship, but also
creating a parallel romance between Oucanasta’s brother, Le Subtil, and Charlotte
(Richardson’s character Charles is changed into a woman for this purpose.) Through these two
romances Reaney explores the sexually repressed and xenophobic nature of nineteenth-century
British culture, while also presenting the cultural harmony of the romances as images of an alternative and Edenic peaceable kingdom.

In both Richardson’s novel and its nineteenth-century American stage adaptation, as in Reaney’s play, Oucanasta is an Ottawa Indian, sister (or lover) to the young chief of the Ottawa, who are led by the great chief Pontiac (or Ponteac). Her loyalty, however, is toward the English garrison community, and in particular to Captain Frederick de Haldimar, whom she has loved since he saved her from drowning. As a demonstration of her gratitude, she leads Frederick to a hiding spot where he overhears a kind of Trojan horse plot in which the gathered tribes plan to infiltrate the garrison under the ruse of peace games, and then to attack the British settlers from within the walls of the fort. Although Oucanasta loves Frederick, Frederick is already engaged – to his cousin Madeline – and he asks Oucanasta to demonstrate her love for him by saving his fiancée.

The characterization of Oucanasta as a loyal saviour and noble model of feminine suffering is consistent across both source texts and the adaptation; however, differences in plot, characterization, and, most importantly, in the romantic dynamics between Oucanasta and Frederick point to significant attitudinal shifts between versions. The Oucanasta of both Richardson’s novel and R. Jones’ early theatrical adaptation is firmly entrenched in the convention of the faithful Indian maiden character in nineteenth-century melodrama, as well as in essentialist tropes of the noble savage. Reaney’s update redresses the unpalatable racism of his sources, not only making Oucanasta into a more psychologically rounded and empathetic character but also into an articulate representative of her culture. Reaney also addresses his sources’ implicit fears of “miscegenation” by depicting a more positive and reciprocal love between Oucanasta and Frederick.
In both source texts, Oucanasta speaks, and is described, in language that clearly emphasizes her cultural and racial difference from the English characters. In keeping with nineteenth-century Indian stereotypes, Oucanasta speaks primarily in nature metaphors and refers to herself consistently in the third person. Further, in Richardson’s novel, descriptions of Oucanasta employ imagery that associates her not only with the natural world but also with the pagan world’s symbolic connotations of evil. Oucanasta is aligned with the nighttime as she passes through the “living darkness” of the “deep gloom pervading the wood,” and with serpent imagery when she is described as bounding over obstacles “emitting scarcely more sound than would have been produced by the slimy crawl of its native rattlesnake” (253).

Richardson includes an encounter that while it exploits the exoticism and eroticism of Oucanasta’s threatening sexuality also subverts the assumed authority of British culture and challenges its cultural beliefs. As Oucanasta guides Frederick through the forest to the hiding place where he will spy on the war council of the Ottawa, she moves naturally, unencumbered, while he moves loudly and without grace. In a moment that overturns the then-assumed natural superiority, expertise and bravery of man over woman, and white man over Native, Oucanasta motions to Frederick to remove his boots and places her own moccasins on his feet, despite his chivalrous protest: “The feet of the Saganaw are soft as those of a young child,’ she remarked, in a voice of commiseration; ‘but the moccasins of Oucanasta shall protect them from the thorns of the forest” (254). As Richardson’s narrator observes, this suggestion is naturally abhorrent to Frederick as it is “too un-European – too much reversing the established order of things, to be borne patiently” and offends “the dignity of his manhood” (255). Oucanasta’s response is at once highly eroticized and depicted as being the result of a natural naivety: “Oucanasta, however, was not to be outdone in politeness. She calmly reseated herself on the log, drew her right foot over her left knee, caught one of the hands of her companion, and
placing it upon the naked sole, desired him to feel how impervious to attack of every
description was that indurated portion of the lower limb” (255). Frederick’s response to the
intimate contact with Oucanasta’s rough and calloused foot is one of ambiguous disgust but
also of confusion.

After this moment, while Oucanasta’s behaviour continues to be described in erotically
charged terms, Frederick apparently responds with affection rather than lust, oblivious to, or
uncaring about, Oucanasta’s feelings: “He grasped the hand that still lingered on his own,
pressed it affectionately in his own, then placed it in silence on his throbbing heart. The
breathing of Oucanasta became deeper, and the young officer fancied he could feel her
trembling with agitation” (273). When Oucanasta masters her apparently inappropriate feelings
and vows to help rescue Frederick’s fiancée Madeline, Frederick catches her “wildly to his
heart; his lips pressed to hers, and during the kiss that followed, the heart of the latter bounded
and throbbed, as if it would have passed from her own into the bosom of her companion.” The
overt sexuality of this kiss is quickly (and perhaps ineffectively) contained by the narrative
declaration that “[n]ever was a kiss less premeditated, less unchaste. Gratitude, not passion,
had called it forth” (276).

The potential raciness and taboo of this erotic moment for Richardson’s audience may
be most clearly signaled by the contrast offered by the stage adaptation by R. Jones, produced
almost simultaneously with the novel’s publication. The script for this first stage adaptation
gives an indication of what was permissible, both in terms of offending contemporary audience
mores by depicting inter-racial sexuality on stage, and in terms of the conventions of the
nineteenth-century melodrama. The intimacy of Frederick’s caress of Oucanasta’s naked foot
is excised, as is their passionate, though chaste, kiss, the contradictory intentions being perhaps
too difficult to clarify when actually performed. Instead, the play utilizes frequent, passionate
declarations of fidelity, and creates situations of suspense and dramatic irony to illustrate the tension between the possibility that Oucanasta may be jealous and treacherous (a characterization which played into racial stereotypes about manipulative and tricky Indians) and the surprising reality that she remains loyal to Frederick and his beloved fiancé. As in Richardson’s text, however, Oucanasta internalizes the impossibility of her love for Frederick:

OUCANASTA: The Great Spirit has frozen the fountain of my life, but the love of the Indian girl will not change, like the flowers of the forest. She will save thy pale love, and when that fair head like the willow with its long curls shall pillow on thy breast, then Oucanasta can die. (45)

That Oucanasta is indeed doomed because of her cultural transgression is borne out in a kind of morbid self-prophecy. When Oucanasta meets Madeline, she declares: “The summer of Oucanasta is over. She is glad for her heart wishes to die” (61). Indeed, in R. Jones’ script, Oucanasta and Wacousta are the only characters to die. Wacousta stabs Oucanasta on the bridge, punishing her for her treachery and assistance to the English, just before Captain de Haldimar orders the troops to fire on Wacousta. The stage melodrama is thus even more punishing of Oucanasta than Richardson’s version, in which Oucanasta affirms the union of Frederick and Madeline and stoically accepts her own solitude. In both sources, the threat that Oucanasta’s love poses is contained either through her destruction, or through her absorption back into the wilderness of which she is a part.

As a corrective to his source texts, Reaney uses the Oucanasta sub-plot to highlight the cultural assumptions and racial biases inherent in the historically depicted relationships between English settlers and indigenous populations. One means that Reaney employs to foreground the distance between the (supposedly) progressive attitudes of the 1970s and the problematic attitudes of the eighteenth-century British garrison is to voice these assumptions
through his characters. In act one, scene four, the stylized rescue of Oucanasta by Frederick is integrated into a staged flashback of Charlotte’s memory of a pastoral day which she and her brother spent happily learning Native music and language with Oucanasta and her brother, Le Subtil. Their father, Governor de Haldimar, arrives after Oucanasta is saved from drowning, and punishes his children. Perceptions of cultural superiority, and attendant anxiety about the threat of miscegenation are given direct voice by de Haldimar, who tells Frederick that “instead of rescuing Indian women from drowning and leaving most of your clothes in the river, you should have stayed by your sister’s side” (24), and proclaims: “I did not bring my children thousands of miles from their British home in order that they might adopt heathen customs and marry savages” (25).

In contrast to her predecessors, Reaney’s Oucanasta speaks articulately in an English that is grammatically similar to that of the English characters. Indeed, when she and Frederick meet outside the garrison’s gate in act one, scene five, they speak in her language, Cree. These lines of dialogue remain untranslated for the audience, thus conscientiously avoiding the subordination of the language to the necessity of being understood by English listeners. Also unlike her predecessors, Reaney’s Oucanasta is unapologetic about her feelings for Frederick, and refreshingly free of both displaced Christian guilt and self-loathing. The inclusion of situations and qualities that assert Oucanasta’s equality functions not only to build audience empathy and identification, but also to vilify the perspective of de Haldimar and the culture he represents.

If de Haldimar’s “heathen savage” is the historical perception to be redressed, however, Reaney’s depiction of Oucanasta counters with another stereotype, that of the peaceful and wise indigene, at one with the natural world. As Oucanasta leads Frederick through the forest to the hiding place where he will spy on Pontiac’s council, the sense of power reversal that is
present in Richardson’s novel is retained, but is reframed as being the result of Frederick’s
disconnection with nature, which puts him in a position of cultural disadvantage. Oucanasta is
neither fiendish temptress nor escort to the underworld, but rather educator and comforter. As
Frederick describes their journey, using language taken from Richardson’s novel, Oucanasta
counters, and offers celebratory maternal imagery instead:

OUCANASTA: laughter  You are drowning now and it is my turn to lead you to
a shore. Tell me, where do you feel that you are?

FREDERICK: Narrow winding path.

OUCANASTA: No, it is wide and straight to me it is...

FREDERICK: Star-proof underwood.

OUCANASTA: Comb the hair of your mother with loving feet

    Touch be your lantern...

FREDERICK: My hat!

OUCANASTA: The forest says—I will be your hat instead.

FREDERICK: My heart shakes with black fire welling from this abyss you lead
me down, down...

OUCANASTA: Let the forest be in you, Frederick, not always Frederick in the
forest—this narrow stream, jump! Listen to its happy song, blind water knowing
always where it goes. (34-35)

In casting Oucanasta as the articulator of a natural philosophy (what we might call proto-
environmentalism), Reaney makes her able to identify and articulate the cultural differences
between her and Frederick, and in this way gestures toward a cultural self-awareness born out
of the historical moment of emerging Canadian multiculturalism. This is perhaps most clear in
the pivotal scene in which she offers him her moccasins. The moment in which she offers her bare foot is, though not without eroticism, presented as flirtatious teasing:

OUCANASTA: laughing Footgear! Here, feel the soles of my feet – will they suffer? Frederick does so, takes moccasins Tell me Frederick— are your sweetheart’s feet as tough as mine?

FREDERICK: How can I say, Oucanasta? I’ve never even seen Madeline’s feet, let alone touched them.

OUCANASTA: Will you ever see her feet or touch them?

FREDERICK: No, I never will.

OUCANASTA: Even though you will be her husband?

FREDERICK: Even though. (35)

In contrast to the dynamics of seduction, resistance and repulsion depicted in Richardson’s novel, Frederick’s physical contact with Oucanasta’s body is at once more mundane and more liberated. Oucanasta, and the culture she stands in for, are shown to be more progressive than the British couple-to-be, with their repressed sexuality and rigid decorum. The ‘naturalness’ of the Native culture, as opposed to the ‘unnaturalness’ of the English, is thus celebrated and romanticized, even as Oucanasta plays the role of the sexualized other.

Perhaps the most significant revision to the Oucanasta subplot that Reaney makes is his allowing of the romance to be reciprocal. When Frederick thanks Oucanasta for her help in enabling him to hear Pontiac’s plot, he expresses more than simple gratitude before embracing her: “Terror makes me want to hold its opposite in my arms – to know that love is possible even in Hell” (41). Pointedly, at the end of the play, Frederick, Madeline, Oucanasta and Ellen are the only characters that remain alive at the end of the tragedy. In a change of events that
overturns the happy reunion of Frederick and Madeline in both source texts, Madeline declares that she must ask Frederick yet again to postpone their love:

MADELINE: I leave this morning on that schooner bound down river for Montreal—the wilderness has got into my head and the sisters there must help me drive him—the wilderness—out. Out of my head.

OUCANASTA: I will never leave what you call the wilderness, Madeline. The four directions here are my friends and Frederick and I shall make them yours.

(104)

Oucanasta, speaking on behalf of, and as part of the couple, offers Madeline an alternative to the return to another garrison, that of the Christian convent, and proposes, using imagery that unites square and circle in the cardinal directions of the compass, a shared, peaceable community in the wilderness. This imagined reconciliation, however, remains a fantasy, and the ending is ambiguous.

In terms of Reaney’s revisions to the Native plot lines of *Wacousta*, however, the most developed manifestation of Reaney’s vision of The Peaceable Kingdom, through which the opposition of wilderness and garrison are reconciled, can be seen in the romance of Le Subtil and Charlotte. Reaney invents this second parallel love story between one of de Haldimar’s offspring and one of his enemies, by changing the character of Charles de Haldimar, the major’s second son, into Charlotte. Through the love affairs between Charlotte and Le Subtil, as between Frederick and Oucanasta, the adaptation imagines the possibility of an alternative, peaceful relationship between the British settlers and the Ottawa tribe. The moment of colonial contact, for example, is rehearsed in Charlotte and Le Subtil’s first meeting. Charlotte possesses “the only shuttlecock west of Montreal,” made of cork and pigeon feathers. Le Subtil offers to make one from sturgeon’s nose and the feathers of wild birds. The shuttlecock, a
signifier of imported European culture translated into local materials, is established as the
signal for their elopement. The North American hybrid form is the key that will unlock the
potential of cultural exchange in the form of romantic love. Significantly, this moment of
cultural harmony is described as a return to a pre-lapsarian wilderness:

ELLEN: Then you asked him to teach you his language, for you were heartsick of
the language we speak in our civil society. The so-called wise prefer gazing at
the cruel stars that teach them to invent new machines of destruction and at the
same time trample tiny flowers whose fragrance might teach you the way back
to Eden. (22)

Alone, Charlotte and Le Subtil engage in a language lesson that doubles as a fantasy of Adamic
naming:

CHARLOTTE               LE SUBTIL

Teach me Le Subtil. We
call this
the crystal flood, but you
call it         nespi
the chequered shade    agoowastew
tree bole              mistik
a birch tree           waskuay
the earth              uskes
radiance, light         wasteo (23)

This love affair, however, is equally doomed. Ellen Holloway, the vengeful, grief-stricken
widow of the soldier that Governor de Haldimar wrongly executed, betrays the secret of the
romance to Wacousta. Wacousta, symbol of a monstrous cultural hybrid, uses the shuttlecock treacherously as a signal to unleash a surprise attack on the British fort. Charlotte, her heart pierced by an arrow, dies in her father’s arms a symbolic victim to the curse brought about by his unyielding authority, while rehearsing the same language lesson.

LE SUBTIL

the crystal flood

CHARLOTTE

nespi oh, there is one

word I wish to die saying,

is it?

the chequered shade

agoowastew shakes her head

a birch tree

waskuoy shakes head

radiance, light

she smiles wasteo

Le Subtil removes the arrow. Charlotte dies. (70)

The vision of forestalled cultural harmony serves a narrative that repeatedly asserts the destiny of a history that leads to its current cultural moment. Nowhere is this more emphatically presented, however, than in the depiction of the only historical figure in the play, Pontiac. Throughout the piece, the recurrence of prophecy serves to remind the audience that this is a history linked to their own geography. At the moment of colonial conquest, two alternate histories vie for existence. Thus the stakes of this private conflict are shown to be the outcome of North American society in the twentieth century. This intertwining of personal history and national history is articulated repeatedly as a self-conscious awareness of the momentousness of personal action. Early in the play, de Haldimar voices the rationale of violent colonial expansion as personal fortitude:
DE HALDIMAR: One day, gentlemen, because my rule was severe and our gates were sealed shut with the blood of traitors, this fortress of Detroit, besieged by Pontiac and all his warriors in the year of our Lord seventeen hundred and sixty-three, this fortress shall grow into a great city” (15)

Ellen, following the wrongful execution of her husband, Frank Holloway, at the end of act one, revises de Haldimar’s prophecy by placing her own curse on his future:

ELLEN: Inhuman murderer! If there be a God of justice—avenge, O Lord, this blood of my husband. ‘One day, gentlemen,’ you over there said, ‘because my gates were sealed shut with the blood of traitors, this fort will grow into a great city.’ May it do so and – as I have seen perish before my eyes all that I loved on earth with no mercy, no hope – may I also see all that you love die with no mercy, no hope. Yes! Your children’s blood shall wash away the blood of my husband and your city shall fall into ruins, trees grow again where I am standing, trees through your eyes – through your children’s ribcages! (47)

The outcome of these battling visions of the future, and the historical expansion of the empire, at the expense of nature and the indigenous populations of North America, is invoked, with rather overdetermined symbolism, in two key moments that both focus on the character of Pontiac.

Pontiac, in the council overheard by the spying Frederick de Haldimar, articulates the planned attack as a defense against the aggressions of colonial expansion. Placing an eggshell in a circle for each of the nine British occupied Forts, Pontiac systematically crushes each fort as it is named:

PONTIAC: These nine eggs are filled with straight lines, free-ways,
heartlessness, long knives, minuets, harpsichords, death, disease, right-angled extermination.

One by one, under my leadership, we crushed their forts before they could sit on them long enough to hatch their murderous culture. [...] All save these two. [...] In these forts, tough hard-faced foreign devils, worshippers of the sky-demon Jehovah, shut their gates fast hermetically sealed. After twelve months they have divided my Ottawas from my allies the Potawomies and the Delawares. With offers of a separate peace. (38-39)

The sympathetic portrayal of Pontiac is predicated, significantly, on a historical awareness of the injustices, the “right-angled extermination” suffered as a result of colonization. The actual history underlying the melodramatic fiction is further emphasized in a scene that juxtaposes the fate of the historical Pontiac to a vision of modern day Detroit. When a lacrosse ball falls into the council hall of the fort, signaling the beginning of the second surprise attack, Pontiac presents a pastoral vision of imagined Native victory:

PONTIAC: It means that the sweet grass will grow once more in all the paths and trails of your stronghold. It means that within this many moons holds up both hands the deer will once more browse where this council room now stands and men will as on which side of the river your castle stood. The grass, the deer, the river are my brothers and sisters and they will rejoice with me when the heartless strangers with their clumsy shoes no longer stumble through their delicate dwellings. (61)

As de Haldimar throws back the curtain to reveal the armed troops concealed there, and declares his own victory, Pontiac presents a revised vision of the future. Speaking suddenly in
the past tense in the play’s first direct address to the audience, he narrates his own fate as recorded by history:

PONTIAC: He went on to say much more. It is said that I turned in silence and left his halls. I heard him offer me peace if I would hand over to him the white traitor.

Serpent egg, one of nine, the only one I could not crush. Well you hatched.

Toy friction cars swarm over the stage. In effect a giant Pontiac stands exactly where the Renaissance Building stands now in Detroit with modern traffic swirling about his feet. (61)

THE SCOTLAND PLOT

Reaney’s attempts to balance reverence with reinterpretation led to a final product whose success was decidedly uneven. Many of the problems with the piece were reflected in the local reviews of the touring production. A common criticism was that the play’s most stylized and symbolic moments did not have the intended effect on audiences. Reviewer Lyle Slack of the Hamilton Spectator, who saw the play as a “blundering failure” wrote that “[i]t is so clumsily written as to be embarrassing. It is staged with such amateur theatricalities as to unwittingly provoke laughter, which it did often last night. It is so schizophrenic in style that you wonder from one scene to the next whether it is a serious drama or a farce.” While Slack recognized the play’s potential for “a sort of stylized, symbolized story of love and hate” in practice he indicates that the scene in which “toy cars suddenly explode across the stage” is unfortunately “the play’s most inexcusably inept moment.” Randy Denley, writing for the Owen Sound Sun Times similarly described the toy car moment as “the equivalent of Hamlet dropping his drawers in the middle of a soliloquy.” Other reviewers responded more positively
to the staging techniques. Robin Waples of *The Sault Star* wrote that “[s]ymbolism played a great part in the production – rows of blue yarn effectively created a sea of waves – and it enhanced the intimacy the performers shared with the audience.” Helen Kohl’s review in *The Toronto Star* while acknowledging the play contained “some pretty heavy handed symbolism at times” also acknowledged that “there are some beautifully choreographed moments, the kind that can only happen when a director takes chances.”

A main point of contention in the play’s reception, however, was the script’s perceived didacticism. D’Arcy Jenish, staff reporter for the *St. Thomas Times-Journal*, for example, identified the play’s combination of history and romance as a problematic divide in focus that led to an ambiguity of interpretation. The play, he suggests, “doesn’t tell us much about our past,” but instead offers lively entertainment and heavy moralizing: “In 18th Century Canada, it wasn’t the Indians who were the bad guys, it was the white men, mainly the old ones if we are to believe the James Reaney play ‘Wacousta!’.” Jenish, furthermore, takes issue with the central conflict as taking place between two “white men who brought to Canada with them a scrap and bitter hatred they had developed over a woman when they were young men back home in Scotland.”

Jenish’s assessment, in particular, points to one of the most significant dramaturgical problems in the piece, the relevance of the relationship between the Scotland plot and the plot of the Pontiac uprising. The Reginald Morton back-story, which occupies the majority of the play’s third act, takes place in Scotland twenty years before the events depicted in the first two acts, and is most firmly rooted in the less accessible conventions of melodrama and gothic romance. While the first two acts significantly update Richardson’s text by highlighting (or, we might say, teleologically constructing) the prescient nature of Richardson’s cultural preoccupations, this last act appears to be the product of an incongruously rigid formal fidelity.
The inclusion of the events in the third act of the play most clearly reveals an adaptive focus that prioritizes the retention of those elements deemed at the time to be evidence of Richardson’s literary value. While the first and second acts adhere to a classical dramaturgical structure, following fairly strict unities of time, place and action, and building up to the suspenseful climax of the attacks on the two British garrisons, the final act effectively stalls the play’s conclusion while Wacousta, who holds Frederick and Clara captive, offers a very long rationale for his obsession with revenge.

In the third act Wacousta recounts events that took place during his youth in Scotland, when he was known as Reginald Morton and was a close friend of de Haldimar’s. The actors of the company double as the characters in this past and depict how Morton fell in love with and wooed a woman named Clara Beverley. While hunting a deer with the young de Haldimar, Morton discovers Clara I living in isolation in the forest with her protective reclusive father. In love, he paints two identical portraits of her and shows de Haldimar. Although Morton manages to win her love, and steals her away by lowering her in a net from her mountain home into the world below, he is called to military action before they can be married, and refuses her suggestion of consummating the relationship before he departs. Morton entrusts Clara to the protection of de Haldimar, who, having fallen in love based on the portrait, betrays Morton by marrying her. Enraged, Morton attacks de Haldimar, a superior officer, is court-martialed for treason, and stripped of his rank. Broken by rage and betrayal, Morton follows de Haldimar around the world to exact his revenge.

That the choice to include the extended Scotland back-story is motivated in part by a desire to highlight the literary qualities of the source seems evident when one considers that the sequence has more coherence with other works of 19th century British literature than it does with the style or narrative of the rest of the play. The extended foray into the past, unpopular
with Ontario audiences, seems a rather determined effort to interpret Richardson through the prevailing literary approaches of the mid-1970s. Scholar I.S. MacLaren points out, for example, that Clara’s ‘noble stag’, Fidelity, Morton’s hunt which leads him to the Edenic garden in which Clara lives alone with her father, Morton’s perilous crossing of the abyss to reach Clara, and Morton’s call to service, which takes him from his bride on their wedding day, all correspond to similar incidents in Sir Walter Scott’s *The Lady of the Lake*. Citing the parallels to Scott’s popular romance, Reaney argues rhetorically; “I think you’d have to agree that there’s quite a bit going on in this fiction which for years critics have really short-changed by calling it crude and melodramatic (“Topless” 7).

The inclusion of the sequence also appears to have been motivated by a corrective, or archival impulse. The elaborate details of the Wacousta/Reginald Morton back-story are notably absent from the 1830s stage adaptation that served as Reaney’s initial impetus to adapt and also as a second key source. The episode, as Douglas Cronk points out, is also radically abridged in the many editions of the novel that followed the first, and only authorized, 1832 English publication by Cadell London, up to and including the 1967 NCL edition. The textual history of *Wacousta*, and the elimination of the Scotland plot, Cronk argues in his paper, are politically relevant, because all subsequent editions of Richardson’s novels were based on a pirated version published in the United States by Adam Waldie, four months after it appeared in Britain. Few readers, reasoned Cronk, had thus had the opportunity to read “Richardson’s pro-Canadian historical romance,” reading instead an “Americanized, bowdlerized, ‘abridged’

11 In the 1830s R. Jones script Wacousta alludes to the past, declaring that Clara’s father has “robbed all that made life dear to me” and that he was once generous but love “turned my blood to overflowing gall,” but these statements merely qualify the extent of his rage: “I loved your mother as man ne’er loved woman. I hate your father as man ne’er hated man. That love –that hatred are unquenched – unquenchable” (68).
and ‘very imperfect edition’ that Richardson himself denounced. That Reaney was aware that the restoration of those parts cut or altered from Richardson’s original text could be seen as a necessary political and historical recuperation of the novel’s distinctive “Canadianness,” likely having communicated with Cronk in the lead up to the UWO conference, is indicated by comments he made in “Topless Nightmares.” He writes: “We can’t have a theatre with any depth to it until we get some sort of literary and historical programme going. That’s why we’ve also gone to the trouble to get all the parts cut out of the 1967 edition of Wacousta sewn together again because before you see the play, or help me write it, you should really have a go at the complete text” (“Topless” 8).

Reaney’s most extensive analysis of the Scotland plot events, however, indicates that the elaborate sequence was retained in the play because the mythic resonances of Wacousta’s story within the broader patterns of Canadian literature were perceived to be vital to the play’s meaning and value. Thus Reaney’s reverential approach to his source material again shows the significant influence of his mentor Northrop Frye. The character of Wacousta, Reaney suggests in a reading that echoes Frye on archetypes, is a “giant dream figure” who “invites comparisons with Lord Byron, Satan, Heathcliff, Thoreau, Achilles, Hamlet, a whole nation of souls protesting the way so-called civilization irons out individuality, fantasy and the passions” (“Topless” 3). Again reflecting the influence of Frye’s ideas about the unconscious structures of literary forms, Reaney explains, Reginald Morton’s courtship of Clara I represents the discovery of a psychological Eden, in which through the confrontation with the sublime in nature, Morton readies himself for the “conjunction with tenderness, woman, Beulah, beauty” (6). When this ideal union is ruptured, precipitated by the lowering of the ideal woman into the

12 See, for example, Frye’s essay on Archetypal Criticism in Anatomy of Criticism.
fallen world, as symbolized by Morton’s lowering of Clara down the mountain in a net, Morton “is torn in half; all he has now is dread and the abyss. As Wacousta, the giant warrior, he becomes these forces, forever cut off from the world of beauty and love that should have been his” (7).

By first placing Wacousta within the context of accepted canonical works, and then reading the character as a symbolic figure operating within the themes and conventions of romance, Reaney participates in the contemporary critical reading of Richardson’s Wacousta as evidence of a specifically Canadian tradition. John Moss had already succinctly articulated one aspect of this interpretive strategy in a piece published two years earlier, when he wrote: “what sets Wacousta apart as something more than a lurid, subliminally obscene, melodrama of revenge are precisely those characteristics which make it the prototype of one stream in the flow of Canadian fiction. Exile, in this novel, is a state of mind; the frontier state of consciousness” (467). Character relationships, the complex plot and the novel’s realistic details, Moss goes on to argue, are “all subservient to a larger purpose, which is to convey the nature of man’s condition in the universe and his perception of it” (467-8). The thematization of an uneasy tension between nature and civilization, Moss suggests, is symptomatic, reflecting Richardson’s immersion in Canadian culture: “Such a purpose undoubtedly grew as much out of the frontier materials with which he was working as out of any conscious intent on Richardson’s part” (468). Margot Northey, in a piece published as Reaney was in workshops for Wacousta! at UWO, similarly suggests that the formal features of Richardson’s work, specifically its use of gothic conventions, are ultimately subservient to Wacousta’s symbolic

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13 Although Reaney acknowledges Jay Macpherson as being the scholar who helped him with Wacousta’s “parallel Gothic romance,” MacLaren and Northey were clearly also influential.
expression of a cultural psychology. *Wacousta’s* gothic romance, Northey writes,” is not so much related to its melodramatic externals, whether historically or autobiographically based, as to the affecting symbolic power of these externals; the central images in the tale are correlatives of a terror of the spirit which is gothic in its proportions” (480).

By reading *Wacousta* as an expression of “the frontier state of consciousness,” and the “terror of the spirit” of early nineteenth-century Canada, both Moss and Northey interpret *Wacousta’s* central conflict not literally, as a tale of individual love and revenge, but rather as the conflict between threatening nature and equally threatening society, that is, as the symbolic conflict at the heart of Canadian thematic criticism:

*Wacousta’s* gothic terror is therefore not associated simply with nature, but with a feeling of menace from within civilized society as from without. The prevailing feeling of menace is revealed in a series of images with which Richardson describes life as ‘gloomy and unpenetrable,’ [sic] and yet the garrison that attempts to shut out the forest accentuates the ‘prison-house’ atmosphere. This tension between the isolated dangerous freedom of primitive nature and the sense of claustrophobia of a ‘garrison culture’ (to use Frye’s term) is of course a recurring theme in Canadian literature from Susanna Moodie to contemporary writers. (Northey 480)

Among the scholars that Reaney names as having direct involvement in the shaping of the text, Michael Hurley is listed as having the most influence on the play’s thematic structure. If his article “Two Strings for the Labyrinth,” which Reaney edited and included in the Fall 1976 issue of *Halloween*, is an indication, Hurley’s dramaturgical contributions promoted a thematic assessment of what the play should construct as its key conflicts and narrative arcs. In this article, as in the paper he presented at the 1977 conference, Hurley maps the tension between menacing nature and oppressive society onto the characters of Wacousta and de
Haldimar, arguing that these characters form “composite parts of one larger identity, as, in a sense, all the characters are part of one larger character. [...] Apart, each is a dangerous extreme, an incarnation of law and order or anarchic impulse, whose social counterparts are the British and Indians respectively. The elements the Colonel has suppressed in himself have split off to lead an autonomous existence in the person of Wacousta” (14). Hurley, citing the ideas of Margaret Atwood and Northrop Frye, identifies the Reginald Morton back-story as having additional importance because of its heightened symbolic significance within a Canadian context. The section, he observes, is one that “presents both the recognition of Wacousta as victim, besides victimizer, and a reversal, Clara’s sympathetic response mirroring that of the reader’s. Her curious mixture of attraction and repulsion is characteristic of an ambivalence towards all such outlaws throughout Canadian literature. Richardson’s work seems to suffer from – as well as exploit – ‘a confusion about the nature and moral position of authority which is, in fact, a confusion in the Canadian psyche itself’” (18).

The impulse to include the Morton-de Haldimar plot in Scotland on the basis of its perceived demonstration of a pattern in Canadian literary history has mostly detrimental implications for the clarity and pacing of the overall plot. Because of its inclusion, the play effectively has a first rather anticlimactic climax in the second act, when the suspense surrounding Pontiac’s plotted attack on the two forts is quickly resolved, and a second climax as Wacousta and the de Haldimars vie for survival. This is a dramaturgical challenge posed by adhering to the structure of the original novel. The retention of the structure becomes more problematic in performance, however, given Reaney’s attempt to emphasize the realist historical roots of the Pontiac plot within the play. Significantly, after de Haldimar foils the surprise attack and Pontiac leaves the fort in defeat, the play largely ignores the presence of the Natives, or their historical plight. Pontiac appears briefly in the final moments of the play, and
makes a reference to the King’s offer of a peace treaty, but this is almost a distraction from the spectacular main action, where Wacousta in a final attempt to thwart de Haldimar begins to climb the flagpole with Clara in his grasp. The play’s sudden focus on European plot events further undermines the progressive cultural ambitions of the previous chapters by casting the characters of Oucanasta and Pontiac in roles aligned with Clara’s symbolic, pre-lapsarian world; Oucanasta appears in antler head-dress as Clara’s pet deer, Fidelity, and Pontiac re-appears as the hermit father, Colonel Beverley. The implicit parallels that this casting draws between Native culture and an unspoiled mythical Eden, render Oucanasta and Pontiac as “pure story” – “Indians” who are as much romantic conventions as Clara’s deer – significantly undermining the play’s earlier moments of politicized historicism.

CONCLUSION

Despite the evident weaknesses of Reaney’s adaptation, in its multivalent exploration and affirmation of its source’s value Reaney’s adaptation offers a window into the beginnings of Canadian literary theatre adaptation in this country. Although Wacousta!, considered both as process and product, was influenced more directly and profoundly by the literary theory of the period than were other adaptations of its time, the case study highlights a broader emerging interest in the possibilities of “Canadian literariness” for the Canadian theatre. Setting off in all directions, Wacousta! anticipates a number of interests that continued, and continue, to shape the priorities of CanLit adapters in the decades that followed. In its attempt to cultivate and expose Canadian audiences to their own cultural traditions, the Reaney/NDWT production anticipates a context-oriented, educational framework, which eventually produces the mainstream successes of adaptations like James W. Nichol’s The Stone Angel. In its marketing, and its critical reception, which emphasized the cultural cachet of John Richardson, the “father
of our literature,” and the text as a piece of Canadian history, the example of *Wacousta!* anticipates an environment of reception for adaptations deeply invested in authorship and canonicity. The conservatism of the script, in its “fidelity” to the narrative structures and language of the text, can be seen in the persistent reverence for “text” demonstrated by an entire body of Canadian adaptations.

In its development process and staging, techniques, however, the production of *Wacousta* reflects an impulse beyond traditional fidelity that also persists in the approaches of adapters that would follow. The impulse to innovate, to use adaptation as a way to explore different theatrical approaches, is evident in current day adaptations such as Necessary Angel’s *Divisadero: A Performance*. Many of Reaney’s staging techniques, for example, appear to have roots in a somewhat belated modernist orientalism. In his commentary on *Wacousta*, Reaney notes in one section that “[i]n homage to the Peking Opera whose visit to Canada changed my life, I always have music in my plays, with the musicians in plain sight” (120), and in another he observes that the dramatic problems of showing masts of ships, flagpoles, and distances of journey downriver “have probably been solved in Oriental theatre centuries ago” (144). In his 1978 summary of influences Reaney states that his ideal “is an Eskimo solstice celebration I once read about in which one big underground igloo the whole community gathered and put on their annual us-against-winter play; masks, chanting women all sitting on a bench, but swaying and miming; men being crows, animal marionettes entering by invisible means, and total audience enjoyment. That’s a style I’d like to reach up to” (156). At the same time, in its formal explorations the production anticipates an ongoing (comparatively) experimental interest in the relationship between adaptation, literariness and intermediality. The stage directions of *Wacousta* make reference to film techniques including “split-screen effect[s]” (41, 63), glance-object cuts (19), “flashbacks” (19), time-lapse effects.
(95), and “dissolve[s]” (64), indicating the influence that cinematic techniques had on the production’s staging.

Imagined as a celebration of the arrival of Canadian Literature as a recognized and culturally realized tradition, Reaney’s production instead marks the beginning of theatrical adaptation’s ongoing pursuit of the idea of Canadian literariness.
3. **AUTHORSHIP, NARRATION AND SURROGATION: PERFORMING MARGARET ATWOOD**

*The writer is thus the original invisible man: not there at all but also very solidly there, at one and the same time, because the second answer to the question—Where is the writer when the reader is reading?—is, ‘Right here.’ At least we have the impression that he or she is right here, in the same room with us—we can hear the voice. Or we can almost hear the voice. Or we can hear a voice. Or so it seems.*

(Margaret Atwood, *Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing*, 148. [2002])

If, as Margaret Atwood suggests, the writer is always an “invisible man,” present and yet absent in the “voice” that one seems to hear, the perplexing question for adapters and audiences alike is, “What happens to this voice, this seeming presence, in adaptation?” When a book is adapted, can its author be adapted as well? This question is at the heart of a second trend in Canadian literary stage adaptation that we might identify as a shift from an emphasis on Canadian stories, to the prioritization of Canadian storytellers. It would also appear to be the question at the centre of the recent reception of two adaptations of Margaret Atwood’s writing.

One would be hard-pressed to find ways in which *The Penelopiad* and *The Handmaid’s Tale* can be identified as fundamentally Canadian theatrical works. On the level of content, the first offers a retelling of *The Odyssey* of Homer from the perspective of Penelope and her twelve hanged maids, while the latter is a dystopian speculative fiction set in a United States that has become a fundamentalist Christian theocracy. Although the novella and novel’s explicit feminist politics perhaps can (and have\(^1\)) been read allegorically into the postcolonial (symbolically gendered) relationship between Canada and the United States, there is nothing in either story that is literally about Canada. Nor, to adopt another measuring stick for the

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assessment of “Canadian content,” can the productions be considered exclusively “Canadian” on the level of the artistic contributions of their creative teams. The two most recent high-profile adaptations of Margaret Atwood’s fiction are, in many senses, examples of an increasingly globalized model of theatrical development and production. *The Penelopiad*, a co-production between England’s Royal Shakespeare Company and Ottawa’s National Arts Centre, marked a trans-Atlantic turn for the NAC, as its first non-North American collaboration and performance since its inception. With the explicit aim of “develop[ing] exciting international dialogues” (“NAC”) as part of “a series of cross-cultural exchanges and collaborations” the 2007 co-production received financial and material support from both British and Canadian governmental agencies. With its equitably balanced cast of six U.K. and seven Canadian actresses, its British director, its Canadian choreographer, and so on, the list of individuals involved in the production similarly reads like an exercise in international diplomacy. Canada can not even claim bragging rights over the play’s world premiere; British audiences had the privilege of seeing the production’s first run in Stratford-upon-Avon and Newcastle before it moved to Ottawa in the fall of the same year.

The Canadian Opera Company’s 2004 production of *The Handmaid’s Tale*, is even less clearly a Canadian theatrical work. Adapted by Danish composer Poul Ruders and British librettist Paul Bentley for a commission by the Royal Opera House in Copenhagen, *The Handmaid’s Tale* received full productions in Denmark, England and The United States before the Canadian Opera Company secured the opera for their 2004-2005 season. As a remount of the production owned by the Royal Danish Opera, the Toronto production revived

\footnote{English National Opera, 3 April to 2 May 2003 at the London Coliseum.}

\footnote{Minnesota Opera in Minneapolis, 10 – 18 May 2003.}
Phyllida Lloyd’s original direction seen in the Copenhagen and London productions, as well as set and costumes by British designer Peter McKintosh. What opened on the Canadian stage, therefore, was very much an assembly of international creative contributions produced through a global “borderless” flow of resources, materials and culture.

Given the complex national origins of these works, it is particularly strange that in advance of both productions, the national media was quick to celebrate the “homecoming” of each adaptation. With surprising consistency the press coverage surrounding the events celebrated the works’ eagerly anticipated “return” to the Canadian stage. Even stranger is the degree to which the Canadian reception of both productions appears to have been predicated on their perceived status as Canadian works. Kamal Al-Solaylee’s review of *The Penelopiad* for *The Globe and Mail*, for example, depicts the reaction of the opening night audience in Ottawa as being nothing short of patriotic. Al-Solaylee writes, “[t]he mood in the sold-out house was of national-pride. It’s like the [cast and production team] just returned from battle in Afghanistan” (“A Hit”). Faced with the challenge of contradicting the audience’s apparent enthusiasm for the piece, he later dismisses the crowd’s reaction as “mere-flag waving.”

Al-Solaylee’s assessment of the audience response resonates with my own experience as an audience member of both adaptations insofar as I felt that reactions to *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *The Penelopiad* were shaped, to an unusual degree, by expectations about the relationship between national identity and cultural representation that did not correspond to the works’ actual historical or material conditions of production. It appears equally clear that for many audience members, in performance both adaptations had the effect of confirming these expectations.

While there may be other explanations that could account for the consumption of these works as Canadian cultural products, the most obvious reason for these productions to be
celebrated as a triumphant “homecoming,” however, is their adaptive connection to the novels upon which they are based, and by extension to the nationality of their author. For individuals who are aware of the fact that The Handmaid’s Tale and The Penelopiad are based on Margaret Atwood’s works of the same names, any knowledge they might have about the author functions paratextually, as a collection of secondary signals that both surround the novel and novella and are part of their totality. As one of the few individuals who can be called a Canadian literary celebrity, Margaret Atwood’s nationality is undoubtedly a well-known fact for the vast majority of spectators. And while the mere fact of Atwood’s nationality doesn’t account for the kind of audience response she elicited when she appeared on stage in the curtain calls of The Penelopiad and The Handmaid’s Tale, there was something in the audience’s response that united fandom and patriotism. Her appearance provoked a frenzied ovation (perhaps disproportionate to the merits of the productions) that left me convinced that if the audience members had Canadian flags, they certainly would have waved them.

Contrast this to the situation for Wacoust!, described in the previous chapter. When James Reaney and the NDWT toured their adaptation across Ontario in 1978, they faced the challenge of interesting a largely “unknowing” audience in the value and significance of a largely unknown novel. For the relatively limited number of spectators who were familiar with Wacousta, John Richardson’s novel, to borrow Robert Lecker’s terminology, was a “curricular” rather than “canonical” text (Making 55). It was a book studied inconsistently in the classroom, a book that prior to the NCL edition had been out of print for several decades. Within what could be called the knowing audience were likely many more individuals that “knew of” John Richardson, or Wacousta, without having read the book or being familiar with its story. The spectators they encountered were, for the most part, alternately ambivalent and indifferent toward the performance.
From audience indifference to overzealous demonstration: I have started with this particular contrast in audience response because it points both to the uniqueness of Atwood’s position within Canadian culture and to a number of telling features of the environment in which adaptations of her works have been produced and received. First and foremost, it signals the increasing role that authorship plays in public perceptions of literariness. In the shift from the largely “unknowing audiences” of the 1970s – audiences for whom the work of Canadian literature upon which the adaptation was based and perhaps its author would likely be unfamiliar – to the emergence of strong “knowing audiences” in the last decades of the twentieth century, we can see the emergence of the idea of the Canadian literary celebrity. A number of factors, including the expanded number of Canadian publishers, the entrenchment of Canadian literature and Canadian studies courses in schools, the increased attention given Canadian writers, and the general expansion of literary infrastructure in the decades following the founding of the Canada Council in 1957, contributed to the establishment and increased profile of many Canadian authors’ reputations. The 1980s and ‘90s in particular were prolific and highly successful years for Margaret Atwood, who garnered attention for publications including *Murder in the Dark* (1983), *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985), *Cat’s Eye* (1988), *The Robber Bride* (1993), and *Alias Grace* (1996), for which she won the Giller Prize. In addition to critical acclaim, Atwood also achieved incredible popular and commercial success. In turn, the growth of a fan culture signals an expansion of influence and commercial success for Atwood. Perhaps more than any other Canadian author, Atwood has transcended the “curricular canon,” establishing an international reputation and reaching mass audiences within Canada.

Second, the contrast in audience reaction indicates not only that contemporary audiences know Atwood, but also that they invest particular meaning in her celebrity. Indeed,
Atwood’s fame at once as an author and as a Canadian cultural icon represents a significant factor in the production and reception of adaptations based on her works. While James Reaney and his collaborators turned to John Richardson’s novel to reveal the ways in which the text itself represented an authentic literary tradition, I argue, Atwood’s adapters, along with their critics and their audiences, have turned to the author herself as the symbol of a Canadian literary tradition. Despite the varied circumstances of production (the international development process described above) the different scales of performance venues, and even the different medium (in the case of *The Handmaid’s Tale* opera), adapters have chosen a number of very similar adaptation strategies, all of which highlight the telling of the tale and the storyteller. Although Atwood herself has only actively participated in one of these cases, as playwright and adapter for *The Penelopiad*, the pieces have been widely publicized and analyzed as Atwood’s works. In the case of Atwood, given her public profile, her commercial success, and her literary prestige, the relationships between what adapters do in the creation of the work, what the media does in the interpretation of the work, and what audiences expect are defined by greater mutual influence than in the case of Reaney’s adaptation. Audiences, particularly those associated with strong fan cultures, have a reputation for demanding “fidelity” in adaptations. In circumstances in which personal investment runs high, the imperative of an adaptation to “be true,” whether by achieving a kind of “stylistic equivalency” or by capturing the “spirit” of a known work, can have a significant impact on the success or failure of a production. What appears to have been true in each adaptation is that the piece of theatre, in order to be successful, needed to somehow incorporate the figure of the author into the interpretation.

While the shift in priority from story to storyteller is, on one hand, a response to the special case of Margaret Atwood, it is also rooted in the specific historical and cultural
developments of the past three decades. The promotion of adaptations on the basis of the fame of well-known authors can be connected to economic and paradigmatic shifts in the arts. By the early 1990s the quota-oriented project of “Canadianization,” which had driven theatrical activity in the ‘60s and ‘70s had come to be seen as both limiting and regressive. As Dennis Salter observed in 1991:

By investing so much of ourselves in these outdated ideas, we in fact succeeded in alienating ourselves from a polyvalent conception of nationalism as we tended to suppress marginalized constituencies whose artistic and political values transgressed the dominant paradigm. We also made it difficult – and, indeed in some periods, impossible – to conceive of theatre as something that can exist entirely separate from the agenda of nationalism, or that might question the system of traditional values on which nationalism is inevitably based […] it was naively assumed that the classic Canadian play, which would allay all our fears about our neo-colonial insufficiency, would be written and staged one day…once we had in fact grown up to be just as important as other cultures.” (90)

The disengagement from the conscious policy-driven pursuit of a Canadian theatre, a theatre created from a point of view unique to the geography and culture of Canada, was prompted by a number of developments, all of which had implications for the way that Canadian literature, and the adaptation of fiction, might be perceived. A number of institutional developments, for example, led to a sense that the ambitions of the Canadian theatre, if not entirely fulfilled, had produced a new stage of maturity. As Don Rubin suggested in a 1983 article on the Toronto Theatre Movement, across Canada the conscious interest in “Canadian theatre,” as opposed to “theatre in Canada” in the 1970s and early ‘80s produced a great deal of institutional professionalization, through the utilization of government subsidies, the
establishment of professional awards, the formation of professional associations (including the Playwrights Circle (later the Playwrights Co-op and eventually Playwrights Canada), Canadian Theatre Critics Association, Toronto Theatre Alliance, and Professional Association of Canadian Theatre (PACT), and the emergence of a number of publishing ventures dedicated to play publishing. In an academic context, attempts to make available published Canadian play texts resulted in the publication of three influential anthologies in 1984-5, which had the somewhat unintentional effect of legitimizing a fledgling Canadian dramatic canon. In the context of such institutional “arrivals,” the perceived legitimacy of Canadian Literature as an institution with a more developed or coherent tradition was likely lessened.

At the same time, the relevance of the idea of a tradition, particularly as linked to the expression of a national cultural identity, was increasingly questioned, especially within academic discourse. As Imre Szeman observes, Canadian literary criticism, extending up to the present, is characterized by the contradiction that it has, on one hand, “been underwritten by a literary nationalism that seeks to make intelligible the special and specific attention to Canadian texts as Canadian texts. On the other hand, the work of the intellectual forefathers of contemporary Canadian criticism express forcefully the view that it is no longer sensible to speak of a specifically Canadian sensibility or culture” (183).

For mainstream critics, academics and many creators, one effect of the growing skepticism about the possibility and desirability of a single homogenous national culture, and a concern with the experience of actual individuals was increased attention to marginalized communities and voices, and thus the proliferation of different aesthetic priorities. As Robert

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~ 114 ~
Wallace observes, “Ultimately, ideas about difference and diversity began to replace notions of homogeneity and unity for many Canadians during this time ideas that the federal government sought to institutionalize in multicultural policies that affirmed the Charter of Rights and freedoms that it had ensconced in 1982” (17).

Within Canadian literary studies too, the 1980s and ‘90s were years in which the idea of Canadian literariness changed shape. William New identifies a shift in 1984 when “conventional versions of Canadian nationhood went through another sequence of adjustments” (283) in which the perception of Canada as a nation of two founding cultures, French and English, shifted toward one of it as a more self-consciously pluralistic society. For cultural production in Canada, globalization introduced fundamental contradictions in attitudes toward nationalism. This changing perception, when coupled with theoretical movements of the mid-eighties, resulted in increased attention to identity politics, and increasing anxiety about authenticity and who had the authority to speak on behalf of whom.

Although this led to heated debates about the definition and relevance of the canon, such academic arguments were to some extent in conflict with a popular and economic culture that rewarded literary stars. Thus, as New observes, even as “adherents to the notion of globalism suggested that the idea of nationalism in literature was obsolete [...] new prizes were being inaugurated to celebrate Canadian books” (293), including the Giller Prize and the Charles Taylor Prize for literary non-fiction. Despite the enthusiasm for ridding criticism of any reference to nationality, such prizes rapidly became marks of serious literary accomplishment, and ‘Canadian’ nominations to (and winners of) such international awards as the Orange Man Booker, Kiriyama, Impac, and Pulitzer Prizes were highlighted yearly in the popular and critical press.
Like these new literary prizes, literary theatrical adaptations after 1985 appear to have responded more to the interests of economics and popular culture than to academic discourse. In particular, the adaptations produced after the early ‘80s were affected significantly by material and economic developments in the Canadian theatre industry. Many theatres were in the process of trying to build quality and infrastructure, while grant levels were declining. In particular, two federal grants that had been crucial to the growth of theatres throughout the 70s, the Local Initiative Programs and Opportunities for Youth, were cancelled before the end of the decade. In 1982 the government froze the Canada Council’s budget, while demand for funds continued to rise. At the same time high unemployment in the early ‘80s and a slow national economy meant greater competition for audiences against other forms of entertainment. As Don Rubin wrote in 1983,

No longer was it enough to simply offer them something Canadian. Plays had to be both Canadian and good. Theatres began searching for plays which seemed to have a higher entertainment quotient. In time, it was this entertainment quotient itself which began to take precedence. [...] As the councils began to apply more stringent standards with their ever-decreasing sums of funds to give out, subsidy rules remained essentially the same but interpretations of those rules began to change. ‘How many people,’ the Councils began to ask, ‘are actually going to this particular theatre?’ The question required many theatres to re-think their mandates with both good and bad results. (‘Toronto Movement” 385).

The competition for audiences in the new economic landscape of Toronto, in particular, was further increased by the rise of a number of commercial theatre productions in the mid-to-late eighties. Lavish musicals like The Phantom of the Opera, Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat, and Miss Saigon regularly drew large audiences and demonstrated
the potential of a Canadian theatrical tourism industry. As a number of scholars have observed, the move toward a free-market approach contributed to a conservative shift in Canada’s alternative theatre, both in terms of the titles produced and in terms of the models of development employed. As the alternate theatres became more ‘mainstream’, as Robert Wallace notes, they began to initiate co-productions with Regional theatres, allowing them to share risks and to access the Regionals’ greater resources (13).

Significantly, the economic changes affecting the theatre industry were linked to a broader paradigm shift in arts funding, and to shifting perceptions about the relationship between culture and the idea of the nation. As Ryan Edwardson argues, the changes in the ‘80s were initiated during the course of the 70s, when the Trudeau administration oversaw “a proactive structuring of cultural activity, underwriting a third model of Canadianization, which posited nationhood upon the success of cultural industries. Out of this policy emerged the current situation in which federal bureaucrats have become guardians of Canadian cultural life, overseeing vast economies in which the production of industrially quantified Canadian content – with little concern for the qualitative elements – has become an end in and of itself” (18-19). This marked shift toward commoditization of the arts and the rise of the idea of the arts as a ‘cultural industry’ is demonstrated clearly in the statement in the 1980 Annual Report by Canada’s Department of Communications that, “Culture is not only a matter of artistic creation and appreciation, it is an economic activity that has become a multi-billion-dollar-a-year industry in Canada” (qtd. in Edwardson, 250). The election of the Progressive Conservative government of Brian Mulroney in 1984 ushered in a new era of arts cuts and the ideology of treating culture as a commodity. Over the next two decades “federal bureaucrats successfully engaged in a neo-conservative clawing back of the public sector in favour of private-sector
growth, all the while continuing to emphasize the importance of culture to nationhood” (21).

As Edwardson describes,

Economic incentives and industrial point systems all placed Canadian content within the dynamics of profitability and cultural commodification, which encouraged industries to strip it of national identifiers – or, more commonly, replace Canadian ones with American equivalents – in order to attract the interest of distributors at home and abroad. The commercialism that had once been an anathema to cultural nationalists was now identified as the means of ensuring cultural vitality; advertising, marketing, co-productions, and the tailoring of Canadian content to the interests of foreign markets were all treated as key to the success of Canadianization. The end result was that any sense of intrinsic value was replaced by an economic one. Culture, in terms put forth by theorist Jean Beaudrillard, was now treated on par with Levi Jeans and washing machines” (20-21).

In this climate of risk-averse theatre companies, increased competition for audiences, audience-driven programming, and emerging ‘branding’ strategies, combined with the legacy of quota-oriented funding policies that prioritized Canadian works and writers, a new imagined source of legitimacy emerges: popular appeal. The literary tradition, as identified by elite intellectuals with positions of authority, was suspect in a way that average readers and audiences were not. Robert Lecker’s distinction between the “curricular” and the “canonical” offers a clear example of this shifting perception of the authentic:

In Canada, we have a shifting but identifiable curriculum that is often misread as a canon […] By this I mean that we study works whose temporal impact is brief, whose cultural grammar is local before it is national, whose idealizations are not those we can identify with the values held by a community at large. A good way of demonstrating
this assertion is to consider the popular appeal of some Canadian works that have been institutionalized and are often thought to be canonical, say, Sinclair Ross's *As for Me and My House*. While the novel may appear on course curricula throughout the country, and while much has been said about its ostensible excellence, it is not a canonical work. The average, well-read person out of the academy has never heard of it. In fact, many well-read people within the academy have never heard of it. [...] It has no claim to public interest. It does not mediate between popular and academic demand. It transmits no cultural grammar (*Making it Real* 55).

Popular demand has been a quality even more elusive for Canadian theatre works. As Chris Johnson observes in a 1995 article, not only do the plays ostensibly canonized by the publication of a number of influential (academically constructed) anthologies in the 1980s not correspond to the public interest of real audiences, they also don’t accurately reflect the full diversity of what is actually being produced on Canadian stages, or even what is taught in Canadian classrooms (“Wisdome”). Johnson concludes, “all canons are porous and subject to change, but the ‘canon’ of Canadian drama changes so quickly that I would question whether it can thus qualify as a canon at all” (46). If there is no consensus about a curricular canon of published play texts, which at least can be circulated and read across the country, popular consensus on ephemeral and geographically limited theatre productions seems an untenable possibility.

One of the things that Canadian Literature offered the theatre, in a world of neo-conservative commoditization of the arts and appeals to mass popularity, was a growing culture of celebrity. As early as 1982, the Federal Cultural Policy Review Committee had suggested the need to cultivate a cultural star system that would “not only help buyers choose but also serve to highlight various kinds of excellence”: 

~ 119 ~
In the same way that buyers of everyday goods and services—peas, shoes, or tennis balls—economize on information by responding to goodwill, brand names, and trademarks, so do buyers of artistic and cultural products economize on information by reliance on ‘stars,’ which can be performing arts companies as well as individuals […]. They should be recognizable not only among rock musicians and film actors, but also among composers, choreographers, painters, writers, and performing arts companies (qtd. in Edwardson 250).

The authorship of adaptations—the recognizability of the name attached to the adaptation—had always been a component of the marketing of plays based on Canadian novels and poetry. In the 1970s however, marketing approaches suggest that recognition could not always be taken for granted. For example, press releases for James Reaney’s *Wacousta!* stressed John Richardson’s historical significance as one of Canada’s first writers and radio announcements and posters for Theatre Passe Muraille’s 1979 production of Michael Ondaatje’s *Coming Through Slaughter* emphasized the author’s Governor General’s Award for the benefit of “the literary community” (Stephenson). As the ‘80s drew to a close, a new trend in adaptations that traded more significantly on author-recognition appeared: the emergence of highly-publicized, lavish productions of adaptations by well-known Canadian authors, produced either in co-production or exclusively by Canada’s larger regional theatres. Although not comparable in size to the commercial productions put on by the Mirvishes or Garth Drabinsky’s Live Entertainment Inc. [Livent], these adaptations were created in a more mainstream, commercial model than many previous adaptations based on Canadian sources. The trend begins roughly around the Citadel Theatre’s production of *Duddy* in 1984. Produced a decade after the release of the successful film adaptation starring Richard Dreyfuss, and directed by Ted Kotcheff, *Duddy*, a musical adaptation of Mordecai Richler’s 1959 novel *The
Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz, aimed for major commercial success and aspired to Broadway. With music by Mike Stoller, lyrics by Jerry Lieber, and a large ensemble cast, expectations for the piece ran high, but the show was a critical failure. In the early nineties a number of adaptations based on “canonical” works appeared, including Not Wanted On The Voyage, a 1992 co-production between Necessary Angel and Canadian Stage based on Timothy Findley’s 1984 novel, World of Wonders, an adaptation of Robertson Davies’ 1975 novel, which ran at Stratford in 1992, and James W. Nichol’s The Stone Angel, which was first performed in 1991 and remained in production across the country throughout the decade. The adaptation of Margaret Atwood’s books is thus part of the broader trend of trading on the cultural cachet of well-known names, and the most visible manifestation of the growing link between literary celebrity and perceived cultural value.

I tackle the question of what it means to adapt “Atwood” first by looking at the way that Atwood operates as a ‘text,’ that is, as a construct, produced through individual reading practices and through media and cultural practices, to which a (large, but finite) number of possible meanings are attached. In particular I identify two key interrelated Atwood ‘texts’: what I, following Lorraine York, will call the celebrity text – the biographical and public image of Atwood the celebrity as she is perceived separately from a detailed knowledge of her writing, and what I will call the auteur text – the authorial construct that is read out of her body of works, produced by various interpretive communities, and engaged by individual readers.

I then look at how the desire to adapt “Atwood” is manifested in formal practice in two key ways. First, I look at how the imagined author is frequently “translated” into performance through a particular dramaturgical strategy that I will call literary surrogacy. Drawing on the analytical tools of narratology, I examine how every adaptation based on Margaret Atwood’s writing has integrated a character who functions as an embedded narrator, such that the
unfolding action on the stage appears to be the product of the narrator’s perception. Modifications to this relatively common technique further emphasize the authorial position of the narrator surrogate, highlighting her seeming agency and undermining the materiality of the dramatic situation. Second, I consider the specifically theatrical implications of surrogacy as a strategy of adaptation, particularly in terms of the way that it mobilizes the presence of the actor, and the event-ness of live performance to authorize the authenticity of an adaptation.

**THE SPECIAL CASE OF MARGARET ATWOOD**

Margaret Atwood undoubtedly holds a unique place in Canadian culture as the country’s most famous literary celebrity. Indeed, what is unusual about theatrical works based on Atwood’s novels is the degree to which the Canadian public knows, broadly speaking, the source novels and the author herself. She is known, of course, through her works of fiction and poetry, which are some of the most widely taught and consistently bestselling books in Canada. Indeed, part of Atwood’s widespread recognizability stems from the fact that her works have, in Atwood’s own words, “broken the sound barrier between literary and commercial” (Ross, “Atwood Industry” qtd. in York 111) one is as likely to see one of Atwood’s books on the syllabus for a university literature course as on the beach, or in the pharmacy’s book section. Although many Canadians will have encountered Atwood’s fiction, poetry, or criticism in the context of the high school or university classroom, where her works have been a steady component of the curriculum since the emergence of Canadian Studies in the 1970s, many more will have read Atwood outside of an institutional context.

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5 See, for example, Thomas B. Friedman, Shannon Hengen, and Sharon Rose Wilson, 1996, and Caroline Rosenthal 2000.
In Canada, however, one need not know Margaret Atwood’s writing to “know” Margaret Atwood. Perhaps more than any other Canadian author, Atwood has become a literary celebrity, whose image, voice, and public persona are widely recognizable. Since the 1960s Atwood’s face has appeared on billboards, on the covers of numerous magazines, and on merchandizing (World’s Biggest Bookstore plastic bags, for example, featured her image opposite that of Charles Dickens). She is regularly featured in Canada’s national newspapers, offering cultural commentary on everything from governmental policy to arts funding, to Canada-US relations, to national finances, and changing attitudes towards debt. Throughout her career she has been an outspoken activist for a variety of political and environmental causes. Less seriously, but no less influentially, the author also figures prominently in Canadian comedy and cultural satire, where she often functions as a symbol of Canadianness alongside such stock icons as the beaver, the maple leaf, and hockey players. Indeed, as a more recent example suggests, to not know Atwood is to invite derision. In July 2011 Toronto city councillor Doug Ford, responding dismissively to statements Atwood made in an attempt to save the Toronto Public Library system from proposed budget cuts, received a great deal of press when he was quoted as saying: “Well good luck to Margaret Atwood. I don’t even know her. If she walked by me, I wouldn’t have a clue who she is” (Moloney). As the resulting furor

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6 In many ways Atwood’s appearance on the comedy program *Rick Mercer’s Monday Report* [which originally aired January 31, 2005] typifies (and self-consciously appropriates) the comic image of Atwood as circulated in this country. The sketch, part of a series in which Canadian celebrities gave advice on unexpected topics, featured Atwood as herself, offering instruction on how to be a goalie. The humour of the sketch derived partly from the improbability of the situation, partly from the constructed contrast between “high-brow” and “low-brow” Canadian culture, and partly from Atwood’s enactment of stereotypical perceptions of her personality. The tension between competing perceptions of her as dignified queen of CanLit and as “man-hating” feminist and the physicality of her grandmotherly “pussycat” demeanor are exploited to comic effect when Atwood growls (within her characteristic monotone): “I don’t like to hotdog, but if the puck carrier’s really putting lumber on it, Mama can get nasty.”
revealed, not knowing Atwood, in the eyes of many, is tantamount to being an uncultured philistine.\footnote{In addition to the wide coverage that Ford’s quotes received in the press, and on social media sites such as Twitter, the relationship between Margaret Atwood and Rob Ford became the subject of \textit{Rob Ford, The Opera}, in which Atwood appears to the mayor as an angel and forces him to stand before a jury of Toronto librarians.}

Atwood’s prominence as a public figure is also unsurprising given that she is one of Canada’s most adapted writers. Since 1999, theatrical adaptations of \textit{The Edible Woman}, \textit{The Handmaid’s Tale}, \textit{The Penelopiad}, and \textit{Good Bones} have appeared on the Canadian stage, joining a much larger body of Atwood adaptations globally, across all media.\footnote{Relatively few of her works that have been adapted for the theatre have not been produced in Canada. Laurence Strangio’s one-woman stage adaptation of \textit{Alias Grace, performed by Caroline Lee} was produced in Sydney, Melbourne and Kuala Lampur. In February 2010, a new stage adaptation of \textit{The Handmaid’s Tale} written by William Leiren premiered at the University of Colorado at Denver.} Atwood’s fiction has been re-imagined on the silver screen (most notably Volker Schlöndorff’s \textit{The Handmaid’s Tale} [1990] and Claude Jutra’s \textit{Surfacing} [1981]), on television (\textit{The Robber Bride} [2007], \textit{The Blind Assassin} [2002]), as radio drama, and as a symphony, further contributing to the heft of her work as demonstrating ‘fitness’ for cultural survival.

That Atwood is known as well as, or more than, her works is particularly significant for the context of Canadian adaptation. Because Atwood is a celebrity, the expectations that Canadian audiences have when they enter into an adaptation of an Atwood work are produced not only by their perceptions of a particular body of works, but by readings of what Atwood herself “means.”

THE AUTHOR AS PARATEXT

Authors, or the varieties of knowledge that we have about authors, function as paratexts, in Gérard Genette’s terminology (\textit{Palimpsests} 3): as information and context that
surround a text, and which inform and shape our reading of it. As a paratext, the author’s name functions akin to other forms of framing texts such as titles, dedications, covers, or advertising campaigns, created as part of the publication and promotion of books. In adaptation, paratexts proliferate: the author’s name is one possible frame of expectations, alongside the cost of the theatre tickets, the venue in which the production is performed, the names of directors, actors, playwrights, theatre companies, and so on.

But the paratext of the author is more complex and often much more influential than other paratexts. Audiences often have an investment in the idea of a particular author that is deeply connected to their reception of a work in general. Typically this gets expressed as “loyalty” to the “vision,” “spirit” or “voice” of an author. As Kamilla Elliot observes, such concepts are expressions of a “psychic concept of adaptation, in which “[t]he spirit of a text originates and ends in formless consciousness as pretextual spirit (generally figured as authorial intent, personality, or imagination) and as posttextual response (something that lingers in the reader or viewer after the novel or film has been consumed)” (“Literary Film Adaptation” 223). When adaptation is imagined as a kind of direct communication in which the form of expression is dispensable, the author slides from being a frame that shapes reception into being the desired content that is (or is not) transferred. The author’s name can do, and often does, more than produce expectations about style or content or political engagement: it produces a hope for a kind of personal engagement and leaves us desiring the sense of identity or presence that we imagine behind a text. When we long for the author’s “voice” or “spirit,” we are hoping for a kind of performative dynamic that exceeds the form of expression. We are, one could say, looking for the author to be adapted.

In practice, Elliott suggests, the “spirit” or authorial vision of a text is always a construction. She quotes Christopher Orr’s definition of the spirit of a text as being “a function
of both its discourse (the manner in which the narrator communicates to the reader or viewer) and its narrativity (the processes through which the reader/viewer constructs the meaning of the text)’ (223). When adaptation is imagined as a psychic concept, the relationship between form and reception is elided, often with political consequences:

Fidelity to the spirit of a text is almost always accompanied by an insistence on the necessity of infidelity to its letter or form. The psychic concept of adaptation argues that to be true to the spirit of a text adaptation has to leave behind the literary corpse. [...] Thus the psychic concept’s ghosting of what passes between novel and film in adaptation allows a host of personal, filmic, and cultural agendas to be projected onto the novel and identified as its own spirit. [...] The authority of the literary author is essential to validating these imposed agendas and projections. The author has been slow to die in adaptation criticism and practice even as he lies molding under other discourses, because he represents an author-ity on which both novel and film advocates call in an effort to assert their medium over the other. (224-225)

To try to pinpoint the impressionistic and intangible quality that is the author’s spirit, we need, I believe, to look at the ways in which particular meanings get mapped onto authors. We can think of the perceived “spirit” of the author as less a product of intuition or mystical presence than as an interpretation formed through the application of auteurist interpretive strategies to the cultural “texts” that constitute our image of an author. If, as Elliot suggests, the figure of the author as authority is a way of validating imposed agendas and projections, the author, as a constructed “text” to some extent also sets the terms of what can be projected. Audiences, in other words, do not have complete interpretive freedom to make an author mean whatever they want him or her to mean. Claims about fidelity to the author’s “spirit” are ultimately an appeal to fidelity toward another text or intertext – the complex text of the author.
THE PARATEXT OF LITERARY CELEBRITY: ATWOOD’S STAR IMAGE

The narrative of Margaret Atwood’s fame, considered as an intertext in adaptation, tells us as much or more about Canadian literariness than do the interpretations of her works alone. In her 2007 study of Canadian literary celebrity, Lorraine York analyses the various meanings that have been attached to Margaret Atwood’s celebrity and the kinds of cultural work this celebrity performs. York’s examination of the complex relationship between a star’s public persona and his or her creative output draws, as does much contemporary research on literary celebrity, on concepts developed in film theory. York extends the definition of stardom from the domain of film production to the broader sphere of cultural production by adapting John Ellis’ definition of a star as “a performer in a particular medium whose figure enters into subsidiary forms of circulation, and then feeds back into future performances” (York 12).

Thus, Atwood, as a performer in the medium of words, can be seen to enter into subsidiary forms of circulation through “advertising, television and radio interviews, magazine profiles, book launches, the hiring of agents, prize competitions, and other commercial activities” (12). The celebrity image, notably, extends beyond traditional autobiographical information to include images and meanings that are constructed, separately, within these other media channels. The narrative about Atwood the individual that is generated through these subsidiary forms of circulation informs our expectations of what an Atwood novel is like (or what an Atwood adaptation should be like) by forging interpretive connections between the personality and preoccupations of the author and the characteristics of that author’s writing.

The phenomenon of literary celebrity, in which authors receive as much or more personal attention as they do attention to their works, makes it (even more) tempting to conflate the autobiographical “I” of the author with the “I” of the fictional narration. As York
observes, “[a]t a time, too, when writers increasingly resist the idea that the representations of persons they create – on the stage or in the pages of a novel – are not to be confused, in a naïve autobiographical reading, with themselves, this increasingly public presence as media personalities tends to confirm the link between the writer and the book in the public mind” (20).

York, following Richard Dyer, calls the intertextual construct of the author that is produced across various media a “star image.” The star image can be defined as “a constellation of possible meanings and affects that audiences may attach to particular stars” (Dyer 29). From this perspective, the celebrity narrative of an individual becomes a “text” that both informs and is informed by the interpretation of the works. Because of Dyer’s centrality to York’s arguments, several of his ideas are worth reviewing in more detail here. Significantly, in Dyer’s theory, the star text operates in complex ways. The star image is a “structured polysemy,” a cluster of “the multiple but finite meanings and effects that a star image signifies” (63). This means that although an individual’s celebrity may represent many different things to audiences, such meanings are not unlimited, but rather structured by what cultural texts make available. For example, the star image has temporal and geographical dimensions that contribute to its proliferation of meaning. What Atwood has meant to Canadians has changed in the decades since she was first published, as she has written more and more has been written about her, and as the contexts surrounding literature, the arts, nationalism, and a range of other issues in Canada have also changed. Similarly, the meaning represented by her star image at any particular moment may not be consistent across all regions...
of Canada, or all communities of readers. The enormous volume of material dedicated to interpreting, representing, or otherwise describing Atwood and her works across a range of media is testament to the multiplicity of her star image.

In practice, knowledge of who Atwood is as a cultural figure inevitably informs the ways in which her books are read, marketed, and interpreted; conversely the books that Atwood writes, and the contexts in which they are studied, discussed, and promoted, inevitably shape the way that Atwood is seen as an individual and writer. Graham Huggan explains:

The text or writer accumulates symbolic capital – recognition, prestige, and, occasionally, celebrity – through a cumulative process of legitimation that may eventually culminate in what [Pierre] Bourdieu calls ‘consecration’. The ‘consecrated’ text, like the ‘canonised’ writer, presents a simulacrum of scriptural authority. But both are obvious products of secular institutional processes—processes that effectively mask the historical contingencies and shifting power relations underlying cultural production, either by appealing to transhistorical continuities that might have the potential to shore up consecrated/canonical status (e.g. the myth of universal or transcendent value) or by using the logic of scriptural closure to present the consecrated text or canonical writer as a quasi-permanent presence, a fait accompli. (212-213)

What Atwood’s presence represents to a Canadian audience, I believe, goes beyond the mere dynamics of fandom. Atwood, performing herself, becomes a symbol of the imagined literary authenticity so hungered for by a post-colonial nation. In this context it is significant

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9 The term “communities” is used here in the same spirit as Stanley Fish’s interpretive community. See, for example, Is There a Text in this Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities.

10 The two published reference guides by Hengen and Thompson (2005) and McCombs and Palmer (1991), for example, cite several thousand entries.
that one of the most consistent aspects of Atwood’s star image is that Atwood is known for being successful. Richard Dyer argues that “star images function crucially in relation to contradictions within and between ideologies, which they seek variously to ‘manage’ or resolve” (Stars 38). One of the greatest points of ideological conflict within the discourse of celebrity is the nature of the relationship between individuals and fame. A key paradox of stardom is that it simultaneously recognizes exceptionalism – the superiority and rarity of the star – and exemplification – the star’s representative quality. The star is at once different than you and I – better, luckier, harder working, more successful, more talented – and yet operates in the same culture, is usually born in (broadly) similar circumstances, and is ultimately, in many ways, common. Part of the appeal of the personal celebrity narrative is that it “humanizes” those who have achieved success and reveals them to be “just like us.” One effect of this contradictory position is that stars are often seen to be exceptional representatives of the groups of individuals who identify with them. As Richard Dyer explains, “[s]tars represent what are taken to be people typical of this society; yet the types of people we assume characterise our society may nevertheless be singularly absent from our actual day-to-day experience of society; the specialness of stars may be then that they are the only ones around who are ordinary!” (43).

This “specialness,” however, is a necessarily fraught condition. As Lorraine York observes, “if celebrity marks the uneasy space wherein the single, special individual and the group demographic both meet and separate, then citizenship, as a condition wherein the individual and the group mutually define each other, is a prime expression of that uneasy space” (York 5). With a bit of tweaking, Dyer’s observation can thus be used to highlight the particular position of Atwood’s stardom in Canadian culture. If Atwood represents what is taken to be typically Canadian, her special status resides in her apparent recognizability as a
sign of “Canadianness,” when in fact “Canadianness,” as a distinctive, homogeneous and unified identity, may be entirely absent from our actual cultural experience. Atwood’s “Canadianness” may be simulacral, but that doesn’t prevent it from being perceived as authentic.

What is also remarkable about Atwood’s star image is the weight that her historical image as cultural nationalist takes on in this cultural construction. The prominence of this particular aspect may be the result of timing. As we know, her early work as a writer, and as a critic engaging with the problem of defining a Canadian literary tradition, both impelled and coincided with the cultural nationalist sentiment of the late 1960s and ‘70s in Canada. In her introduction to the second edition of *Survival*, Atwood herself pinpoints this particular historical moment as the reason that, upon *Survival*’s first publication in 1972, she was transformed into “an instant sacred monster” (3). Atwood’s rising fame came at a significant moment of cultural hunger for “writers of our own” and of growing cultural resistance to the colonialisms of British tradition and American expansion. As such, she became one of the first products of what we might now call national “branding”: her celebrity deployed as part of a nationalist project to affirm the distinctness of Canadian identity to Canadians and the world.

Within this crucial aspect of Atwood’s star-image, then, Atwood as a celebrity becomes a symbol not only of Canadian identity but of the very narratives that make it possible. In the past decade a number of critics have turned their attention to a consideration of Atwood’s media image. Graham Huggan, in a chapter titled “Margaret Atwood Inc. or Some Thoughts on Literary Celebrity,” identifies a number of reasons why Atwood has attained the celebrity status that she has. In doing so, Huggan implicitly singles out a set of cultural criteria that Atwood, often consciously, works to fulfill. Significantly, these criteria offer a rationale as to why Atwood has come to be seen as an icon for Canadian culture. He suggests that Atwood
“has helped enhance her status as a national cultural icon by speaking out on national issues, editing national anthologies, and even—in one celebrated instance [namely the publication of *Survival*]—using literary criticism to diagnose national ills.” Further, he argues that “Atwood’s national image as a no-holds-barred cultural commentator has been augmented by her international image as a translator and interpreter of Canadian culture. These images, when taken together, have fuelled the common (mis)perception of Atwood as a ‘representative,’ or even ‘quintessential,’ Canadian and Canadian writer” (214). Through interviews and public readings, television appearances and public lectures, Atwood plays the part of being a concerned informed citizen.\(^{11}\)

**ADAPTING THE AUTHOR FROM PAGE TO STAGE: NARRATION AS SURROGATION**

The kind of reverence that literary celebrity inspires often translates into a demand, on the part of adapters and audiences alike, for fidelity. But, we may ask, fidelity to what, exactly? As a paratext, the Atwood star image has created a significant pressure for adaptations to pursue the literary authenticity that Atwood herself represents. The necessary condition for a successful Atwood adaptation is that it be somehow true to Atwood’s “spirit” or “voice,” leading us once again into the thorny territory of the ineffable.

The concept of “voice” in writing, a metaphor that sees the written text as a verbal enunciation made by an embodied subject, when invoked in conversations about adaptation is most often described in terms of its intimacy, its singularity and its situated, controlling point

\(^{11}\) Her self-positioning in the 2008 Massey Lectures, *entitled* Payback – Debt and the Shadow Side of Wealth, is typical in this regard. As a cultural icon Atwood is given a platform to weigh in on the global economic crisis. In the question period that followed the concluding lecture of the series at the University of Toronto’s Convocation Hall [1 Nov. 2008] Atwood found herself having to clarify on several occasions that she was in fact not an economic expert; she was in the business of providing observation and analysis, not offering recommendations or solutions.
of view. It is also cited as one of the biggest challenges of moving from a telling to a showing mode of representation. Charles Isherwood, writing about the “books-on-stage genre,” for example, accounts for the weakness of many theatrical adaptations by suggesting that they are “denuded of the distinctive authorial voice and the imaginative scope that gave them their stature as memorable, sometimes even life-altering works of art” (“Pages that Weren’t Meant for Stages”). Although not a theorist of reception, he echoes the perspective of a number of theatre critics in Canada, and offers several important insights. His emphasis on the importance of authorial voice is repeated in his claim that film and television are better suited to the adaptation of novels than theatre since “[t]he eye of the film director can more easily approximate the voice of an author because his or her control of the audience’s perspective is much tighter.” Later in the article Isherwood offers some thoughts on the fundamental differences between the audience’s experiences of theatre and literature that “keep the odds stacked against any success in the enterprise of adapting literature to the stage”: “Reading is an inward, intimate experience, a quiet communion between one imagination and another. The reader is the author’s active collaborator. Words are just signifiers after all. The images and experiences they evoke are brought into being in the mind of the reader. Books happen inside us; theater happens to us.”

While Isherwood seems to be suggesting (problematically) that the reception of books is an active experience, while the reception of theatre is a passive one, his emphasis is in fact on the singularity of the collaboration of reading: “The theater is also a collaboration between audience and writer, but it is a communal one, mediated by directors, designers and actors. The singular vision of a novelist is likely to be diluted as it passes through several sets of hands.” By suggesting that the reader collaborates with the author, Isherwood tellingly conflates the
Isherwood’s implicit understanding of reading as an experience characterized by an intimate, collaborative, and singular imaginative relationship with an authorial voice shares similarities with that articulated by Wolfgang Iser three decades earlier. Operating within a phenomenological approach to reader response, Iser describes the strange sense in which the author is always present as an “other” in written language. Reading, according to Iser, is a “convergence of text and reader” (50) in which particular patterns and cues prompt the reader to fill in gaps, “set[ting] the work in motion,” which in turn results in the “awakening of responses within himself” (51). He postulates that

the work itself must be thought of as a consciousness, because only in this way is there an adequate basis for the author-reader relationship—a relationship that can only come about through the negation of the author’s own life-story and the reader’s own disposition. […] If reading removes the subject-object division that constitutes all perception, it follows that the reader will be ‘occupied’ by the thoughts of the author, and these in their turn will cause the drawing of new ‘boundaries.’ Text and reader no longer confront each other as object and subject, but instead the ‘division’ takes place within the reader and himself. […] Thus, in reading there are these two levels—the alien ‘me’ and the real, virtual ‘me’—which are never completely cut off from each other.” (66-67)

While Iser’s thoughts help to situate Isherwood’s observations about the collaborative nature of reading within a theoretical tradition of reception-oriented criticism, what is particularly interesting about these echoes is the way they fuse together the author’s thoughts, the textual cues (words on the page) and the reader’s mental reconstruction or activation of those cues.
There is something about the experience of reading, or at least of silent, solitary reading, that seems to encourage the experiential blurring of these different “voices.”

From a narratological perspective, the author’s thoughts are not accessible directly in the text. Standing between the author and the reader in a narrative text is the narrator. As Mieke Bal explains: “A narrative text is a story that is ‘told’ in a medium; that is, it is converted into signs. […] These signs are produced by an agent who relates, who ‘utters’ the signs. This agent cannot be identified with the writer, painter, or filmmaker. Rather the writer withdraws and calls upon a fictitious spokesman, an agent technically known as the narrator” (8). Bal points out that this narrative agent is not identical to the implied author – a term introduced by Wayne Booth to describe the totality of meanings that can be inferred from a text – which is the result of interpretation (Bal 18). Nor is it identical to particular manifestations of the “visible, fictive ‘I’” (18), which is only one particular version of the narrator: “Two types of ‘speakers’ are to be found in a narrative text; one does not play a role in the fabula whereas the other does. This difference exists even when the narrator and the actor are one and the same person as, for example, in a narrative related in the first person. The narrator is the same person, but at another moment and in another situation than when s/he originally experienced the events” (9). The vocabulary of narratology gives us tools to describe the complex ways in which the narrative agent assumes different voices, how it may be bound to particular characters or assume the specific ‘colouring’ of an individual point of view through ‘focalization,’ but ultimately suggests that the unifying presence or speaking subject in the text is a fictional guide and a textual strategy.

As a number of scholars have pointed out, the problem of being conflated with her narrators and characters is one that has plagued Margaret Atwood more frequently than most authors. In one telling example, Susanne Becker describes the period following the publication
of *Lady Oracle*, whose heroine, Joan Foster, is a famous author who, in her youth was obese: “When *Lady Oracle* first appeared, public meetings with Margaret Atwood were dominated by one single question: ‘How did you manage to lose all that weight?!’” (28). Atwood herself has taken aim at the persistence of autobiographical readings of her work on many occasions. Despite her criticism of the motivations and assumptions behind the tendency to collapse writer and writing, however, Atwood has frequently also played coyly with this relationship in interviews and public appearances. Of greatest pertinence to the topic of theatrical adaptation is Atwood’s choice, in collaboration with director Phyllida Lloyd, to perform as Penelope in the initial staged reading of *The Penelopiad* in 2005 before its full theatrical adaptation. In an interview with *The Guardian*, in typical self-deprecating style, Atwood downplays her own celebrity as a potential draw for the event in emphasizing her affordability as a performer (“I’m cheap – in fact, I’m free”) and her appeal as an amateur: (“[P]eople are going to love it, because everybody understands that it's not a West End show and that it involves one amateur performer – me. The maidens will look great no matter what they do, because they are going to look better than me” (“She’s left”). At the same time, she draws playful attention to the overlap between the character of Penelope and herself: “Where Helen was very tall and extremely beautiful, Penelope was short and people emphasised her intelligence because she obviously wasn't as beautiful. By the time the suitors got around to her she was quite old for those times, so you know they were after the loot. I'm quite old myself, so I'm not at all worried about playing her.”

Expectations about the relationship between the author and the subject that speaks in the text, which have been a source of great frustration to Atwood as a writer, have been of great advantage to theatrical adaptations of her work. Atwood’s playing of Penelope, which came as a result of speaking to Lloyd after the 2002 premiere of *The Handmaid’s Tale*, which
Lloyd also directed, seems to be a logical affirmation of a choice made consistently in adaptations of Atwood’s work. The adapters of *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *The Penelopiad* (discussed in this chapter) and *Good Bones* (discussed briefly in the next chapter) all made bold choices about the centrality of a female character that functioned both as a verbal narrator and as a narrative agent, seen to be responsible for the visual actions on stage. Playing on the perception that Atwood’s narrators speak with Atwood’s distinctive authorial voice, each of these productions answered the question “how do you adapt Atwood?” with the solution of offering a visible surrogate.

The productions in question responded with remarkable consistency to the pressure exerted by Atwood’s star image by prioritizing what I have provisionally called Atwood’s “auteur image” through specific strategies of narration. The biographical narrative that allows Atwood, as a literary celebrity, to be a symbol not only of Canadian culture, but also of the arrival or maturity of Canadian literature itself, is thus mapped onto the image of the author that emerges out of the textual experience of reading. Combining the idea of the narrator – that fictitious consciousness that (the reader functionally infers) stands as the overarching agency responsible for the “utterance” or presentation of the text’s signs – and Foucault’s concept of the author-function – the construct that enables particular kinds of reading across a body of works as well as within a work\(^\text{12}\) – the auteur image performs a classificatory function in narrative discourse, allowing certain narrative principles or stylistic properties to emerge as consistent features of the author’s “voice.”

\(^{12}\) “Such a name permits one to group together a certain number of texts, define them, differentiate them from and contrast them to others. In addition it establishes a relationship among the texts” (Foucault 369).
CONVENTIONS OF THE DRAMATIC NARRATOR

The question of whether dramatic performance has a narrator, in the sense of a fictional consciousness or agent that “utters,” is subject to debate. In the field of interdisciplinary narratology many have questioned whether the idea of the narrator is equally relevant to media that “show” rather than “tell,” and that are collaboratively created. The applicability of the idea of the narrator to other media is questionable, not only because “showing” media call into question the appropriateness of linguistically based “enunciation” theories of narration, but because of the potential absence, invisibility, or multiplicity of the narrating “agent.” Comparatively little attention has been paid to the narratological status of narration and narrators in theatre, particularly in comparison to discussions of narration in film. Brian Richardson, one of the most recent writers on the subject, cites only a handful of important existing studies, and observes that “as recently as 1980 Keir Elam could write that drama is without narratorial mediation” (682). For those who have considered the issue, the answer to whether it is useful to think of a “dramatic narrator” that serves the same function as the “cinematic narrator” depends largely on the degree to which live performance is perceived as an unmediated event. Katherine Thomson-Jones argues that in the case of theatrical performance “postulating such a narrative agent seems rather more forced”:

Do we always have the sense, when watching a play, that we are having our attention directed to significant events by an invisible agent inside the story? … My guess is that we never have the sense of being guided through the events represented on stage in

quite the same way as we might occasionally have the sense of being guided through depicted events in a film. Why might this be? The clearest answer involves the presence of the camera in the making of the film and consequently of the projection screen in the viewing of the film. A film involves edited shots of staged events from a certain angle, under certain lighting conditions, and with a certain lens. Insofar as it is actually the case that the cinematographer decides what view to give us on a staged scene, it could also fictionally be the case that a narrator decides what view to give us on the scene in the story.

Of course it is also the case in theatre that we are actually given a chosen view on the performance and thus a fictional view on story events. But somehow, without the camera, and all of the possibilities it implies for multiple views, it is less tempting to follow Chatman’s lead in distinguishing between two activities of actual and fictional showing carried out by two agents, the director, say, and the narrator-guide. It is also not clear how upholding this distinction helps our understanding of dramatic narration, since the immediacy of dramatic performance — having the actors right there before us — encourages us to imagine simply that the events represented on stage are occurring. It seems particularly awkward to imagine the mediation of a narrator in this context. (90)

In contrast, Brian Richardson argues for the greater relevance of the concept of the narrator to theatre, precisely because of the spectator’s greater awareness of the medium. “We never entirely feel that ‘things are happening right there,’” he suggests, “because we know what is ‘there’ is a stage, not a battlefield in France” (“Voice” 685). Because of the spectator’s persistent awareness that what is being presented is being staged, theatre, Richardson argues, “occupies a position closer to fiction than film,” for when reading fiction the reader similarly “assume[s] the continuing presence of the narrator” even while reading long passages of
dialogue (685). The theatre, in comparison to film, he suggests, also has a number of traits that work against the illusion of representation including non-illusionistic or stylized traditions such as verse drama and the use of asides, as well as the material conditions of the playing space itself (686).

My own position on the relevance of the concept of the narrator for theatre hews more closely to that articulated by Katherine Thomson-Jones about the limited and case-specific relevance of the narrator in performance media. Thomson-Jones argues against the universal necessity for positing a narrator of film. She concedes that films may, and do, utilize implicit narrators, but ultimately argues that these cases be read in terms of particular choices, rather than as a consistent feature of the medium: “The clearest conception of a narrator derives from literary study. But whether a particular film has a narrator depends on how that film uses a range of narrative strategies, some of which may be specific to the film medium. In other words, whether a particular film has a narrator depends, not on the fact of narration, but on that film” (93-94, italics in original).

Taking Thomson-Jones’s perspective, and applying it to theatre, I would argue that while not all theatrical performance can be said to have a narrator, an agent or presence that is part of the diegesis and that is seen to be responsible for the arrangement and presentation of theatrical signs, the theatrical narrator is a theatrical convention available for use in performance. Thus, while not an ontological fact of theatrical performance, the narrator is a performance convention that necessarily invokes a literary conception of narrative.

**SURROGATING ATWOOD**

It is perhaps no accident of selection that the works by Margaret Atwood that have been adapted and professionally staged in Canada have been ones that not only showcase a
storyteller narratively, but also draw particular attention to the agency of the act of storytelling. Both *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *The Penelopiad* begin by drawing emphatic attention to an unnamed speaking subject:

“We slept in what had once been the gymnasium” (*The Handmaid’s Tale* 3)

“Now that I’m dead I know everything” (*The Penelopiad* 1).

The position and repetition of personal pronouns frame the narrative as a direct address to a listener; the absence of introductory context, plunging the reader into a situation *in media res*, frames this address as an immediate intimacy. The opening intrigue offered to the reader is displaced from events and shifted onto the speaker: who, the reader asks, are you? These opening sentences also function for each of the character-bound homodiegetic narrators as a claiming of narrative space. The stories that follow are those of women who are, or have been, denied the power to give voice publicly to their private experience. Their narratives are a subversive response to the implicit or explicit censorship they face because they are women. In each novel the stakes of insisting on this personal subjectivity for the characters are made clear on narrative and formal levels.

In *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Offred, a handmaid in the Republic of Gilead who is charged with the duty of trying to bear a child for the Commander and his Wife, is forbidden to read

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14 *The Edible Woman*, a third Canadian Atwood adaptation discussed briefly in chapter one, also follows this pattern. Here too, the emphatic use of “I” in the novel’s first line draws attention to the activity of narration: “I know I was all right on Friday when I got up; if anything I was feeling more stolid than usual” (9). In Atwood’s first novel, as Marian McAlpin follows the conventional structures of romance and marriage in the Toronto of the 1960s, leaving her job at Seymour Surveys following her engagement to Peter Wollander, she begins to experience personal dissolution, manifested in an increasing inability to consume food. Famously, her loss of agency and her experience of self-alienation are formally marked in the text by a shift from the use of a first-person narration, in parts one and three, to the use of the second-person in the middle section of the novel. Dave Carley’s adaptation, like those of *The Penelopiad* and *The Handmaid’s Tale*, employs a privileged generative, non-homodiegetic narrator whose control, or lack of control, over the stage machinery is meant to echo the pronoun shifts of the novel’s narration.

~ 141 ~
and write, as are all women in Gilead. Mention of “the time before,” when she worked and lived freely with her husband Luke and daughter, is similarly proscribed. Resistance brings the threat of being sent to the colonies to clear nuclear waste, or a worse fate. Offred describes the act of telling as a strategy not only of subversion but also of personal survival:

I would like to believe this is a story I’m telling. I need to believe it. I must believe it. Those who can believe that such stories are only stories have a better chance. If it’s a story I’m telling, then I have control over the ending. Then there will be an ending, to the story, and real life will come after it. I can pick up where I left off. (50)

The act of telling is given further significance by the inclusion of a section titled “Historical Notes” after the final chapter of the book. In a partial transcript of the proceedings of the Twelfth Symposium on Gileadean Studies, held in 2195, Professor Pieixoto, the keynote speaker of the conference, reveals that the previous chapters are a transcript assembled from thirty audio-cassettes, arranged “based on some guesswork” by himself and another professor. That Offred spoke her tale aloud and that it was recorded offers the only clue as to what happened to her after she was taken away by the Eyes, the last recorded event in her narrative. The move away from Offred’s first-person narration to the form of a dramatic transcript severs the intimacy of the novel’s address, further heightening the experience of narratorial presence in the main section of the narrative. The optimistic reading of this ending, that the tapes indicate her rescue by the resistance and safe arrival in the outside world, places further emphasis on reading the act of storytelling as one of salvation and self-empowerment.

In Atwood’s The Penelopiad, Penelope, the faithful and patient wife of Odysseus in Homer’s The Odyssey, seeks to respond to the stories that have been told about her through history, setting the record straight about her own motivations and restrictions. Although she has been denied a voice of her own in the legends passed down to the present, it is the twelve
hanged maids, whose accusatory counter-narrative forms a dialogue with Penelope’s, whose collective voicelessness is presented as the more poignant disempowerment. Speaking, with few exceptions, as a collective and unnamed chorus, the maids testify to the hardships of poverty and slavery, their physical and sexual abuse, and ultimately their deaths at the hands of Odysseus and Telemachus. The issue of gender, storytelling, and self-representation is thus complicated by the addition of perspectives on class. Formally, the interspersed maids’ sections, written in verse in a variety of poetic genres, puncture Penelope’s attempt to give a unified account of her own life. Written in and for a supposedly “post-feminist” era, the rival narrators of The Penelopiad challenge the assumption that the feminist retelling of a classic myth is a socially easy or unnecessary task.

The personal urgency of Offred’s and Penelope’s need to speak make them ready made-dramatic subjects. I believe it is significant, however, that in turning to these subjects adapters also choose characters whose positions clearly voice opinions and concerns widely associated with Atwood as both an author and a celebrity. In both adaptations, adapters made the choice to maintain the centrality of the speaking “I,” while pursuing the mimetic dramatization of the events depicted in the novel. To contextualize this decision, it is worth briefly considering the alternatives. A traditional dramatization, one that conforms to the rules of classical verisimilitude, or illusionistic realist dramaturgies, shows events as if unfolding unmediated in the present, and thus effaces the question of who is “telling” or presenting the story being shown. The role of spoken narration in the tradition that follows Aristotle’s assertion that drama presents actions that are enacted rather than described is primarily to communicate information that is too difficult to show, whether due to social decorum or the potential rupture of the theatrical illusion. In the film adaptation of The Handmaid’s Tale (1990) for example, the character of Offred (named Kate in this version) is given no narrational
intrusions with the exception of a voice-over in the final scene, which summarizes her situation but gives no suggestion that she has been responsible for the depiction of the events up to that point. At the other end of the spectrum, the more experimental alternative, as we will consider in the next chapter, might aim to avoid dramatization, and present the source material as a spoken diegesis, retaining many of the source’s textual features and thereby drawing attention to the event as the performance of a non-dramatic text.

The adaptations under consideration take a mixed approach, integrating conventions of showing and telling. In prioritizing the “translation” of their source texts’ strategies of narration, each adaptation draws on dramatic conventions that offer a functional fit. Common to both productions is the inclusion of what Brian Richardson describes as a dramatic “generative narrator.” The generative narrator “is a character, but one who is ontologically distinct from the figures who emerge from or are engendered by his discourse” (“Point of View” 209). The actions, speech, and narration of the characters on stage are thus attributable to the central consciousness or agency of the generative narrator; we imagine the events that take place as being “told” by the narrator. The generative narrator performs within what Richardson elsewhere calls a “partially enacted homodiegetic narrative” or narrative “in which the narrator is also a participant in the events he or she recounts and enacts” (“Voice and Narration” 682). As Brian Richardson suggests, the convention is reminiscent of literary strategies, as the technique of alternation between narration and enacted events in drama is “quite comparable in may [sic] ways to a homodiegetic narrator’s shift between presenting scenes as they unfolded in his or her life and the retrospective commentary that takes place during the time of writing […]. The drama further marks such differences of tone and temporality by the narrator moving in and out of character, and addressing the audience rather than the actors (683). Frequently, in conjunction with other cues, the events visually depicted
can thus also be understood as being focalized through the narrator – that is we see them as being ‘coloured’ or ‘inflected’ by his or her perspective.

Because theatrical performance lends itself, conventionally and materially, to being perceived as an unnarrated, if not altogether unmediated, event, the convention of the generative narrator is almost always established in the opening moments of a performance, or soon after. The openings of the two plays, like the openings of the two fiction texts, thus provide important clues to the way that narrators function in each adaptation. As different tonally as the stories of *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *The Penelopiad* are, in adaptation the productions begin in a strikingly similar way. In each, a woman, the central protagonist of the story, speaks to the audience in a first person address that signals a privileged break from the theatrical space that she occupies. As such, the woman, as character and as actor, has a special relationship to the audience.

In *The Handmaid’s Tale*, performed in Toronto in 2004, the performance opens with the “Symposium Prologue.” A film montage of headlines and footage of events leading up to the establishment of the republic of Gilead, projected on a large screen, precede a spoken introduction by Professor Pieixoto. Among the effects of the re-imagination of the novel’s epilogue as a framing device for the performance is the additional prominence it gives to the character of Offred as a character.

PIEIXOTO: …but for students of Gilead these thirty [recordings] are special, because we believe they were used by a Handmaid, a handmaid in hiding, to tell us her tale, the tale of her – passion…

(He inserts a cassette into the tape recorder on the table – looking at us.)
Behold our Handmaid. (66)

Offred’s voice, the first singing voice of the opera, is heard initially as a recording over the theatre’s speakers. Gradually, the voice of a live performer, soprano Stephanie Marshall, blends with and then takes over from the recording, as a spotlight illuminates first her face, then her body within a sea of darkness. The libretto, drawing from two separate sections of text in the novel, begins:

OFFRED: I’m sorry my story is in fragments.
I’m sorry I can’t change it.
I’m sorry there is so much pain.
But I want you to hear it,
because I want to believe
that you are there,
I tell,
therefore you are. (67)

Offred’s privileged position as storyteller, established by this address to the audience, is then reinforced by conventions that signal that the action to that follow is a visual narration that can be attributed to her memory and/or conscious selection. The spotlight reveals that Offred is wearing casual clothes, an outfit from “the time before” (and, perhaps, from the time after the story’s events, when she is in hiding). Offstage gunshots signal a sudden shift. Offred, no longer singing, watches as an identically dressed younger version of herself, The Double (soprano Krisztina Szabó), is separated from her daughter and husband Luke by armed border guards: “The Guards approach and seize them, drag Luke off stage left and the daughter off stage right. The Double, stage centre, her arms held by two Guards, watches Luke and her daughter disappear into darkness”(69). The set and lighting change, illuminating the Hanging
Wall. Offred walks to The Double and “in a kind of grave dance exchanges positions with her” (69), the guards now holding her as The Double exits. The exchange moves us from the present moment of telling, to the unfolding, mimetically depicted present of Offred’s recounted tale. The framing convention allows us to read the events shown as being presented to us by the narrating character of Offred.

Like *The Handmaid’s Tale*, *The Penelopiad* employs a technique of juxtaposition to link a solitary speaker to the scene that follows. In the production at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa, the performance began in darkness, with the amplified noise of roaring and neighing. A tightly framed square spot appeared on a fully covered Penelope (Penny Downie), alone on stage, draped from head to toe in a sheet. This mysterious figure pronounces “Now that I’m dead I know everything,” and then, with a flourish, Penelope unveils herself, sweeping the sheet from her head and face. Now visible, she continues:

PENELOPE: This is what I wished would happen, but like so many of my wishes it’s failed to come true. I know only a few factoids that I didn’t know before (3).

The monologue that follows introduces Penelope’s desire to set the record straight. She bemoans the way she has been constructed by “the singers” and “the yarn-spinners”: “And yet what have I amounted to, now the official version has gained ground? An edifying legend. A stick to beat other women with” (4). “Don’t follow my example,” Penelope’s distorted, recorded voice roars over the theatre speakers. She extends her hands as though clawing open a gate to the underworld, a gesture that will be repeated throughout the play as a device that

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15 Although the citations are taken from the 2007 published play text, the descriptions of the staging are based upon my own notes taken after the Saturday, September 22, 2011 performance in Ottawa. The play script was published before the production opened, and the published stage directions do not accurately reflect the staging I saw.
prompts movement in the set, opening trap doors and flying in set pieces. Penelope’s agency as a storyteller is signaled by her apparent control over the material stage environment.

In contrast to *The Handmaid’s Tale*, the staging of *The Penelopiad*’s opening complicates the singular agency of Penelope’s narration almost immediately. The twelve hanged maids, covered in identical black shrouds, enter the stage and move rhythmically, like a dance of chess pieces, into place across the stage and thrust. The maids, speaking collectively, also invoke the “I” and “you” of direct address, although the “you” appears to be neither Penelope nor the audience, but rather Odysseus and Telemachus:

MAIDS: We are the maids

   The ones you killed
   The ones you failed

   We danced in air
   Our bare feet twitched
   It was not fair

   With every goddess, queen and bitch
   From there to here
   You scratched your itch

   We did much less
   Than what you did
   You judged us bad… (4)
As the maids advance in the space, Penelope at first attempts to avoid them, regarding them with unease, mingled with some curiosity. The gradual creep of the maids into Penelope’s space suggests the invasion of her memory and consciousness. She continues her monologue uninterrupted, with no verbal acknowledgement of the maids, asserting herself as the teller of her own story.

PENELOPE: After I was dead they turned me into a story; though not the kind of story I would have preferred to hear. I waited. I waited some more. Now that all the others have run out of air, it’s my turn…I’ll spin a thread of my own. (5)

Penelope begins with the story of her childhood, and the maids obligingly remove their shrouds and assume the roles of characters as Penelope names them. All costume changes and additions take place in view of the audience. The maids assume a stylized acting technique for these characters and the role-playing is very self-conscious. Similarly, when the twelve women assume the male roles in the play, they clearly remain women playing men. Little effort is made to deepen voices or create any realistic illusion. The cross-casting functions as a constant visual commentary on the gender dynamics depicted, and critiqued, within the play. As an example of the latter strategy, Odysseus, played by Sarah Mailin, was significantly shorter than Penelope, and appeared comparatively petite beside her. In the subversiveness of their role-play, then, the maids demonstrate a critical agency that complements but also exceeds the perspective that can be attributed to Penelope as story-teller. Their appearance in cabaret-like songs that interrupt and offer a counterpoint to Penelope’s chronological narrative is never acknowledged by Penelope, or framed by any dramatic convention that clearly suggests they are part of the story that she ‘utters.’ As in the novel, the counterpoint of the dual narration points toward a third presence, the unified polyphonic and political perspective of the implied author.
Because the dramatic narrator, unlike the narrator of a novel, is not constantly implicit in the medium, the frame of the generative narrator in both of these plays must also be sustained, or renewed, throughout the piece. The different genres of the plays provide different resources in this regard. The score of *The Handmaid’s Tale*, for example, further reinforces Offred’s centrality to the narration of the piece by providing cues that what is heard is also focalized through her consciousness and reconstructed memory. Eric Domville observes that the variety of instrumentation, musical styles and idioms employed by composer Poul Ruders mirrors similar techniques in Atwood’s novel: “His score proves as eclectic as Atwood’s text in allusions and quotations: tonal, atonal; medieval chant; jazz; twentieth century avant-garde techniques. The music moves backwards and forwards with noteworthy coherence” (878). Just as scattered and decontextualized quotations in the novel suggest Offred’s distorted and momentary recollections of the “time before,” and hint at the fragmented nature of Offred’s testimony, the music also provides a shifting subjective soundscape.

A consistent strategy used in both works, however, is the use of language to deny the materiality of the stage sign, in order to emphasize the ontological difference of the narrator from the depicted narrative. The opening line of *The Penelopiad*, “Now that I’m dead I know everything” (1), constructs Penelope’s narrative as an impossible communication of an absent speaker – a position that imitates the absence of the novelist from her future audience. Being dead, Penelope reminds us, is a state of “bonelessness, liplessness, breastlessness.” She insists: “I can’t make myself understood, not in your world, the world of bodies, of tongues and fingers” (4). Penelope is available to us, her speech claims, only as text. The similarity between her spirit state and the present absence of the author in the novel is played upon in moments of self-reflexive dialogue:

PENELOPE: Perhaps I have only invented the oracle story in order to make myself
feel better. So much whispering goes on here, in the dark caverns, in the meadows, that sometimes it’s hard to know whether the whispering is coming from others or from the inside of your own head. I use head figuratively. We have dispensed with heads, as such, down here (8).

The live actress playing Penelope creates a tension between her claim of disembodiment and the visual and very material body in front of the audience that is clearly not present in the novel. Although the contradiction plays largely as irony, the fact that the maids assume different roles while Penelope remains the same character throughout the piece subtly suggests an ontological distinction between them. Attention is drawn to the maids as actresses – their theatrical assumption of multiple roles is a reminder of the performers’ extra-diegetic bodies. Penelope, however, remains a whole illusion, the live performer absorbed into and enabling the fiction of the character.

In contrast, the centrality and singularity of Offred as a narrator are in fact reinforced by the use of two actors playing one role. In opera the singing voice allows for a connection that disavows the distinction between bodies. What is emphasized in these moments is the fluidity of theatrical signification, rather than the iconicity of the theatrical sign. The doubled body of Offred reveals that character can be dis-embodied; one voice can be articulated through two mouths. This is powerfully reinforced in the act 2, scene 9 duet between the characters of Offred and The Double. Agonizing over the unknown fate of her daughter, Offred in the “Time Now” and The Double in the “Time Before” voice a continued emotional pain that bridges both the two times and the two bodies onstage:

DOUBLE: Hope killed her for me

OFFRED: Hope killed me for her

DOUBLE: For me she is dead
OFFRED: For her I am dead
OFFRED AND DOUBLE:
And what I feel
Is emptiness
What I feel
Is despair
Like famine. (223)

As Helmut Reichenbächer observes, “[t]he music too reflects this dual existence in the vocal lines, through an antiphonal question-and-answer pattern in which the last note of the question constitutes at the same time the seed for the first note of the response, thus creating a seamless transition between the two aspects of the same character” (843). The musical dynamic between the characters effaces the bodily-ness of the singers, even as it depends upon an immensely physical effort.

The verbal and visual disavowal of the narrating performers’ physical presence is important as a convention that gestures towards textuality. The perspective of these characters, who speak from an unknown place and time to a hypothetical audience whose existence is uncertain, mimics the position of an authorial voice. In claiming their own absence and appealing to an apparently absent audience, they structure a kind of intimacy with the theatrical spectator. The convention of the disavowed direct address functions as if to say “only you can see me and hear me; I exist only for you.”

What is important about these choices is that they utilize the possibilities of theatre to prioritize a traditionally textual dis-embodied treatment of character and narration. In doing so, they re-perform the textuality of Atwood’s narrational strategy and open the way for the characters of Penelope and Offred to be read as surrogates for Atwood herself. In the books the
disembodied placelessness of their positions is precisely what enables Penelope and Offred to
tell their stories. The characters cannot tell their stories in their own worlds, and thus must
posit an imaginary audience, and in doing so, constitute themselves as speaking subjects.

In performance these moments become a powerful address to physically present
spectators. Let’s return for a moment to Offred’s opening lyrics:

OFFRED: [...] I want you to hear it,

because I want to believe

that you are there,

I tell,

therefore you are. (67)

Offred’s words are a performative speech act; through them she attempts to constitute herself
as speaking subject. As such it is also an appeal. In order to be felicitous, in Austin’s sense\textsuperscript{16},
Offred needs the audience to recognize, and legitimize her position. It can only do so by
becoming the community she hopes it will be.

It is through this community formation, the result of the interpellation of Atwood’s live
surrogates, that we are summoned not only as Offred’s audience, the audience that makes her
story possible, but also as Atwood’s audience. We are invited, in other words, to legitimize the
performance as Atwood’s, as authenticated by the author herself.

AUTHORIZING THE ADAPTATION THROUGH PRESENCE

Returning to the point at which this chapter started, how might we connect the
reception that Canadian audiences gave \textit{The Handmaid’s Tale} and \textit{The Penelopiad} to the idea

\textsuperscript{16} See Austin 12-24.
that each adaptation has prioritized the narrative surrogation of the author’s voice? To answer this question I would like to briefly consider a related performance: Margaret Atwood’s book tour for the novel *The Year of the Flood*. Departing from the traditional format of a public reading, the book tour was constructed as an hour-long performance of sorts, which involved Atwood, three actors, who assumed the roles of three main characters, and a choir of “God’s Gardeners,” giving voice to the hymns that punctuate the novel. The performance was also framed by a dramatic entrance and exit, as Atwood and the performers entered the space (in many cities a church) in singing procession. The text spoken by the performers, however, was not adapted as dialogue, nor re-imagined as a moment of showing, rather than telling. A publicity event designed, at one level, to function as a kind of trailer showcasing Atwood’s novel, released only shortly before the tour began, the book reading was not meant to create a new autonomous work (an adaptation), but to invigorate (i.e., sell) the book available for purchase at the end of the evening. As Atwood herself suggested at the Toronto reading, the combination of song, reading, and performance could best be described as a hybrid, neither purely dramatic nor purely literary.

Margaret Atwood, perhaps more than most authors, seems to be keenly aware not only of the public demand that she perform the role of author, but also of the utility of theatrical performance in meeting that demand. Although in press interviews conducted in advance of the tour, Atwood suggested that the theatrical format was a pragmatic, energy saving measure to alleviate the demands of touring (Wagner, “*The Year of the Flood*”), the structure of the event also demonstrates canniness about the relationship between theatre and authorship on a number of other levels.

Having other performers read and sing the text allowed Atwood to take on a role that is not present in the novel itself, that of an omniscient, non-focalized narrator. In the readings
Atwood provided context about the world of the novel, described and summarized events that took place in between the scenes selected for the reading, and functioned as the consciousness that holds the fragments together. In doing so she creates a position for the author, a narrative perspective that belongs exclusively to the storyteller who is responsible for all the other fictional narrators.

Significantly, she also spoke as a novelist, introducing the event, thanking her supporters, and acknowledging her place within the marketing machine. The Atwood speaking at this moment was the one engaged with material circumstances and commercial demands and the peculiarities of the here and now. What is remarkable about the form of the book reading, then, is the way in which it allows for a fusion of the authorial Atwood, the celebrity Atwood, and the flesh and blood author. Her presence mends the rifts amongst the authorial voice we hear as readers, the celebrity persona we know and love, and the small, aging, brightly dressed woman we see in front of us. Atwood has performing Atwood down to a science.

The event, which fused the typical dynamics of book reading with a theatrical situation, illustrates one of the possibilities arising from the liveness of theatrical performance. That the reading was called *The Year of the Flood Event* on the front of the program is telling. The term “event” points to its conceptualization as an unrepeatable, unique moment. In every city on the tour, the cast, location, costuming, and musical style\(^\text{17}\) were selected specifically for the single local performance. Casts in each location were comprised largely of local professional actors, whose names might well be familiar to local audiences. In Toronto, for example, Adam One was played by David Ferry, Toby by Susan Coyne, and Ren by Michelle Monteith. Throughout

\(^{17}\) Music for the hymns was composed by Orville Stoeber. Arrangements for voice and choir and CDs of the music are available on *The Year of the Flood* website at <http://yearoftheflood.com>. Although the composition was the same, interpretation varied from location to location.
the tour Atwood promoted the uniqueness and individuality of each event in online blogs (one written personally, and one written for *The Globe and Mail*) and in her Twitter feed. Her personal involvement in the construction of these events as events demonstrates a further awareness of the way that the singularity of the unrepeatable event can contribute to an audience’s experience of authenticity.

The excitement of book readings, insofar as they belong to and operate within the phenomenon of fan culture, must stem largely from their status and quality as events. As promotional tools, book readings cater to the desires of readers to be in the physical presence of a cherished or admired – or merely famous – author. The book reading attaches something to the novel that, by definition, is always absent in the written word – liveness. By nature, then, the book reading has something in common with theatre. Like the theatrical performance, the book reading depends on the mutual presence of audience and speaker in the same space. The performance of authors is repeatable, since the author is reciting her own recorded text, but also unique, ephemeral, specific to a particular moment in time. Many people can claim to have read a work, but few can claim to have heard the author read it. Using Walter Benjamin’s terms, I would suggest that the public book reading appears to give back the massively reproduced work of art its aura. It does so, or gives the appearance of doing so, not only by reattaching the work as a communication or enunciation to its originating enunciator, but also by re-creating the book as a personal missive directed to an individual receiver. In the moment of the reading, the reader (now a listener), as well as the writer, becomes a concrete physical presence.

The book reading, after all, is closely linked to the ritual of book signing, in which the author’s signature confers an extra mark of authenticity on the book, symbolically joining the
biographical author to the intention\textsuperscript{18} of their words. As Derrida observes in “Signature, Event, Context,” the signature is a performative speech act that illustrates a paradoxical relationship between author-ity, presence, and the written word:

By definition a written signature implies the actual or empirical nonpresence of the signer. But, it will be claimed, the signature also marks and retains his having-been present in a past now or present [maintenant] which will remain a future now or present, thus in a general maintenant, in the transcendental form of presentness [maintenance]. That general maintenance is in some way inscribed, pinpointed in the always evident and singular present punctuality of the form of the signature. (20)

The same signature, at a book signing, usually identifies a particular recipient. In addressing her book to someone, the author re-frames the writing as a personal communication. This, of course, is the other part of the pleasure of having a book signed; it demonstrates the fact that both author and addressee were present in the same moment.

While the surrogates that appear in The Handmaid’s Tale and The Penelopiad are not Atwood herself, they perform the same interpolative and authorizing functions. As in The Year of the Flood Event, the physical presence of a body that speaks to us, personally, is a key ingredient in marking that an address is intended for “us,” and thus in the ways that community, and in turn nation, are invoked. In National Performance: Representing Quebec from Expo 67 to Céline Dion, Erin Hurley offers “a new way of perceiving theatrical and cultural performances as ‘national’”(5) by attending to the ways that such events produce

\textsuperscript{18} Austin demands that in order for language to be performative the source of the utterance should be present to the utterance (i.e., to be uttering with full intentionality). As Derrida points out, he assumes that the pronoun “I” is a formula that is interchangeable with “being the person who does the uttering” in verbal utterances, or in written utterances (or ‘inscriptions’), by appending his signature. (qtd. in “Signature, Event, Context” 19-21).
affective experience in their spectators. She suggests that while “the traditional focus on a performance object’s representational labours vis-à-vis the nation leads scholars to rely on the figures of reflection and construction to define how performance stands in for nation,” her approach is to pay “attention to performance’s emotional labours vis-à-vis nation – the ways in which their forms implicate audiences corporeally and affectively, the intensity and range of responses they elicit” (5). The performance strategies of Penelope’s live address to the audience – her eye contact with spectators, her imploring gestures and the intimate availability of her own emotional responses – in combination with narrational strategies that reinforce the performance of an intimate relationship (Barton 81), perform the kinds of emotional labour that Hurley describes. So too, does Offred, with the additional affective possibilities that music and the singing voice make available to operatic performance. As Hurley explains:

Feminist studies of emotional labour have isolated its primary contributions as that of building networks and forming communities. Emotional labour makes, manages, and distributes relationships through affective appeals; it draws people and objects, real and imaginary, into affective webs. By allaying audiences emotionally with the on-stage action, or providing vicarious experience – often of emotionality itself – or prompting thrill responses, for instances, emotional labour creates what Jill Lane terms ‘national sentiment’ […] [T]hese affective webs form the substrate of national performance; they create the conditions of possibility for reading certain performances as ‘ours,’ and, thus, as ‘national’ (28).

The power of the authorial surrogate as a strategy of adaptation, then, is not that a surrogate adequately stands in for the absent author, but rather that he/she also affirms the spectator as the privileged receiver, the knowing reader, of both performance and source text. As Alan Filewod observes, “theatre is a not simply a matter of staged representation: it is an event both
physical and symbolic; it transforms experience into a community narrative; and it materially constructs in the audience the community it addresses in its texts” (xvii). If the cheering audiences of *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *The Penelopiad* response was indeed a kind of “flag-waving,” as Kamal Al-Solaylee suggested, it was perhaps not merely because they recognized the voice of Atwood, haunting the speech of her stage surrogates, but also because in performers’ direct addresses they recognized themselves, hailed as Atwood’s appreciative, loyal, and Canadian readers.
4. EXPERIMENTALISM, “POETICITY” AND LITERARY AFFECT IN THE NECESSARY ANGEL ADAPTATIONS OF MICHAEL ONDAATJE’S FICTION

The atmosphere is everything in this production of Coming Through Slaughter. Staging the play in a bar where the audience can slug back a few beers during the performance and take in some good blues and jazz is a brilliant attempt to capture the raunchy, volatile tone of the novel[...]. But, as in the 1979 production, one gets the sense that the entire play is filtered through Michael Ondaatje, the author. Ondaatje is too much a part of the play. His brilliant poetry loses a lot of its very tight vivid quality when brought to the stage, and the production becomes dangerously close to resembling a play-reading rather than a play.

(Isabel Vincent The Globe and Mail, 9 June 1989.)

Divisadero is to conventional theatre what a cantata is to an opera – the former shaped more for the ear, the latter for both ear and eye, both demanding, for maximum enjoyment, to be seen rather than merely heard. Relying primarily on the spoken word and on music to tell its story, like most radio plays, Divisadero nonetheless very carefully – occasionally almost self-consciously – plays to an inner ear informed by memory and emotion and all of the things of which great theatre is made, rather than any random vibrations of the tympanic membrane.

(John Coulbourn The Toronto Sun, 11 Feb. 2011)

As the previous chapters suggest, the adaptations of Wacousta!, The Handmaid’s Tale and The Penelopiad are exceptional examples that demonstrate the strong role that the historical pursuit of a national theatre and national culture has played in the perceived attractiveness of Canadian literary sources to some theatre adapters and audiences. In contrast, the Necessary Angel adaptations of Coming Through Slaughter (1989) and Divisadero: A Performance (2011), based on Michael Ondaatje’s novels, are key examples of a predominantly formal and experimental set of adaptive priorities, and of approaches that give little or no weight to the perceived “Canadianness” of the sources or their author. This contrast is evident in significant, although not radical, shifts in emphasis. While Wacousta!, The Handmaid’s Tale, and The Penelopiad explore ways of translating, or approximating, some of the stylistic elements of their written sources, Coming Through Slaughter and Divisadero: A Performance are more adventurous in their attempts to evoke or “imitate” the medium of
written fiction, and to stage the “poeticity” of Ondaatje’s language. Accordingly, the primary fit that Ondaatje’s work has found within the Canadian theatre is within the changing historical aesthetics of experimental or “avant-garde” theatrical practices. The shift can be attributed to a number of contextual factors, including the particular way that Michael Ondaatje and his works are perceived within Canada, and Ondaatje’s frequent collaboration in stage adaptations of his own work, driven by his interest in inter-artistic and cross-media exchanges.

In the case studies that follow I explore how the two adaptations of Michael Ondaatje’s novels by the Toronto theatre company Necessary Angel engage primarily with the formal “literariness” of Ondaatje’s writing as a way of exploring the transmedial and intermedial possibilities of performing non-dramatic literature in the theatre. Creating works that are at once evocative of the process of reading and self-consciously theatrical, Necessary Angel moves beyond the search for stylistic equivalencies, to an exploration of ways to create a doubled experience in which both the dominant media of theatre and the absent media of the written text are perceptible and in tension. I argue that both productions interpret “literariness” through strategies that exploit tensions between “thought” and “feeling.” Employing principles of construction and staging that depart from the conventional modes of dramaturgy employed in the majority of “mainstream” adaptations in Canada, these two adaptations employ theatre’s different channels of communication – sound, image, space, stasis and movement, showing and telling – in order to create an experience that is at once highly affecting and imaginative.

ONDAATJE, AUTHOR INTERTEXTS AND ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVES OF CANADIAN LITERARINESS

Michael Ondaatje is one of Canada’s best-known authors and poets; in this regard he invites obvious comparisons with Margaret Atwood. Like Atwood, Ondaatje has won
numerous prestigious Canadian and international awards.\(^1\) Also, like Atwood, Ondaatje inhabits the relatively rare position of an author in Canada who has achieved significant mass-market success as well as literary acclaim (York 124). In contrast to a “curricular” author, the name of Michael Ondaatje also draws a large “knowing audience” of dedicated fans as well as individuals with a casual knowledge of his reputation. Indeed, in some ways Ondaatje’s public profile may be greater than Atwood’s, in large part because of the extraordinary exposure brought to him by the popular 1996 film adaptation of *The English Patient*, directed by Anthony Minghella. The broadcast of the Academy Awards ceremony – in which the film won in nine of its twelve nominated categories - was viewed by one billion people in ninety-one countries (York 124), to name only one measure of the reach of the film. The film itself was viewed by millions of spectators, grossing over $78,000,000 domestically and over $213,000,000 worldwide.

Although as renowned a Canadian author as Atwood, however, Ondaatje has found his status as a representative national cultural figure exerting comparatively little influence on the production and reception of adaptations based on his works. Indeed, in comparison to the case of Atwood, the absence of public narratives claiming the adaptations as part of a Canadian literary tradition, or celebrating them as national accomplishments, warrants commentary. There are likely a number of factors as to why the topic of identity – national, cultural, and individual – has been of conspicuously less importance to adapters and critics of his adaptations than the perceived “poeticity” of Ondaatje’s writing.

\(^{1}\) Beginning with the Governor General’s Award for Poetry in 1970 for *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, Ondaatje has gone on to win prizes including the Giller Prize, the Booker Prize, the Prix Médecis, the Kiriyama Rim Book Prize, the Canada Australia Prize, and three more Governor General’s Awards for Fiction.
First, at the level of content, the works that have been adapted for the stage – *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid, Coming Through Slaughter,* and *Divisadero* (the sections that have not been excised) – are all set exclusively in the United States. This is a significant fact for a few reasons. Because of the unique relationship Canadians have to American history and popular culture, these particular works are more likely to be read as culturally “unmarked” stories. That is, their subject matter is more likely to play into perceptions of Ondaatje’s transnational cosmopolitanism than into perceptions of him as a Canadian author. Also, in comparison to works like *In the Skin of a Lion* or *The English Patient,* which feature prominently in a political, post-colonial tradition of interpretation, the works selected for adaptation feature more prominently in readings of Ondaatje’s expression of a Canadian postmodern aesthetic. This of course does not mean that ideas of identity or nation are entirely absent from interpretation; but more on this in a bit.

Second, and perhaps the most important reason for the preoccupation with the formal processes of adaptation, is the fact of Michael Ondaatje’s regular participation in the process. Ondaatje’s engagement with the theatre begins almost concurrently with his writing career. As early as 1968, Ondaatje travelled to Vancouver to work with friend and former classmate Ken Livingstone on a theatrical version of his as-yet-unpublished narrative poem *the man with seven toes* (Sutherland 43). Ondaatje’s adaptation of *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* was first produced at the St. Lawrence Centre by the Toronto Arts Foundation (later CentreStage) in 1971, only a year after the publication of his experimental collection of narrative poems. In 1979 Ondaatje wrote the script for Theatre Passe Muraille’s adaptation of *Coming Through Slaughter,* directed by Paul Thompson. After a hiatus from the theatre, Ondaatje returned to collaboratively develop an adaptation of *Divisadero* with Daniel Brooks and a company of actors over workshops conducted between 2009 and 2011.
His involvement with the adaptation of all four of his works that have made the transfer to the stage is a natural extension of his wide-ranging interest and involvement in multiple artistic disciplines. In addition to his ongoing work as an editor with Coach House Press, and his publications in poetry, fiction and criticism, Ondaatje has made several films, including *Sons of Captain Poetry* (1970), a documentary on poet bpNichol, and *The Clinton Special: A Film about The Farm Show* (1974), which followed the development of the Theatre Passe Muraille collective creation by that name. He has also written a book, *The Conversations: Walter Murch and the Art of Editing Film* (2002), compiled from discussions he and Murch held in the years after the film adaptation of *The English Patient*. The published exchanges between Murch and Ondaatje are filled with inter-artistic musings on structural and aesthetic connections between visual art, music, poetry, sound and film editing. Ondaatje’s role as a vocal supporter of Toronto’s Art of Time Ensemble, a company with an interdisciplinary mandate of “finding new ways of blending classical music with other genres as well as other art forms,” is another informal indication of a cultural engagement that transcends particular fields and forms.

One result of Ondaatje’s participation in the adaptation of his own works is that the adapters of Ondaatje’s fiction have primarily been like-minded, exploratory collaborators with whom Ondaatje has formed artistic connections. This presents a third reason for the formal, rather than political priorities evidenced in the adaptations. The nature of such collaborations likely mitigates the possibility of distanced or critical political interpretations of the source, and reinforces the fit between Ondaatje’s works and “alternative” theatrical practices. Ken Livingstone’s company, The Gallimaufry Repertory Theatre Company, which initiated the adaptation of *the man with seven toes*, for example, was part of what would later be called the alternative theatre in Vancouver, and saw theatre as “a place of confrontation” (Sutherland 50)
defining itself as “Vancouver’s original experimental repertory theatre” (46). Ondaatje’s relationship with Paul Thompson and Theatre Passe Muraille, similarly, was established when Thompson directed *the man with seven toes* as a workshop at Stratford in 1969. Although Richard Rose and DD Kugler approached Ondaatje about their 1990 Necessary Angel adaptation of *Coming Through Slaughter*, Ondaatje actively approached singer/songwriter Justin Rutledge, whose work he admired, and eventually director Daniel Brooks, with whom he had an existing working relationship, about the adaptation of *Divisadero*.

Finally, we could observe that what Michael Ondaatje “means” to adapters and audiences is markedly different from what Atwood “means.” If Atwood is known as the iconic author of Canadian Literature – that is, if her public image is closely connected to narratives about the pursuit, “maturation,” and “arrival” of Canadian culture – Michael Ondaatje has been interpreted variously as a key contributor to Canadian literary postmodernism, as an author “owing almost nothing to an indigenous Canadian tradition”² (Toye 620), as a figurehead for Canada’s ethnic or multicultural “canon,”³ and as a representative of literary globalism.⁴ The diversity of these interpretations suggest that Ondaatje’s “star image” is more multiple and contradictory than Atwood’s. What the name Ondaatje evokes is not the (imagined) coherence of an historical Canadian literary tradition, but rather a network of ideas surrounding contemporaneity and cultural plurality in Canada.

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² Sam Solecki in his introduction to *Spider Blues* similarly suggests that a “specifically Canadian tradition of writing […] for obvious reasons, can’t include Ondaatje whose characters, landscapes, stories and themes resist any taxonomies based on an overtly Canadian thematics” (7).

³ See, for example, Georgiana Banita’s “Canons of Diversity in English-Canadian Literature” in Nischuk (2008). See also sections on Ondaatje in *Other Solitudes: Canadian Multicultural Fictions* (1990).

⁴ See, for example, Kit Dobson’s chapter on Ondaatje in *Transnational Canadas: Anglo-Canadian Literature and Globalization* (2009).
Born in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), Ondaatje moved to England at the age of ten, and then to Canada, which became his permanent home, at nineteen. Arguably, Ondaatje’s ethnicity and immigration are never entirely absent from critical or popular interpretations of his work or from perceptions of him as an author. His writing career has been interpreted as reflecting, and coinciding with, a number of significant developments within Canadian poetry and fiction since the late 1960s. In these historical narratives, Ondaatje’s demonstrated fascinations with multi-generic forms, with blending “high” art and “low” popular culture, his attraction to characters who are outlaws and failures, and to forms such as the historical novel and autobiography, for example, have been interpreted and taught as examples of the Canadian postmodern. In such accounts, which connect him to a national narrative, his presumed ethnic marginality is often also implicitly or explicitly connected to the “ex-centric” position of the postmodern writer to the dominant culture. Such interpretations trace the author’s ongoing interest in questions of origin and place, as evidenced in works like *Handwriting* and *Running in the Family*, or in the recurrence of surrogate or makeshift families (Banita 401) to his own multicultural experiences.

Despite the insistent presence of Ondaatje’s ethnic identity, however, the politics of his writing have been the source of critical ambivalence. While his writing has often been read as a postcolonial critique, for example, there is also a critical tradition that sees his explicit textual politics as ultimately being empty. *In the Skin of a Lion* (which, notably, has not been adapted for the stage) is one focal point for such criticisms. Smaro Kamboureli, for example, argues that the novel, the winner of CBC’s 2002 inaugural “battle of the books,” the popular radio show and literary contest *Canada Reads*, “materializes the intentions of national pedagogy,” by
offering an aestheticized and depoliticized picture of history that “showcases differences only to harmonize them” (48).  

That Ondaatje’s ethnicity is both announced as difference, and often re-appropriated, set to work in the service of a vision of contemporary, progressive, multi-cultural Canada, is also seen in media depictions of the author. As Lorraine York observes, “unlike Atwood, whose public persona is a WASP one, and therefore usually taken for granted in mainstream media representations of her, Ondaatje’s public persona is overdetermined by an exoticizing and eroticizing attention to his ethnicity” (124). She argues that sexualized descriptions of Ondaatje crop up repeatedly in journalism:

*Toronto Life* named Ondaatje one of Toronto’s sexiest men. Noting this perhaps dubious honour, Keith Nickson, writing in *Books in Canada*, referred to what he calls Ondaatje’s ‘druglike effect on women’…, and Derek Finkle, writing for *Saturday Night*, luxuriates in the subject: ‘Ondaatje may be the closest thing we have to a literary sex symbol in Canada,’ and he argues that this erotic appeal is part of ‘his growing mystique.’” (York 138)

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5 The fit of Ondaatje’s writing within a culture of celebrity that affirms literature’s power to connect people, in her view, lies in its universalizing tendencies:

What has been celebrated about the Ondaatje oeuvre—and the culture of celebrity, I should say, always works toward the construction of oeuvres […]—that is, his poetics of violence and characters who live on the edge, relies on his romantic aestheticization of failure and the eroticization of politics. […]

From Buddy Bolden to Caravaggio, if not the English patient, from Billy the Kid to Anil, his characters surface from the margins of history to claim a place for themselves in the surplus of history. As Davey has argued, ‘(o)ne general ahistorical model of Canadian society— rich and poor, exploiter and exploited—yields to an even more general but implicitly patriarchal one in which all men appear to have some access to sensual visionary experience which can link them with a universal human fabric’ (155).
The “sexiness” of Ondaatje the author is undoubtedly also an aspect of his perceived cosmopolitanism. Glen Lowry, in a close reading of a Maclean’s article, offers one example of the complex way in which Ondaatje’s perceived Canadianness was constructed following the success of the film adaptation of The English Patient:

[W]e are presented with a vignette of Ondaatje as a (new) Canadian treasure, a ‘gain’ offsetting the ‘drain’ of cultural capital flowing out through our permeable borders. […] Presenting Ondaatje as a national icon, this narrative performs a paradoxical reinscription of Canadian culture and literature as the nexus of various international ventures. Ignoring the problematic ownership of the film, in fact ascribing it to Ondaatje and thereby claiming it in the name of Canada, Maclean’s depicts him as a hot commodity, an unexpected bonus in the to and fro of international migration for which Canadians should be glad. (“Between” 218)

Ondaatje’s importance as an icon of Canadian culture, Lowry concludes, “appears to depend on a kind of geopolitical sleight of hand that obfuscates the historical specificity of Canada and replaces it with an empty cosmopolitanism that is sanctioned by the stature of the film” (220).

If Ondaatje’s perceived ethnic difference, along with the potential political critique within his works, has gone unremarked and unaccentuated in the adaptations of his works, then, it is perhaps because it is so often reabsorbed into the way that Ondaatje is perceived as a multicultural and international Canadian writer. In this contemporary vision of national culture, as Smaro Kamboureli suggests, the idea of Canada as a homogenous “imagined community” has given way to a new imagined source of cohesiveness: “the cohesive nation of the present has moved beyond a genetic sense of national kinship; instead it depends on—in fact it celebrates—the politics of difference. It is, technically, a transcultural nation, a nation at once
of ‘heritage groups,’ indigenous peoples, and many diasporas, but one that sees ‘the affirmation of difference as an end in itself’” (52).

Many of the most recent media portrayals of Ondaatje conflate the author’s “hybrid” cultural identity with the boundary-crossing aesthetics of his writing, celebrating Ondaatje as a representative of a contemporary borderless world. Indeed, Ondaatje, who has always resisted exclusive identifications with particular nations or traditions, appears to be most comfortable with this image of himself. Robert McCrum’s profile of Ondaatje in *The Observer* shortly before the publication of *The Cat’s Table* (2011) offers one of the clearest recent examples. Describing Ondaatje as having “the pale sapphires of a witty Dutch burgher set in a 68-year-old Tamil frame,” McCrum leads his piece by quoting Ondaatje’s description of himself as “a mongrel of place. Of race. Of cultures. Of many genres.” McCrum then offers a number of apparent contradictions:

The more you look, the more dizzyingly kaleidoscopic he seems to become: a Canadian citizen who remains profoundly Sri Lankan. A winner of the Booker prize who first made his name as a poet. An admirer of Robert Browning and Thomas Wyatt who finds his deepest inspiration in the aesthetic traditions of the East. […] If Ondaatje, the man, is divided and detached, then Ondaatje, the writer, is militantly opposed to western habits of narrative. This is partly because he was raised in Ceylon's oral tradition: "tall stories, gossip, arguments and lies at dinner.”

McCrum unites and resolves the opposing aspects of Ondaatje’s perspective, however, through the observation that such multiplicity reflects our contemporary world. As he continues, [Ondaatje] quotes the critic John Berger with approval: "Never again will a single story be told as though it were the only one." This, he adds, "is the possibility of our age. A
person grows up in Colombo or Wichita and their true mentor or touchstone could be Calvino or Miles Davis, or it could be a political gesture or act in a far away place."

Eschewing political identification while claiming the global as a space of creative freedom and connection, this construction of Ondaatje, seemingly reinforced by the author himself, presents the writer as a transnational icon.

If, over the forty-plus years since the first stage adaptation of Ondaatje’s writing, the priority of adapters, critics and audiences has been a primarily formal exploration of the boundaries existing amongst different media, artistic forms, conventions and genres, it is for good reason. This is the principle, espoused both by Ondaatje himself and by others, that has most defined the particular literariness associated with his work.

**Theatrical Fit: “Non-dramatic” Texts and “Intermedial Imitation”**

In looking at the particular fit that Ondaatje’s adaptations have found within the Canadian theatre, the example of *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, both because of its long production history and its ongoing success, is a useful entry point. This difficult-to-categorize collection of poems, prose narratives and images, for which Michael Ondaatje won a Governor General’s Award – and which also solidified Ondaatje’s image as a provocative new writer when former prime minister John Diefenbaker denounced *Billy* as a filthy book (York 128) – went on to become not only the most frequently adapted of Ondaatje’s works, receiving treatments by Ondaatje himself and by others, but also the most produced adaptation of Canadian literature in Canadian theatre history,\(^6\) staged professionally by companies including

\(^6\) The 1989 entry in the *Cambridge Companion to Canadian Theatre* suggests that the book has been adapted “at least twenty-one times” (163), and numerous additional adaptations have been produced in the past two decades.
the Toronto Arts Foundation (1971), Stratford Theatre (1973), Toronto Free Theatre (1974),
Manitoba Theatre Centre (1975), Theatre Three (1977), The Tarragon (1990), The Belfry
(1993), The Great Canadian Theatre Company (1995), and Alberta Theatre Projects (1998), as
well as numerous universities and amateur production companies. Staged with equal frequency
by so-called regional and alternative theatres in Canada, *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*
has often been simultaneously positioned by theatre companies as a canonical and yet daring
offering of original Canadian theatre.

Given the numerous productions of *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* based on
Ondaatje’s script, one cannot generalize about the specifics of its staging. Ondaatje’s hopes for
the piece, which he outlines in a note that prefaces the script of “Billy,” are a significant
window into adaptive interests that persist in his later theatrical ventures. For example, the
centrality and flexibility of narration as a structuring principle are already evident. Ondaatje
suggests that “[a]t various times in the play there should be a sense that Billy is setting a scene
and then stepping into it, being free to step out of it and talk to us whenever he wishes” (“A
Note”). Also apparent in this early adaptation is Ondaatje’s interest in creating tensions
between the poetry of the text and impact of the stage image. Such moments are highlighted in
scenes that Ondaatje labels “GROTESQUES” in the script. As he explains, “[t]hese are all
speeches by Billy and are moments of his most internal/savage thoughts and feelings. When
these sequences are performed by him the rest of the cast on stage should freeze and there
should be the sense of time stopping – as well as a very strong juxtaposition of mood with what
has gone before and what follows.” It is this principle of sudden contrasts that Ondaatje
stresses is key to the overall mood and pacing of the piece:

There should be the sense of sudden juxtapositions in the character of Billy and in the
contrast of scenes: rambling stories and then sudden violence, lyric and then horror, the
sense of game and the sense of dead seriousness. Some scenes which begin innocently should turn manic and be out of control. When there are scenes of action they should be very physical and active to balance the amount of talk. (“A Note”)

This structuring principle of juxtaposition, in which the showing and telling modes of performance are employed in ways that create startling sensory and imaginative contrasts is a unifying element in each of the Ondaatje adaptations. The Necessary Angel adaptations, *Coming Through Slaughter* (1989) and *Divisadero: A Performance* (2011), are remarkable for the willingness they demonstrate to tell rather than show, and to have dramatic elements like story order, narrative causality, and action remain unclear. While embracing elements of performance – as, for example, in the sudden, even violent physicality Ondaatje recommends in *Billy* – traditional theatrical enactment is often broken up, undermined, or restrained. One way to describe this difference is a shift toward a primary interest in the qualities of written literature as a medium, and in the type of experience it produces for readers. As such these productions are part of a broader exploratory trend in theatre in Canada. What marks these adapters’ practices as different from what we might call conventional adaptive strategies is a strong attraction to those elements in a source that are not conventionally theatrical, or even seen as being particularly suitable for the stage. Extended sequences of description, monologues that replace or duplicate showing with telling, structures that prioritize interiority, thought, and character perceptions over actions, and language that transcribes or reproduces the syntax and diction of prose fiction or poetry, are some of the signposts of this mode of adaptive practice. And yet rather than the imitation of literary elements their goal is the translation and transformation of literary experience within the theatre.

While many of the formal choices made as part of this alternative pursuit of the literary appear to be motivated by a kind of exaggerated fidelity to the source text, I will argue that a
re-evaluation of these adaptive strategies within the context of a broader experimentation with “literariness” in twentieth-century theatre practice indicates that what motivates this seeming textual fidelity is rather the exploration of the relationship between literature and theatre as two distinct media. This exploratory perspective is perhaps best articulated in Michael Kirby’s speculation on the possibilities of “literary theatre” in *The Drama Review* in 1974. Kirby attempts to define literary theatre not in terms of its textualities, but in terms of the mode of perception that it generates:

Some people use the phrase ‘literary theatre’ to designate any performance that is based on a written script; ‘non-literary theatre’ is any performance that is not derived from a script. [...] Our use of the term ‘literary’ is functional and more complex. We are concerned with the qualities of the performance itself and with the spectator’s perception of that performance. In our formulation, ‘literary’ means ‘like literature’ rather than ‘derived from a script.’ Our hypothesis is that in literary theatre the spectator behaves in the same way he does when reading literature: he ‘reads’ the performance. How then does the perceptual mechanism and the mind work when reading, and what parallels can be seen in theatrical experience? (104)

A variant of this last question – how can the theatre create a “literary” or reading-like experience? – describes the approach of a number of contemporary Canadian theatre adapters. Two brief examples, produced at Toronto’s Tarragon Theatre in 1999 and 2000, offer a useful point of comparison to the Ondaatje adaptations. In January of 1999 Claire Coulter performed *Good Bones*, combining a selection of pieces from Atwood’s 1983 collection, *Murder in the Dark* and the 1992 compilation, *Good Bones*, in a production directed by Urjo Kareda. With a minimal set by Ken Garnhum and functional lighting by Bonnie Beecher, the focus of the production was on Coulter’s virtuosic acting, which, in the words of a reviewer of the time,
took “a series of unrelated monologues by diverse characters, binding them together only by the strength of her performing genius” (Coulbourn).

Shortly after the second run of Good Bones (Nov. 3 - Dec. 12, 1999), Brian Quirt’s adaptation of Jane Urquhart’s The Whirlpool was staged as a co-production between Tarragon and Quirt’s production company, Nightswimming. Employing only text selected and transcribed from the novel, with no invented dialogue or newly scripted scenes, The Whirlpool similarly did not attempt to re-create the story of Urquhart’s novel in a classical dramaturgical mode of “showing.” One of the most distinctive features of the adaptation was the incorporation of choreographed movement and dance. Solo dances, such as the one performed by the character of Maud (played by Christine Brubaker) in the opening moments of the performance, created stylized expressions of psychological states. Choreography within scenes was also used to interpret the novel’s central metaphors through a system of spatial imagery.

For example, the whirlpool, the cyclical force that sets in motion the lives of the characters, was expressed through a set designed in the round, creating a blocking logic of arcs, tangents, and rotation.

Both adaptations share what might typically be viewed as a radical fidelity to the text of their sources. Indeed, Coulter’s adaptation in particular is so little altered as to raise questions as to what distinguishes an adaptation from a dramatic reading. But in both cases, the choice to work with the unaltered language of the source is not intended to elevate “The Text,” that is to

7 In act 1, scene 6, for example, Maud and the Boy walk in one direction around the circular stage “to their garden”, while David “walks to town” and Patrick “begins to circle the space, always watching Fleda,” who follows her four boats around the space (10). As the stage directions indicate, “[t]he effect is a whirlpool of people, connected to a rhythm but not (yet) to each other. Their movement is restricted to a predetermined set of circles” (10).
assert the priority of the written script over the elements of performance, but rather to explore ways in which text and performance can be given equal weight.

In each case, the relationship to text was perceived by the artists to be something innovative or experimental. In an interview with Beth Herst, Clare Coulter cites American avant-garde director Robert Wilson’s adaptation of Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando* as a key influence on her adaptation of Atwood’s short stories. Herst describes Coulter’s fascination with Wilson’s insistence “on what she calls ‘an unbridgeable gap between the words and what you’re seeing.’ ‘The star was the words,’ she explains. ‘They took off, soared above the production, and yet the words remained on the page, the pleasure in one’s own brain as one imagines remained intact’” (67). Herst also describes Coulter’s desire to use Atwood’s language to work against the tradition of illusionist dramatization, and thus to resist, in Coulter’s words, “narrowing the imagination by the intrusion of the real” (65). Ultimately, Herst suggests, Coulter sees her formal technique as having a political component. Coulter’s antidote for a cultural slide into “non-complexity,” Herst summarizes, is “language that is not only complex in itself, but that exists in complex theatrical relation to the other languages of theatre, to movement, sound, image, and space” (68). As imagined by Coulter, then, the performance of Atwood’s unchanged text is an adaptive strategy that both subverts traditional dramaturgical principles and challenges the audience through perceptual difficulty, goals that are the historic signposts of the twentieth-century avant-garde.

*The Whirlpool*, similarly, was a production imagined by both its creator and by the theatre that co-produced it as being a work whose approach to textuality would challenge the audience. In 2000, under the dramaturgical leadership of Urjo Kareda, as Quirt explained in a 2009 interview, the Tarragon Theatre seemed like a good home for a piece with a literary pedigree such as *The Whirlpool* because of the Tarragon’s reputation as a literary theatre.
Quirt observed: “it seemed like their audience had a great appreciation of Canadian work, and of Canadian literature.” Significantly, however, the Tarragon’s interest in the piece, he suggested, was not only its status as an adaptation, but as a means of expanding the audience’s range of theatrical interests: “The Tarragon talked about the way we were doing it, which was not literary at all, and in fact more suitable in the end to World Stage or to Buddies [in Bad Times] than to the Tarragon, or at least their audience. Urjo was very interested at that time in trying to encourage his audience – meaning largely, but not entirely, his subscribers – to have a broader view of theatrical possibilities.”

When Quirt describes the Tarragon as a “literary theatre,” he refers to the historical reputation of the Tarragon at the time for creating language-driven works demonstrating a type of “poetic naturalism” (Robert Nunn, qtd. in Knowles, Theatre of Form135) that typified the “Tarragon aesthetic” (Robin Butt, qtd. in Knowles 143). The Whirlpool, which integrated extended sequences of choreographed movement, dance and music, was thus “not literary” in the sense that it did not employ the familiar naturalistic “writerly” dramaturgy that Tarragon audiences had come to expect. Developed through a workshop process in which actors explored the effectiveness of potential “what-if moments” on their feet, and in which the collaboration of a choreographer was a vital component almost from the outset (interview), the play also complicated the association of “literary theatre” with a playwright-driven drama.

The “broader view of theatrical possibilities” that Kareda hoped The Whirlpool might generate was understood to be produced by the equivalency given to the text and to other systems of signification in the total production. As the study guide issued by the Tarragon explained to prospective audiences:

In conventional theatre and literature the major emphasis is often on narrative or story; other elements of form are not addressed with equal weight. Dance, however, does not
always lend itself to literal interpretation in the way words do. Therefore it is important
as an audience member to participate by responding to these forms as well as by
analyzing the plot.

This theatre piece is an opportunity to allow voice, movement, and design to
enliven all your senses, and to gain equal footing with the narration. You may emerge
with more impressions and feelings than concise understanding (and that’s ok!) (2
Tarragon)

In the shift from treating the text as the engine of drama to treating text (sans definite article) as
one element among many in a performance, these works participate in a broader twentieth-
century shift. In the context of adaptation, however, where a recognizable relationship to a
known text forms a key part of the new work’s identity and has significant impact on its
reception, the dethroning of text, even while preserving it “untranslated,” as it were, in
performance, is a more adventurous move.

What the examples of Quirt and Coulter’s adaptations offer is a glimpse of a shared
principle. In both adaptations it is the juxtaposition, even the contradiction, between different
representational modes that are of greater interest to the adapters than the kind of integration
imagined in the tradition of Wagner’s Gesamtkunstwerk. The perceived difference of the
literary text is kept intact, rather than absorbed into a coherent theatrical illusion.

This principle, as Michael J. Sidnell observed in 1996, is one that emerges more
broadly out of the contemporary theatre’s resistance to traditional ideas about textual
inscription, the primacy of the dramatic text, and to the dramatic genre itself. He observes that
despite the rise of contemporary performance that “resists overall pre-inscription,” as
characterized by the theatrical auteurism of Gilles Maheu or Robert Lepage, such practice “is
by no means averse to writing, for literature often figures in it. Indeed the contemporary theatre

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often chooses not merely to do without a dramatic text as the basis of performance, but to substitute for it one of the other literary genres” (548 emphasis in original). In contrast to traditional adaptations in which a novel is transformed into a conventional dramatic script, Sidnell suggests, a number of contemporary productions endeavor to perform the “non-dramatic” text:

In the performance of ‘non-dramatic’ vis à vis ‘dramatic’ writings two main departures from traditional practice are evident: first the exploitation of modes of expression not found in, or inhibited by, dramatic texts; and secondly, the enablement of the performativity of the writing itself, by which I mean…its poeticity. (550)

The experimentalism\(^8\) of the performances described above depends upon the sense that the performance of non-dramatic texts offers something different than the performance of dramatic texts. This sense of difference, moreover, appears to extend beyond a mere extension of available conventions, to reach for new possibilities of engagement. The question of how non-dramatic modes of expression and the poeticity of certain kinds of writing (a concept that will be defined more precisely below) can be embedded within theatrical performance clearly raises some thorny theoretical issues, however. Written language is an element that is absorbed into performance; when transformed into speech, the textual origins of the linguistic signs disappear. Language, we could say, is a transmedial element of both print novels and theatrical performance.

Werner Wolf offers the useful definition of the transmedial as “phenomena that are not specific to individual media” which, because of their appearance in multiple media can “form

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\(^8\) I use the word experimentalism here, instead of the noun experimentation, to point toward the performances’ perceived innovation and radicalism.
points of contact or bridges between different media” (18). Typically what distinguishes these common traits, whether formal or at the level of content, as being transmedial is that “they do not have an easily traceable origin which can be attributed to a certain medium or that such an origin does not play a role in the gestation of the works in question” (19). For example, in addition to the shared trait of using language in their representations, theatrical performance and print novels often share basic features of narrativity. Similarly, poetic language, whether defined based on “its emphasis on form, condensation and systematization of literary devices” or “distance from everyday language” (Pavis 275), has extensive histories in both dramatic and non-dramatic literary forms.

While the transmedial usually refers to transfers in which “specific features of the source medium become lost in the process of transposition” (Kattenbelt 2008, 23), there are conditions, as Chiel Kattenbelt suggests, under which “the taking-up or imitation of the methods of representation of one medium by another medium can also function as a specific, medium-crossing form of intertextuality, which implies that one medium refers to another medium” (24). Different names have been proposed for the phenomenon in which one medium ‘cites’ another. Werner Wolf, for example, names three different, though not mutually exclusive, kinds of intertextual relationships across media, all of which are commonly employed in adaptations of Canadian literature on the Canadian stage. In the first, which he calls “intermedial reference,” the “non-dominant” media is “only present as an idea, as a signified, and hence as a reference”; the “monomedia work remains monomedia and displays only one semiotic system” (23). Examples include discussions or depictions of a medium in a work of another medium, as when a character in a novel paints, or describes painting. Intermedial references have appeared frequently in Canadian literary adaptations. For example, in the 2005 CanStage and Arts Club Theatre Company coproduction of Unless, an adaptation
of Carol Shields’ book of the same name, the novel’s chapter headings – prepositions and other fragments of language – were projected onto a screen incorporated into the rear centre of the set, punctuating transitions between scenes and acting as entry points into the main character’s monologues. Used primarily as structuring devices, the projections also framed character Reta’s speeches as acts of writing composition. Another commonly used convention is to have performers engaged in the act of reading or writing on stage. The Whirlpool, for example, contains several such moments: the character of Maud itemizes the objects she has recovered from the whirlpool in a small book (3, 5, 9, 19, 37); Fleda reads aloud her own diary entries, carries and quotes the poetry of Robert Browning and Coventry Patmore, and is seen reading silently (5, 18); Patrick recites Algernon Charles Swinburne’s “The Triumph of Time” (37); Fleda points out to David the first poem written in Canada (which they look at but do not read aloud) (43); and Patrick and Fleda both quote parts of Browning’s “Prologue: Amphibian” (51).

Wolf’s second category, “in which discernibly similar contents or formal aspects appear in works of different media and where at the same time a clear origin can be attributed for them in another medium” is called “intermedial transposition” (19). At the broadest level, Wolf uses this term to describe the process of adaptation – the transposition of entire works across media – but also applies it to parts of individual works. In the example he gives, “the transposition of a narrator – a typical component of the medium of verbal fiction – to film or drama” (19), Wolf points out that analogous conventions exist within the destination medium (the ‘presenter character’ of ‘epic drama’, or the film ‘voice-over’), but under certain circumstances these conventions are instead read as originating in, and being transposed from, a written source. “Intermedial transposition,” then, might be considered another term for the concept of “stylistic equivalency” as it is commonly understood in adaptation studies.
Of the three terms, however, Wolf’s final category, “intermedial imitation” is of the greatest relevance to the current chapter. He explains:

Like intermedial transposition, ‘imitation’ involves a kind of translation. However, the objects of translation differ: in imitation the objects are primarily the nature and structure of the signifiers of the source work or medium, and it is the characteristic traits of these signifiers that are translated as much as possible into the target medium; in contrast to this, in intermedial transposition the object of translation are the signifieds of the source work or medium and/or their effects. (25 emphasis in original)

Significantly, both transposition and imitation involve the translation of one medium into another, but while in intermedial transposition “the result is here often a ‘seamless’ integration of the transposed substance of the ‘old’ medium into the ‘new’ one, so that the new medium retains its familiar aspect,” intermedial imitation “frequently leads to, or is expressed by, a certain defamiliarization of the new medium” (29).

The advantage that Wolf’s concept of intermedial imitation has over similar concepts expressed within adaptation studies, such as Dudley Andrew’s concept of “intersection,” for example, is that rather than describing cross-medial elements as being “intentionally left unassimilated” or preserving the “specificity” of a source text, Wolf’s term implicitly assumes a “both-and” relationship. As Robin Nelson suggests in his introduction to Mapping Intermediality in Performance, the idea of the “both-and” more accurately reflects “the range of ‘inters’ in ‘interrelationships’” (17). He writes: “Although not entirely abandoning the

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9 Andrew, in his consideration of modes of film adaptation, suggests that in the “intersecting mode,” “the uniqueness of the original text is preserved to such an extent that it is intentionally left unassimilated in adaptation. [...] All such works fear or refuse to adapt. Instead they present the otherness and distinctiveness of the original text, initiating a dialectical interplay between the aesthetic forms of one period with the cinematic forms of our own period” (463-64).
various conceptions of the ‘in-between’, we have come to think that the compound ‘both-and’ better characterizes contemporary performance culture. [...] Intermedial theatre may be both physically based and on-screen: experiences may be both actual and virtual; spaces may be both public and private; bodies may be both present and absent” (17). Wolf’s term, similarly, suggests that the phenomenon of “citing” written literary texts such as novels in performance can be viewed both as an imitation – which necessitates formal and narrative choices that are perceived as translations or equivalences – and yet also be viewed as a form of intermediality, in which two media interact as elements of the work. Viewed in this way, we could say that particular adaptations can be read both as imitating and staging the medium of written literature.

LITERARIZING THEATRE, PERFORMING POETICITY: “THINKING” AND “FEELING” TENSIONS IN EXPERIMENTAL PRACTICE

The two primary strategies of intermedial imitation used in Coming Through Slaughter and Divisadero: A Performance are common to experimental theatre practice in the twentieth century. First, both productions exploit tensions between intellectual and visceral response, or “thinking” and “feeling” aspects of theatrical reception by restricting traditional “showing” elements and emphasizing “telling” elements in particular (and frequently defamiliarizing) ways. Second, again inverting traditional priorities, these works explore the “feeling” or affective properties of language, emphasizing sound and the embodied physicality of speech as significant elements in the performances’ communication strategies. These strategies, in effect, are those articulated in Michael Sidnell’s proposition that in the performance of “non-dramatic” texts there are two main departures from traditional practice.

In the first departure, Sidnell suggests, such works go against traditional perceptions of what constitutes the dramatic through “the exploitation of modes of expression not found in, or
inhibited by, dramatic texts.” Most often, the modes of expression absent from, or inhibited by, dramatic texts are those that belong generally to the “telling mode” of representation. In defining the differences between the various poetic arts, at several points in *The Poetics* Aristotle specifies that drama is different from the poetic art that imitates by the use of language alone, because drama is enacted rather than narrated.10 Aristotle’s famous definition of tragedy, which profoundly shaped not only tragic drama but the western dramatic tradition in general, further specifies that it should be “the imitation of an action” in a “dramatic, not a narrative form” (49). Those that “present their personages as acting and doing” are most properly called dramas. Because of the priority given to plot, the role of all other theatrical elements are subordinated to the function of doing, or showing, rather than telling; for example, Aristotle tells us, the actors don’t act to merely portray characters, rather characters are included for the sake of presenting the action. The role of spoken language, as described in Aristotle’s category of “thought,” or “saying whatever can be said, or what is appropriate to the occasion,” is similarly motivated by the kind and amount of characterization that services the advancement of plot events: “There is no room for Character in a speech on a purely indifferent subject” (51). In the tradition of verisimilitude that follows from the interpretation of Aristotle, what is said in the “telling” mode of theatre is constrained by contemporary perceptions of what a character might plausibly say in a realistic situation, with some latitude given for stylization and artistry.

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10 He first suggests that the poetic arts are separated by the means of their imitation into those that imitate by use of language alone (which in his time remains nameless), thus isolating what we might call prose and poetry, and those which imitate by combining rhythm, melody and verse. He also makes distinctions on the basis of the manner of their imitations: “one may either (1) speak at one moment in narrative and at another in an assumed character, as Homer does; or (2) one may remain the same throughout, without any such change; or (3) the imitators may present the whole story *dramatically*, as though they were actually doing the thing described” (emphasis added 46)
As William Gruber observes in his book *Offstage Space, Narrative, and the Theatre of the Imagination*, “[t]he classic answer to the question of what the dramatist should show on the one hand, and what should be merely told about, on the other, is given by Racine in the preface to *Britannicus*: ‘one of the rules of the theatre is to make a narrative only of those things that cannot occur in action’” (4). What “cannot occur in action” is, of course, largely defined by the decorum, taste, and ideology of any given historical period. What might be perceived as too shocking, too raw to be absorbed comfortably into the theatre’s signifying system in one period – nudity, sexuality or graphic violence, for example – might be conventionally acceptable in another. Gruber summarizes this “necessary evil” approach to narration as follows:

Normally proscribed from the stage, therefore, or considered at best a necessary concession to the various exigencies of theatrical performance, narrative is to be used in plays only sparingly and only when there is no mimetic alternative. This is the position taken by Aristotle, articulated more fully by Horace, and, by and large, it is the position adopted subsequently by the French neoclassicists. […] Indeed, since antiquity, most commentators on drama follow classical and neoclassical precepts in believing narrative to be at best a *substitute* for enactment, never its equivalent. As Patrice Pavis has recently put it, narrative cannot assume too great a role in drama ‘without running the risk of destroying its theatrical quality’ (Gruber 11).

Because extended diegesis is one of the elements inhibited by, or most often proscribed in, theatre, its use has commonly been linked to experimental traditions. William Gruber argues, for example, that throughout the twentieth century a number of theatre artists have used the replacement of showing with telling as a deliberate “literarizing” technique, as a political, ideological and/or aesthetic reaction against the classical tradition of verisimilitude in which the dramatist is limited to “telling” only what cannot occur in action. Gruber traces the roots of
20th century experiments with literariness to Plato. Taking his evidence from Book 3 of The Republic, rather than from the criticism of poetry in Book 10, Gruber argues that Plato, in addition to criticizing the imitative arts for their distance from truth and God, offers “suggestions on how to modify the undesirable effects of mimetic performance by imbuing it with some of the formal properties and characteristic effects of narrative” (81). For Plato “a more desirable kind of performance,” Gruber interprets, “would be a “diegesis without mimesis” (81) in which the poet’s voice is foregrounded as such, so that the potential for enactment to be confused with truth is always mitigated by the act of reporting:

Plato sees conventional narrative markers as small but critical modifications to mimetic performance. They establish within the performer’s imitation a steady rhythm of interruption and, more important, they show a conscious commitment to some cognitive frame beyond the imitation. To the extent that the poet frames showing with telling, Plato seems to be saying that spectators necessarily remain aware of the constructed nature of the performance (83).

Although Gruber acknowledges that “there is no case to be made for Plato’s ‘influence’ on modern drama,” he suggests that this particular position anticipates many twentieth-century dramaturgical styles, including the theatre of Bertolt Brecht, the modernist experiments of Gordon Craig and W.B. Yeats, and through to the postmodern work of Richard Foreman or Robert Wilson (84-85). Tracing several of these strategies, including Yeats’ use of narrative to describe simultaneously enacted scenes, and Brecht’s advocacy of narrative incursions through projections and the framing device of doggerel verses, Gruber observes a shared interest in the use of literary techniques for the purposes of intellectual detachment and political criticism and aesthetic estrangement in the twentieth century. As Brecht opines in Brecht on Theatre, he suggests, “this literarization of the theatre […] entails punctuating ‘representation’ with
‘formulation’” (Brecht 43). “The literary” is thus associated with the “deflect[ion] of attention away from the thing imitated, toward the imitation itself and the signifying codes of its symbolic representation” (Gruber 97).

Notably, often in this tradition, literary modes of expression are employed as a means of intervening with theatre’s propensity for producing feeling. As Erin Hurley outlines in *Theatre & Feeling*, several categories of feeling endow theatre with its vitality: “affect,” a physiological response to a change in the environment, “makes itself known through autonomic reactions such as sexual arousal or sweating; thus, affects are sets of muscular and/or glandular responses” (13); “mood” is that “disposition or background state that orients us to certain kinds of emotional responses and reactions” (22-23); and “emotion” “names our sensate, bodily experience in a way that at once organizes it and makes it legible to ourselves and consonant with others’ experiences or emotional lives” (23). As Hurley suggests, feeling is divided into hierarchies of development, which also underpins a hierarchy of cultural forms:

Thus affects such as disgust or sexual excitation are signs of our animal nature, whereas social emotions, such as shame or love that involve judgement or discernment are evidence of our more advanced and complete humanity. […] These hierarchies also entail a division of body and mind; body occupies the animal end of the spectrum, and mind inhabits the more rarified and valued human end. […] This same hierarchy (emotion over affect, human over animal, mind over body) underpins a hierarchy of cultural forms (in which high culture is better than popular culture.) (16-17)

If the first strategy of intermedial imitation is to make the theatre more literary by subduing the bodily and placing priority on cognition, discernment and imagination, the second (and not unparadoxical) strategy is to make the literary language of the written source text more visceral and affective. In the second departure from traditional practice that Michael
Sidnell identifies, the affective possibilities of language are activated through “the enablement of the performativity of the writing itself, by which I mean…its poeticity.” Sidnell borrows the term from Roman Jakobson, who defines “poeticity” as “when the word is felt as a word and not a mere representation of the object being named or an outburst of emotion, when words and their composition, their meaning, their external and inner form, acquire a weight and value of their own instead of referring indifferently to reality” (Jakobson, qtd. in Sidnell 553).

Experimentation with the properties of spoken language also has a history within the theatrical avant-garde. Perhaps most influentially, Antonin Artaud saw language as a powerful component of his theorized theatre of cruelty. Poetry, he suggests “is anarchic to the degree that it brings into play all the relationships of object to object and of form to signification.” In recognizing the “anarchic” potential, the ability of poetry to disturb spectators on a physiological and unconscious level, as he believed, Artaud emphasizes the subversiveness of employing the “feeling technologies” of language:

[T]o make metaphysics out of a spoken language is to make the language express what it does not ordinarily express; to make use of it in a new, exceptional, and unaccustomed fashion; to reveal its possibilities for producing physical shock; to divide and distribute it actively in space; to deal with intonations in an absolutely concrete manner, restoring their power to shatter as well as really to manifest something; to turn against language and its basely utilitarian, one could say alimentary, sources, against its trapped-beast origins; and finally, to consider language as the form of Incantation. (Theatre and Its Double 46)

While the strategies of “literarizing” the performance through the introduction of “non-dramatic” “telling” modes of representation and of “theatricalizing” the performative qualities are thus part of a broader historical legacy of experimentation, they are taken up in particular
ways by the creators of the Necessary Angel adaptations, in response to the interests of their specific historical moment.

NECESSARY ANGEL AND THE LATE 1980S – COMING THROUGH SLAUGHTER

When director Richard Rose and dramaturg Don Kugler began the process of adapting Coming Through Slaughter, one of their primary objectives was to capture the ambiguous and fluid perspective of the novel’s narration, which was left out of the 1979 Passe Muraille adaptation as well as a subsequent film script that Ondaatje had written. As Kugler told Glen Lowry in a 2005 interview,

[t]he thing we didn’t like about those [scripts] was that it was pure autobiography. It was just really about Buddy Bolden. While Buddy Bolden was important to the novel, the thing that was most compelling to me about the novel – if you can call it a novel, let’s call it a book – was the tension between the narrator and Bolden, and the way that voice slips back and forth between the clear outsider coming into this world, doing research, slipping back in time, assuming the voice of Bolden in an imaginative way, reimagining this whole experience as a way of kind of understanding himself. […] [B]ut then how to do that on stage? Clearly the other two productions had not attempted that at all but for me that was one of the most interesting things about the book. (“emigrations”)

The solution that the pair found, the choice to create the combined role of Actor/Bolden, and to stage performer Phil Akin’s shifts between roles as visible moments of transformation, initiated a number of choices that can be interpreted as strategies of intermedial imitation.

The opening scenes of Coming Through Slaughter offer a kind of primer both for the way that Actor/Bolden’s transitions act as a structuring principle, and for the play’s juxtaposition of
enactment and description. The production begins with a brief scene that mimetically frames the performance as the Actor’s attempt to reconstruct the history of Buddy Bolden.

ACTOR: To get back to Buddy Bolden

WOMAN: Uh-huh. He was the first to play the hard jazz and blues for dancing. He got famous right after 1900 come in. In a parade, darling, he take folks with him all the way down Canal street. And he always looked good. He loved wearing them red shirts.

MAN: And when he bought a cornet he polished it up make it glisten like a woman’s leg.

ACTOR: He lost his mind, I heard.

WOMAN: That’s right, he lost his mind. He died in the bughouse.

ACTOR: Yes, now that’s what I heard…

WOMAN: Yes, darling, he died out there. (Rose 4)

After a pause, the three performers move into position for the Actor’s opening monologue, shifting from a mode of enactment, or showing, to a mode of description, or telling. The speech, which begins with the first words of the novel after the epigraph, “His geography,” descriptively creates the scene as other characters begin to animate the setting he describes. Taken with little alteration from the first pages of the novel the speech is full of deictic markers that indicate features of the space he occupies, despite the fact that the actor performs in a space largely devoid of representational scenography. Descriptions that in the novel thematize the necessary subjectivity of historiography, in performance draw attention to the audience’s imaginative labour. What the Actor describes are signs whose visual presence offers a kind of absence. The faded “signs of the owners obliterated by brand names” which were once “primary yellows and reds” are “muted now.” Although still present, the text suggests, the
shops and streets and signs of New Orleans reveal only the vacated surface of the New Orleans of Buddy Bolden in which there was little recorded history. In performance, however, the same text presents a series of absences. Not only must the street signs be imagined, but the linguistic signs that stand in for them disappear as the actor speaks as part of the ephemerality of performance. Linguistically and visually, the search for Bolden is displaced from material clues or artifacts, back onto the act of storytelling itself.

The Actor narrates almost continuously, interrupted by short scenes of enacted dialogue between other characters, until in the midst of a description of Bolden playing jazz, the Actor moves up to the elevated stage to join the band that has been playing music throughout, and he makes the slow transition into being Bolden. As “Tiger Rag” plays, the performer begins to take off his sport coat and white shirt to reveal Bolden’s red shirt beneath.

ACTOR: He was the best and loudest and most loved jazzman of his time, but never professional in the brain. He was obsessed with the magic of air, he would drag a net of air in and dress it in notes and make it last, wanting to leave it up there in the sky like air transformed into a cloud. Urging the band to play so loud the music would float down the street saying –

(Actor speaks in Bolden’s voice for the first time. A cornet is placed in his hands.)

BOLDEN: Cornish, come on, put your hands through this window. Come on, put your hand through this window. And Lewis and Cornish and Mumford and I sending the notes forward and forth and forth till, as I could see them, their bursts of air were animals fighting the room.

(Tiger Rag ends abruptly.) (Rose 4-5)

The shift from Actor to Bolden, significantly, does not divide the play into obvious binaries of past and present, or description and enactment. If the Actor as researcher is understood to be
speaking from both the present of the performance (the audience’s present) and the present of
the story (the represented present of the narration), Bolden often speaks from an ambiguous
and complex temporal and spatial perspective.

Perhaps the clearest example occurs in a scene at the end of the first act of the play,
immediately before intermission, when Bolden and Pickett explain and separately demonstrate
how Bolden attacked Pickett, cutting his face and turning him into “The Fly King.” The scene
is framed twice as a recounted story: first, when Webb asks Pickett “how did this happen?,”
then when Robin, on the other side of the performance space, asks Buddy “How did you break
your arm?”

**BOLDEN:** I – can’t – remember.

(Robin goes back to cutting carrots. Bolden stares at himself in the mirror –
suddenly alone. Pickett’s laugh distracts him.)

(Shared story from separate spaces: Pickett to Webb, and Bolden to himself.)

**BOLDEN:** Nine o’clock. Storm rain outside...Tom Pickett walks in.

**PICKETT:** I see business has improved! Got time for a good haircut Buddy?

**BOLDEN:** I think he said that, something like that. I lay a towel over his shirt and
knot it at the back of his neck. I hand the bottle to him. (Rose 46)

In performance the characters remain at opposite ends of the acting space, Bolden near Nora’s
table, downstage left on the audience’s level, and Pickett in the entry aisle within the crowd,
telling their shared story in spatial isolation. Although the printed stage directions imply
interaction, the actions are mimed separately.

**BOLDEN:** You ever had your stomach shaved Pickett? Eh? Keep still! (pulls towel
tighter as Pickett starts to get up)

**PICKETT:** Jesus, Bolden...
BOLDEN: (soaping Pickett’s chest) You ever had your stomach shaved? Women love a smooth stomach. You know that, too? Nora loves a smooth stomach...you know that?

PICKETT: (last frantic attempt at humor) Hey man – is it going to cost extra for the chest shave? Then he slices off my nipple. I don’t think he meant to, was probably an accident. But that got me shouting. He starts shaving very fast now. Small cuts. I was crying from the pain. I got my thumb into the wrist with the razor and I broke free. That’s when I really got badly cut on the face, this one here.

BOLDEN: I still have the razor and we stand looking at each other. The blood drooling of his chin onto the wet shredded shirt. He takes a quick look at himself in the mirror and the tears just rush out of his face. God what’s the matter with me. (47)

As the scene progresses, Bolden describes Pickett smashing a mirror with Bolden’s leather strop as Picket swings the strop and Pickett picking up pieces of mirror and skimming it across the room. Each imagined smash is punctuated by the drummer’s cymbal crash. Only after this point do the actors move slowly together, holding the strop and towel between them in tension as they move and twist in a stylized fight.

The mode of simultaneous description and stylized enactment that is used in several crucial scenes in the play, including the lengthy climactic parade scene, in which Bolden goes mad, creates a perceptual tension that is at the heart of its intermedial imitation. Within the historic avant-garde, this particular strategy has typically been understood as a device that causes spectators to become detached or estranged from what they are seeing. A number of assumptions about the nature of theatre spectatorship underlie theories that link “literarization”
to “alienation,” namely that the increased intellectual demand of interpreting and imagining would lessen the emotional and affective impact of the performance, shifting spectators from the (automatic and “lowbrow”) passive sphere of bodily response to the engaged, critical (and “highbrow”) sphere of the mind. Indeed, both because of their historical association and the association of “difficulty” with sophistication, the techniques of telling rather than showing, and of simultaneous showing and telling are conventions that are likely to be perceived as literary conventions, especially in the context of literary adaptation.

While *Coming Through Slaughter* exploits the perception that such “non-dramatic” devices introduce literary elements into theatrical performance, it also explores the related theoretical proposition that live performance has the capacity to theatricalize, rather than “literalize” poetic language. In staging poetic text as poetic text, theatre draws attention to the embodied nature of spoken language, and highlights the affective and emotional “technologies” of speech. To return to the example of the fight between Bolden and Pickett, it is significant that the actors’ verbal performance resembles that of a poetry reading, or spoken word performance, with cadences and emphases that draw attention to the sound and rhythm of the language, for the sake of the language, rather than imitating realistic dialogue. The affective impact of a scene in which Pickett has his nipple sliced off and is thrown through a glass window, and Buddy has his arm broken at the elbow, is produced through sonic, rather than visual, violence. The hard breathing of the characters and the shrill, drawn-out expressions of pain imitate and echo the “squawks” of the jazz trumpet, and are punctuated by percussion, drawing connections between “poeticity” and musicality.

Language, perceived this way, becomes another sensory experience in a production that highlights the most affecting aspects of Michael Ondaatje’s text. By this I mean that language is part of dramaturgy that regularly introduces moments that exploit theatre’s power to trigger
the spectator’s automatic physiological response. Perhaps the most obvious of these affecting scenes is Olivia’s oyster dance. Reportedly one of the most memorable scenes of the play, the oyster dance featured a performer clothed only in seashell pasties and bikini, who seductively shimmied an oyster from her forehead down her greased body to her foot without dropping it. The set-up of the scene, as part of the opening narration of Bolden’s geography, winks at itself as a moment of pure spectacle. The Actor’s introduction of the dance as commodity – “no matter how much [money] you took with you, you would lose it all in paying for extras” – reveals the dance as curiosity and circus trick, and casts the Actor momentarily as barker. The skill in balancing and manipulating the descent of the oyster, and of course the sensual suggestiveness of its movement down her body, is the pure content of the dance, which arrests the narrative. In the tradition of the variety theatre, then, as a theatrical device the incorporation of the oyster dance borrows from the avant-garde aesthetics of shock or stimulation as an opening strategy, even as it is enfolded into the summoning and controlling monologue of the Actor. The music, parading brass bands, and dance that punctuate the entirety of the performance create similar effects, offering an explicitly spectacular complement to the play’s verbal performances.

If the use of highly physical, spectacular scenes of action was, as Ondaatje suggested in his notes on *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, a way to “balance the amount of talk,” the play’s site-specific setting can also be seen as a counter-balance to the lyrical and “high-brow”

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11 My line of reasoning here borrows from Tom Gunning’s arguments about the Cinema of Attractions, which itself draws on concepts from the theatrical avant-garde. In Gunning’s terminology we could say that Olivia is an “attraction;” her dance is “that which aggressively subjects the spectator to “sensual or psychological impact” (41). Like the cinema of attractions, theatrical moments such as the oyster dance “directly solicit spectator attention, inciting visual curiosity, and supplying pleasure through an exciting spectacle” (40). In such moments “[t]heatrical display dominates over narrative absorption, emphasizing the direct stimulation of shock or surprise at the expense of unfolding a story or creating a diegetic universe” (41).
literary qualities of the piece. In this regard, *Coming Through Slaughter*’s exploration of the possibilities of theatricalizing Ondaatje’s poetic text was shaped in part by the changing ways that Necessary Angel defined itself as an experimental theatre company at the time. As Michael McKinnie observes, the historical perception of Necessary Angel as an ‘innovative’ theatre company, as it has most commonly been described in press materials, “is often linked to the environmental productions that Necessary Angel mounted through the 1980s” (125), despite the fact that such site-specific productions “formed only a minority of Necessary Angel’s repertoire” (126). *Coming Through Slaughter*, which was performed at the Silver Dollar Tavern in Toronto, was both the last of the company’s environmental productions of the decade, and the last before the company’s near-cessation of such performances (McKinnie 128). The year 1989, which also saw the production of Necessary Angel’s *Newhouse* in the William Bolton Arena in Toronto’s Annex, thus marks a culmination of a defining period in the company’s history.

Don Kugler, reflecting on the development process in 2005, suggests that within this particular historical context the choice to do *Coming Through Slaughter* in a non-traditional theatre space was somewhat of a foregone conclusion:

In thinking about adapting the play, we had always thought about it as a site-specific adaptation, which Necessary Angel kind of had a history of – almost we were burdened with a history of it, it was almost implicit or assumed that we would be doing that – but for this play it seemed perfect. So we spent a lot of time researching bars, appropriate bars, and eventually we came up with the Silver Dollar; for those that know Toronto, it’s more or less the corner of Spadina and College, just on the northeast corner. It was a kind of rundown seedy dive, known primarily for hookers and late night drinking, and
is not a fashionable bar in any way. It seemed like a perfect location for us. (Lowry, “emigrations”)

The fit of the venue to the material, as Kugler describes it, appears to stem from a combination of its perceived authenticity – its musical and ‘seedy’ associations – and from the interactive possibilities opened up by the space. The shape of the bar, which had a long narrow aisle down the centre, beside a small six-foot by six-foot bandstand, with tables to each side, left only the limited space in the aisle, the bandstand, and between the tables, for performance.

The fact that the space was a functioning bar, left open to the public with a cover charge, opened the possibility of unusual audience compositions for a theatrical production. Unwitting spectators who merely wanted to have a drink, could, and did, come in during the performance. The choice of location, rooted as it was in the company’s practices of the time, was thus a significant element in framing the production as “edgy” or “experimental.”

The intimate audience configuration and close proximity of actors and spectators also likely gave an additional visceral charge to scenes like Olivia’s oyster dance. If mood, as Erin Hurley suggests, is that which frames and preconditions the way in which we ascribe emotions

12 Significantly, however, the choice to use the Silver Dollar Room was not viewed by the adapters as an overtly political commentary on either the novel or what it meant to stage it in Toronto. When asked by interviewer Glen Lowry about the relationship between the choice of venue and the problematic of “the space of race” within Ondaatje’s novel, Kugler responds:

Was it an issue that came up? Oddly no. It was almost a uniformly black ensemble, the exceptions were Julian Riching who played Belloq and Graham Greene, a native actor, who we cast as Webb. We were interested in issues of race, primarily in casting, but it never was a subject in the show itself. (“emigrations”)

While the venue might encourage questions about potential zones of contact through the superimposition of the sexualized violence and racial segregation of turn-of-the-century New Orleans onto a “seedy” Toronto bar and the marginalized communities it might represent, for the adapters in the moment such potential frisson was merely celebrated as being exciting and adding layers that enhanced the atmosphere.
to our physiological responses to particular stimuli, the environment of the Silver Dollar Tavern likely primed audiences for an evening of sensory pleasures.

**NECESSARY ANGEL AND THE PRESENT – *DIVISADERO: A PERFORMANCE***

Between 1989 and 2009, when the workshop of the *Divisadero* adaptation, then titled *When My Name Was Anna*, was staged, Necessary Angel shifted from a company known for its site-specific work, to a company that performed primarily in traditional theatre spaces. It also moved from the artistic directorship of founder Richard Rose to that of Daniel Brooks in 2003. A shift in the culture of the production company, reflecting a similar shift in the culture of post-alternative, “innovative” Canadian theatre, is evident in the adaptive choices made in the production. While a particular engagement with the literary as a site of exploration remains constant, the formal ways in which this manifests itself reflect the shifting environment of theatrical experimentation.

The shift in Necessary Angel’s approach to creating “innovative” or boundary-pushing work between 1989 and 2009 can be seen as a perceived change in the “frontier” of theatricality. From disrupting conventional perceptions about where theatre is performed or about the competing power of the word and the image, the energies of the *Divisadero* adaptation shift to exploring the nature of performance itself, challenging expectations about the amount of action, literal and narrative, that separates the dramatic reading from theatre. From offering an “edgy” environmental experience to the spectator, the emphasis shifts to offering a challenging cerebral and imaginative experience. Despite being text-heavy and seemingly text-centric, *Divisadero: A Performance* reflects a number of broader contextual shifts that locate it within an evolving tradition of non-mainstream theatre in Canada.
A significant reflection of the passage of time between *Coming Through Slaughter* and *Divisadero* is the adaptation’s development process. In contrast to previous adaptations of Ondaatje’s work, where the idea to stage a complete theatrical adaptation came first, such that the project was imagined as a finished work from the outset, *Divisadero* emerged as a theatrical project after several earlier stages of exploration. Despite its extensive integration of written text, it follows a process of development that more closely resembles that of a devised theatre piece than a traditional text-driven creation; process was given more prominence than the dramatic realization of a preexisting text.

Although Ondaatje suggests that he “always imagined *Divisadero* as having a public voice in some way, so it wasn’t a book read mentally, but heard as well” (Taylor), the first phase of the adaptation process focused exclusively on a separate musical exploration of the novel’s material. While watching singer/songwriter Justin Rutledge perform at Harbourfront, Ondaatje apparently immediately saw Rutledge as the expressly silent but central character of Coop, and thought that Coop could be represented musically (Taylor). Shortly thereafter Rutledge met Ondaatje and the two spent the next year collaborating on music for the play, specifically on a collection of songs written from the perspective of Coop (Hune-Brown) eventually released in 2010 as the album *The Early Widows*.

In the next phase of the adaptive process, Ondaatje approached director Daniel Brooks. Brooks and Ondaatje conducted a number of initial workshops with actors Maggie Huculak, who narrated the CBC radio dramatizations of Ondaatje’s *In The Skin of a Lion* and *The English Patient*, and Tom McCamus. Amy Rutherford and Liane Balaban were brought in as additional actors at a later point, and Justin Rutledge, who in early workshops initially played music while McCamus acted all the male parts, was ultimately asked to perform as a second male actor and as a musician.
Michael Ondaatje, in a videotaped interview with Necessary Angel’s Director of Marketing and Outreach, Lucy Eveleigh, describes the collaborative process as a “very mutual shaping of the text” (“Michael and Daniel Part 1”). Daniel Brooks in the same interview also describes collaboration as the key shaping force in development:

I wouldn’t even be able to say when there was a thing that we would call the script, when such a thing existed. Really we were taking the novel into meetings with either just the two of us, or Maggie, and then Tom McCamus, or Jennifer [Weiss] and Simone [Urdl]. And slowly picking what we wanted to read and who we wanted to read it. […] But it really also formed around the people who came in. So [Michael] wrote [Mancini’s monologue] for Tom. Tom’s presence dictated a certain way of treating the father. Having Maggie, who’s, um, over the age of thirty, dictated how we needed to treat time.

Elsewhere, Brooks emphasizes the intuitive evolution of the piece, saying that “[n]o dramaturgical or structural decisions were made at the outset,” and that “[t]he theatre piece has developed by feel” (Hune-Brown).

That the development process was not initially framed by the expectation of creating a particular kind of finished theatrical product is significant, given the text-oriented adaptation that resulted. Rather than explicitly setting out to create a piece “faithful” to the original language of the source novel, the team actually began with explorations in a more traditional vein of dramatization. Michael Ondaatje describes how Brooks’ shaping of the workshops led to the emergence of the current performance:

I remember the first workshops: everyone was moving around, all over the place, and recreating the world of the farm and so forth. And gradually it got stricter and stricter, and down to four microphones, and you’re locked around them. I loved the idea but I
was a bit nervous. I think it’s very brave, deciding to do it this way. I think it in fact doubles the emotion of the violence and the sex. Having people very still on stage and…barely looking at each other…and so when they do look at each other it’s kind of huge. (“Michael and Daniel Part 1”)

The product of a development process that had no pre-existing goals of dramatization, Divisadero: A Performance goes further than the 1989 adaptation of Coming Through Slaughter in its “literarization” of performance and its “theatricalization” of language. In its radical reduction of enactment, and its almost exclusive commitment to exploring the theatricality of the speaking performer, and the performativity of language, the adaptation may in fact go the furthest of any Canadian adaptation to date in exploring the theatre’s potential for intermedial imitation of literature. Like Coming Through Slaughter, it manufactures, or works to exaggerate, tensions between the attentive and imaginative mode of engagement demanded of spectators by the spoken text and their direct sensory perception of the performers’ physicality, but these tensions are amplified by a script that retains all the “non-dramatic” markers of the novel’s language, and by a platform staging that resists any mimetic treatment of the onstage space. In doing so, the adaptation draws attention to the theatre’s primary technologies of feeling that are not linked to narrative action – the live performer and his/her voice.

The experimentalism of Divisadero: A Performance may be easier to see if we approach it as a work that attempts to raise fundamental questions about the medium of theatre. The choice to call the 2011 adaptation Divisadero: A Performance, for example, draws attention to a question that is equally relevant for the 1989 adaptation of Coming Through Slaughter: what is the difference between performing a pre-existing written text, such as a novel, and adapting it? The word “performance” in comparison to a word like “dramatization”
suggests a greater degree of proximity: while “dramatization” suggests that modifications have been made to structure as well as content, “performance” seems to imply that the same work is “merely” embodied, enacted “as is.” The Divisadero subtitle thus announces, on one hand, a potentially reassuring promise of closeness, a presentation of Ondaatje’s book that is seemingly “the same, but with actors.” On the other hand, the subtitle also announces a distance that is likely more important to its creators: the distance between traditional theatrical adaptations and this type of innovative, even experimental, exploration. Interpreted by a number of reporters and reviewers as a warning,¹³ the title after the colon strategically positions the piece as a work that falls in between traditional categories and expectations. The self-conscious subtitle, I would argue, acknowledges performance as a kind of adaptation. As Linda Hutcheon points out,

>[i]n a very real sense, every live staging of a printed play could theoretically be considered an adaptation in its performance. The text of a play does not necessarily tell an actor about such matters as the gestures, expressions and tones of voice to use in converting words on a page into a convincing performance; it is up to the director and actors to actualize the text and to interpret and then recreate it, thereby in a sense adapting it for the stage. (Hutcheon, Theory 39)

In keeping with the expectations set up by the subtitle, the production of Divisadero: A Performance, more closely resembled a staged reading of the novel than a traditional dramatization. The first act of Divisadero: A Performance tells the story of how the childhood shared by Anna (Maggie Huculak), her adopted sister Claire (Liane Balaban), and the family

¹³ See, for example, J. Kelly Nestruck’s review, “Divisadero: Dramatic Hybrid Ranges from Spellbinding to Murky.”
farmhand, Coop (Justin Rutledge), was shattered by violence when the father discovered the sexual relationship that developed between Anna and Coop. Coop, we learn in the monologue before the first intermission, fled the farm after the father’s assault, and became a gambler and card mechanic in Tahoe, successfully fixing a game of Poker and defeating an influential group of “Born-Agains” named “The Brethren,” and in the process forcing himself into exile. The second act of the play recounts Coop’s life in Santa Maria in the years following his cheating of The Brethren, and his relationship with the drug addict Bridget (Amy Rutherford). Drawn by his attraction to Bridget back into Tahoe, Coop is blackmailed into fixing a card game for Gil, Bridget’s lover and/or pimp. Hours away from the second almost-fatal attack of his life, the result of his refusal to cooperate with Gil, Coop crosses paths with Claire, in town for business. When Coop disappears, his body and memory terribly damaged, Claire finds him, attempts to rehabilitate him, and eventually takes him home to be reunited with her father. At the end of the second act, Anna, whose story has been absent from the narrative (although Huculak, as a speaking narrator, has not been), describes her life’s journey after her father discovered her naked in Coop’s arms, how she ran away, eventually settling and becoming a writer.

As even this brief summary suggests, the exceptional amount of time treated in the represented story and the significant ellipses and absence of causality between events flout the classical rules as to what kind of subject matter should be presented on stage. But more significant than the epic scope of the piece is the manner of its presentation. Throughout the performance the narrative is recounted, rather than enacted. Events that could be shown as if unfolding in the present moment are instead described, always in the past tense. Although Maggie Huculak speaks the majority of the text, the narration is shared by Huculak, Balaban, McCamus and Rutherford, though notably not by Rutledge, in their respective characters. Each
narrator, however, remains an “external” narrator, in that they are never understood to be present in the time of the events they describe. Brief exchanges of dialogue are performed facing forward, without realistic interaction, and are thus signaled as quotations within the spoken narration.

The piece is thus a performance akin to performed poetry. Its dominant mode is that of recitation, of written language delivered directly to a listening audience. This platform performance style is achieved in part through a number of deliberately restrictive staging choices. The set consisted of two wide square white archways or frames, one set behind and slightly narrower than the other. The stage was otherwise bare, but for four microphones spaced equally within the centre frame. The space between the inner and outer frames formed a dimly lit, visible “wing,” where, after certain monologues, actors moved from the microphones into the margins, and vice versa. Most often characters sat on plain metal chairs in this liminal dark space, turned so that their faces were not visible to the audience. In many cases this functioned to create a spatial juxtaposition; the shadowy outline of the father made present during Anna’s speeches about her first romantic encounters with Coop, for example. Rutledge’s visibility as he quietly played the guitar stood out as the one exception in which the side space created a juxtaposition of action. Traditional entrances and exits into an offstage space took place through cut out areas in the dark backdrop behind the back archway. The question of who was standing at the microphone and speaking, and who else was visible on stage, formed the central organizing principle of the piece on a formal level. The presence of a grouping of actors at the microphones typically indicated their presence within a mutually experienced “scene.” For example, in the first act, when the described events focused on Anna and Claire’s childhood with Coop, those three actors would stand side by side at the microphones. In the second act Maggie Huculak’s blocking proved to be an exception to the
rule, when she commented on, and was present onstage for, events in Tahoe that Anna was not present for. Her unique appearance as an external narrator in these situations reinforces her special role as the framing narrator of the piece. With few exceptions each actor was locked to his or her particular microphone. Huculak and Balaban, despite being on stage together, co-narrating shared experiences, never shared a microphone, or moved from one microphone to another. In one early scene, Rutledge, as Coop, sang and played guitar while travelling the stage, eventually coaxing Anna and Claire into singing along. In this distinctive moment of staging, he briefly entered into the defined private space of the microphone, sharing it with each woman in passing.

Through these moments of variation, the staging also acquires thematic functions. The microphones offer a spatial way of communicating the isolation of each character, the separateness of each individual’s experience and memory, despite their roles as participants in, or witnesses of, the same event. In this context Coop’s relative spatial freedom highlights his presence as the central absence at the heart of the narrative. Coop only ever speaks short lines of dialogue. He has no extended monologue and thus never speaks in the first person. As the only character who is active in the spaces between the microphones as well as in the margins of the stage space, his movement traces lines throughout the performance space that echo the lines of connection between narratives created by his presence in the novel. In the second act, his perceptions and reactions are available only through the third person narration of Anna – which, the last monologue of the play suggests somewhat ambiguously, may be an imagined reconstruction.

While the staging offered a few isolated and confined moments of movement and interaction, the overwhelming impression of the piece was stasis. The limitation of visual interest, and the deliberate restriction of traditionally dominant signs of the stage, were part of
an attempt to shift the audience’s attention to the experience of listening. As Brooks told one interviewer, “I became increasingly interested in how far we could go with sound, with text, creating an aural experience with a very limited physical experience” (Gallant). The emphasis of the aural over the visual and the imagined over the directly perceived can be seen as literarizing techniques, imitating the process of reading. Viewed through the historical practices of the theatrical avant-garde, the same techniques can also be read as an exploration of the affective power of language. As editor Jean Graham-Jones points out in a special issue of *Theatre Journal* dedicated to the subject of hearing theatre, the radiophonic experience, which draws attention to the ways in which sound “split[s] and multiplie[s], disembodie[s] and recorporialize[s]” the human body, was logically attractive to avant-garde theatre practitioners including Marinetti, Khlebnikov, Brecht, Foreman, and Artaud (390). Of particular interest to such practitioners was the relationship between sound, affect and emotion; the ability of sound and language to produce physical sensation and emotion, to reach the spectator, as it were, internally.

The process-driven experimentalism of *Divisadero: A Performance* reveals connections to this avant-garde tradition in its conscious exploration of the relationships between actor and spectator, words and actions, affect and emotion. Both Daniel Brooks and Maggie Huculak have commented on the extensive effort both spent in examining the balance between what Maggie’s performing body might communicate to the audience, and what her words might communicate in her execution of the role of Anna. Their descriptions of the process reveal an anxiety that meanings produced by the emoting body might take over or exceed those produced by the spoken words. As Brooks explained,

[t]hat’s what I feel when she’s too emotional. That that much emotion does not permit her to convey the meanings that are in the text. And an audience will experience the
problem that a person’s having as opposed to the thoughts that the text carries. And I’m much more interested in the thought […]. For instance you can enter into, let’s say, a paragraph, think of a paragraph of text. If she’s carrying a certain emotion with her, she knows where she starts and she knows where she finishes and she can ride that emotion. But if she doesn’t have the emotion she actually has to know in much more detail what she’s doing, as she moves through the text. Emotion also makes an actor feel like they’re achieving something. In fact they may not be achieving anything, and they may be obscuring the more delicate work […]. It’s not emotion, per se, it’s whether emotion is serving the meaning being conveyed to an audience. Whether the emotion is appropriate, whether it is a distraction, an unnecessary addition, that then begins to bring us into the experience of the actor on stage as opposed to, I think, where I think the show actually takes place, is between the audiences’ ears. (“Michael and Daniel Part 2”)

As a performer, Huculak found the demand to resist experiencing emotion while delivering the text particularly challenging. In a separate conversation with Eveleigh, she describes the affecting power of the words as something separate from her own performance, which also had an independent physiological impact on her.

Rehearsing this, it did destroy me. These words continue to destroy. I felt I was the audience often, because every line seemed to have so much deep effect on me, and it does, and that’s fantastic, but what was crucial was that […] the audience was the audience and I was not, that I didn’t participate in the result of the writing, the impact of the writing, so that the impact could be elsewhere. And that was hard, that was very hard. Because I didn’t want to deaden myself to the writing. I didn’t want to distance
myself from the writing, or to inure myself to the writing. That was the constant balance” (“Maggie Huculak Part 1”).

Brooks, similarly, describes the effort to restrict the impact of the actor’s experience of emotion on the audience as “a balancing act.”

Although Brooks’ desire to direct audience attention away from the shared physical space of the performance to the intimate, cerebral space of the spectator’s imagination can clearly be read as a strategy that imitates the cognitive experience of reading, it is worth noting that for the other performers on stage, the restriction on emotion, and on naturalistic acting techniques in general, was not imposed. The contrast between acting and speaking styles underscores the effort to make Huculak’s performance the centre of the literary experience of the adaptation. While Huculak, who also was the performer in the radio adaptations of Ondaatje’s *In the Skin of a Lion* and *The English Patient*, spoke in a resonant, full, radio “reading voice,” Balaban, a film actress making her theatrical debut, spoke with clipped realistic intonation. Rutherford, as Bridget, spoke in a breathy voice, quite close to the microphone, emphasizing the mediated quality of her voice – an element that was played up further when distortion effects were applied during her performance of *London Calling* by the Clash. McCamus’ performance, particularly in the role of Mancini, hewed most closely to the familiar contemporary performance style one would associate with Daniel Brooks’ direction. His Mancini monologue was delivered rapidly, with verbal habits and pacing that gave the impression of a personal idiom. Rutledge, a musician without any theatrical training, performed his few speaking lines competently, but the quality of the delivery flagged him as a theatrical amateur. The variety of performance styles and skill levels drew significant attention to the performers as performers, and thus to the performance event itself. In this context, the role of Anna, the primary narrator whose long speeches form the introduction and conclusion
of the performance, carries the weight of establishing and maintaining the literary “mood” of the piece, while performances that operate within a more traditional dramatic mode of characterization, offer relief from what is ultimately a very taxing listening experience.

When I saw the workshop production of When My Name Was Anna in 2009, and again when I saw Divisadero: A Performance during its first run in 2011, my companions commented extensively on how difficult they found the task of concentrating on listening for the full duration of the performance. While this was not my own experience, I have heard other acquaintances linking their inability to maintain focus to their sense of emotional detachment and personal disengagement from the production. Although it is difficult to substantiate such responses without a more thorough study of audience response, it does appear that the experience of reception that takes place “between the ears,” as Brooks says, is an intrinsically challenging one. Of particular interest here is recent research on cognition and theatre that indicates that a spectator’s capacity to pay attention and to store information as memory is affected by the types of sensory input he or she receives. As cognitivist Bruce McConachie suggests, recent studies on the way that the brain perceives human actions suggests that “when they pay attention to intentional human action (in a performance or anywhere else), spectators unconsciously mirror the actions of social others and use this cognitive information to read their minds directly. Although audiences must also interpret spoken language and engage in other mental operations when they watch actors performing, interactional simulation seems to be primary” (79). The staging priorities of Divisadero: A Performance moves in the direction of inverting this relationship, such that language is responsible for communicating significant amounts of information, and the restricted action of the piece effectively withholds information, as compared to realistic action. Attention, as McConachie points out, is likely largely automatic; the mind synthesizes all the sensory percepts that surround the spectator in
the theatre (25). However, it is possible that the restricted focus on the speaking performer requires greater attention in order to perceive the subtler clues of facial expressions, restrained still bodies, and speaking voices. Spoken language, in perceptual experience, McConachie points out, also carries its own relevant “body language”: “the voice is largely a product of muscles and manipulated air; spectators can feel muscular tension in the voice just as they experience it in the tension of other muscles that are more available for visuomotor perception” (75). Processing the content of language, figuring out what the words mean, is “a part of the more general mental effort to understand communicative gestural units. As a system of grammar and semantics, discourse works alongside of movement for audiences; it does not stand alone” (92). Part of the experiment of Divisadero: A Performance, then, is in trying to create an experience of reception in which the restraint of communicative physicality in performance shifts perceptual resources onto the processing of language.14

PERFORMANCE, INTERMEDIALLY, AND NEW DIRECTIONS IN THEATRICAL ADAPTATION

Divisadero: A Performance marks not only the contemporary endpoint in the forty-year history of theatrical adaptations of Ondaatje’s writing – a history that itself represents the trend of experimental, intermedial and interdisciplinary approaches to Canadian literary stage adaptations – but also stands out as one end of the continuum of literary adaptive practices.

Conceived as “an exploration of the intimate relationship between the speaker and the listener

14 The tax that listening places on the attention and memory of spectators can be read as a kind of perceptual difficulty that is itself associated with the quality of the literary. Perhaps the most famous formulation of this idea is Russian Formalist Victor Shklovsky’s concept of the “defamiliarization” technique of art. “The purpose of art,” Shklovsky writes, “is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects ‘unfamiliar,’ to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic in itself and must be prolonged” (18).
and of language's ability to weave a magical spell” (“Ondaatje’s Divisadero”), the adaptation is notable for its willingness to forgo the fulfillment of traditional theatrical expectations in order to explore what the performance of literary language does – that is, what effect it has on both performer and receiver. In contrast to the earlier Ondaatje adaptations of Coming Through Slaughter and The Collected Works of Billy the Kid, Divisadero: A Performance does not try to balance action and “talk” through structures of alternation or juxtaposition; nor is it deeply invested in traditional principles like narrative coherence, development, or resolution. Despite their episodic and fragmented structure, both earlier adaptations nonetheless establish narrative arcs. Beginning at the end, they announce their protagonists’ fates, then piece together facts, anecdotes and individual perspectives to create tentative biographies of Buddy Bolden and Billy the Kid, ultimately arriving at an endpoint that circles back to the beginning of the play. The adapters of Divisadero: A Performance, in pursuing an understanding of the effect (and affect) of spoken language in performance, are willing to let the goals and intentions of the piece be less clear, and even to thwart typical satisfactions like closure, pushing past a conclusion that feels like a “natural” ending to a more cerebral final moment.

It is this rejection of traditional theatrical expectations that indicates that Divisadero: A Performance may represent a future direction for the development of Canadian literary adaptations. Within the broader body of Canadian literary stage adaptations, the use of intermedial, interdisciplinary techniques is quite common. Indeed, “pure” dramatic adaptations, in which narrative is communicated exclusively through depicted action and dialogue, are the exception, rather than the rule. In this sense, the vast majority of adaptations use what Werner Wolf would call intermedial references, if not intermedial imitation. What makes Divisadero: A Performance’s approach exceptional is, we could say, its lack of fidelity to the theatre (as traditionally understood). Whether or not Divisadero: A Performance anticipates future
productions that share the same adaptive priorities, it highlights a new set of questions that may be key to the opening of new frontiers in adaptation. Rather than ask how we might translate literary texts into plays, or how we might cite, or approximate literary elements using theatrical conventions, it asks what happens when we perform literature. Rather than attempt to find new forms for familiar narrative content, it asks how we might re-experience familiar textual rhythms and phrasings. Finally, rather than ask how an adaptation might service the strengths of both its source and destination art forms, it asks how we might imagine new forms that blur and exceed the conventional boundaries of the novel or the theatre as we understand them, to create something at once performative and literary, live and textual, perceived and imaginatively experienced.
5. CANADIAN LITERARINESS, THEATRICAL “FIT”: FORMAL TENDENCIES AND CURRENT DIRECTIONS IN CANADIAN LITERARY STAGE ADAPTATIONS

My primary concern over the past three chapters has been to offer detailed portraits of individual adaptations, in order to highlight the ways that multiple, specific contextual factors have influenced the kinds of interpretive strategies used by adapters and audiences. The picture that emerged in each case was a particular snapshot of the interactions amongst adapters, texts, and circumstances in a given place and time. Although my case studies have a rough chronological arrangement, beginning with James Reaney’s first workshops for Wacousta! in 1976 and concluding with the 2011 production of Necessary Angel’s Divisadero: A Performance, I have endeavored to avoid the suggestion that the history of Canadian literary stage adaptation follows a linear evolution from one set of preoccupations to another. In my research I have found that the opposite is true: despite significant changes in the material and cultural environments of production over the past four decades, it is possible to trace a number of formal continuities that persist over time amongst Wacousta!, The Handmaid’s Tale, The Penelopiad, Coming Through Slaughter and Divisadero: A Performance, and beyond, to the broader body of Canadian literary stage adaptations. However, while every adaptation is subject to the unique exigencies of theatrical production, making each performance somewhat idiosyncratic, the desire to innovate and find models and materials that work, and to do so by gathering inspiration from Canadian literature, has been a consistent feature of Canadian literary adaptation.

In the space that remains I attempt to connect the key formal tendencies and theoretical preoccupations that emerge out of my case studies to trends that appear to persist across the
broader body of Canadian literary stage adaptations, and over the roughly thirty-five years that Canadian literature has been re-imagined for the Canadian stage. I propose that we can identify at least four ways that adapters have used the process of adaptation, and the process of engaging with literary works, to explore particular aspects of theatrical representation. The first of these trends, I suggest, is the tendency for adapters to be attracted to, and engage primarily with, the perceived “Canadian content” of a literary source. Although adaptation may initially have provided another way for the theatre to tell “our stories” in a period of cultural nationalism when Canadian characters and settings were privileged as the natural subject material for an emerging Canadian theatre, the priority given to local narratives persists to this day. The second trend, the tendency to explore the role of storytellers, is manifested not only in the frequent appearance of dramatic narrators who act as authorial surrogates, as I argued in chapter three, but also in the extensive use of the “memory play” genre to explore the theatrical possibilities of depicting subjectivity and interiority on stage. Closely related to this interest in storytellers, a third trend, the tendency to investigate the process of storytelling, is demonstrated in the frequent use of metatheatrical, presentational staging techniques. The fourth and final trend I identify is the tendency to investigate the nature of the theatrical performance by exploring intermedial and interdisciplinary possibilities afforded by literary adaptation.

The way that these trends respond to a changing framework of nationhood represents one possible historical trajectory. *Wacousta!* clearly stands at the most nationalistic end of this continuum: its source was selected because of its Canadian subject matter and because of its relevance to Canadian literary history; its performance was understood to build a local culture supportive of Canadian theatre; and it was adapted using interpretive strategies that further gave significance to the Canadian themes and psychology expressed by the source text.
Divisadero: A Performance, stands, almost as clearly, at the other end of this scale. In advance of the 2012 remount of the production, the word “Canadian” was nowhere to be found on Necessary Angel’s web page for Divisadero. Nor, contrary to what might be expected, was there any reference to Michael Ondaatje as a celebrated Canadian author, even within the short author biography provided on the page for the production’s creative team. If the national frame entered consciously into the process of adaptation, there is no indication of it in the interviews or press materials that came out of the production. Between the two poles that these productions represent, we might locate a number of related formal strategies associated with an emphasis on storytellers and on the act of storytelling. The emphasis on storytellers, as many of my examples have suggested, is closely tied to their efficacy in hailing, defining, and maintaining audiences as members of a community. Such constructed groupings are in turn interpellated as extensions of other imagined communities. The related attraction to the celebrity of Canadian authors thus may also be a way of affirming audience identification on the basis of shared regional or national imagined communities. In this way, the fit of storytelling and the use of storytellers with the cultural preoccupations of Canadian literature reinforces the power of the national frame on an additional level. The movement from Wacousta! to Divisadero: A Performance, then, suggests a historical trajectory in which over time the emphasis on content wanes, and the frame of the national becomes less prominent both in interpretation and in marketing.

As examples of ways that adaptations have allowed Canadian theatre artists to innovate within the theatre, the four trends considered here form a second possible trajectory. We could say that this spectrum spans works that innovate within the traditional model of dramatic representation – as represented by a piece like The Stone Angel – to works that abandon the conventions and expectations of theatre, embracing instead the process and experience-
centered model of performance, such as *Divisadero: A Performance*. Consistent across this spectrum, however, is an interest in the kind of work that performance can do, and the kinds of effects, and the kind of affect, it can achieve, when it takes its inspiration from literary models.

Considered together, I suggest, these four overlapping trends present a picture of Canadian literary adaptation as offering a range of practices, motivations and interpretive strategies. In this necessarily preliminary overview of the most commonly demonstrated approaches to adaptation, I point toward ways in which dominant formal priorities reflect intersections with the cultural environment, with literary interpretive strategies, and with contemporaneous theatrical practices.

**STAGING “OUR” STORIES: CANADIANNESS, NARRATIVE CONTENT AND AUTHENTICITY**

At perhaps the most obvious level, it appears that the adaptation of Canadian literature to the Canadian stage has been motivated to a great extent by the desire to perform Canadian stories. When Canadian theatre artists turn to literary works written by Canadian authors as the basis for their creation, it is perhaps inevitable that the perceived “Canadianness,” the national paratext that frames and links both the source and its adaptation, is reinforced. Although many contemporary adapters would argue that they did not choose to adapt a specific novel because its subject matter or its author was Canadian, few publicists would resist the opportunity to advertise an adaptation’s claim of being based on a “Canadian classic” or on a book by one of “Canada’s best known authors.” And even when not a part of the active marketing of a production, when a work or author is well-known for being Canadian, nationality can continue to function as a significant paratext in reception. The perceived “Canadian content” of these adaptations, in a country where preoccupations with the pursuit of a national culture and
identity have been revived in different ways by each successive generation, has been a source of perceived value throughout the period considered here.

There are specific contexts, however, in which the capacity of adaptation to re-tell “our stories” has been given greater emphasis. James Reaney and the NDWT’s production of *Wacousta!*, as I suggested in chapter two, offers a particularly telling window into the way that the cultural nationalism of the mid-to-late-1970s created particular horizons of reception in this regard. The rhetoric of cultural nationalism is clear in the *Wacousta! Tour Report*, which articulates the touring production’s objectives and perceived cultural impact. Citing the involvement of “more than 170 workshops throughout the province with approximately 3,680 workshop participants, 44 actors, 18 production people, 5 administrators, 1 artistic director, 1 author, and dozens of teachers, sponsors and other volunteers,” the preface to the report states that “[t]hese statistics convey the continuing desire on the part of Canadians to see their own stories dramatized” (7). “Art has many purposes,” director Keith Turnbull, quoting Ronald Bryden, writes, “maintaining the health of national cultures among them” (8). “[W]e feel we must continue to break new ground, open up new communities, and share with more Canadians the drama in their own lives” (7).

Although the rhetoric of cultural nationalism faded as Canadian society moved beyond the mid-‘70s, my case studies suggest that new contextual factors continued to place emphasis on Canadian content. With funding structures in place to promote the development of Canadian plays and playwrights, and with increased competition for resources, pressure to stage established, successful Canadian plays rose, effectively creating a renewed market for Canadian literary adaptations. In 1986, in a special issue of *Canadian Theatre Review* on new play development, Elliot Hayes, writing on the frustrations of “workshopitis” in Canada, identified a gap between the desire for new Canadian plays and the disregard demonstrated by
Canadian theatre artists and audiences toward those that were created. In what he described as the pervasive “masterpiece mentality” of the time, “[t]he ‘masterpieces’ are worth producing, or watching; other plays ‘need work.’… Consequently, Canada appears an interpretive society rather than [sic] an expressive one, excelling in the performance of masterpieces while demonstrating an ironic disrespect for the living playwright” (Developing Nation 1). Nearly two decades later, in the National Post, writer Jamie Portman suggested that this Canadian reverence for established “masterpieces” had contributed to an otherwise inexplicable surge in the number of adaptations being produced on the Canadian stage. Portman’s observations echoed Hayes’ concerns about the detrimental impact of this mentality on the production of Canadian drama:

It’s one of the more perplexing – and questionable – aspects of the current Canadian theatre scene: the increasing presence on our stages of new works that aren’t really new at all but have been yanked from another art form (the novel) and reworked into a theatrical piece. [...] It’s the essential pointlessness of most of these endeavors that confound – particularly when there is so much good and original Canadian drama out there, drama that is crying out to be produced (“Novel Ideas”).

Speaking in particular of the Stratford Festival’s recent spate of adaptations, Portman exclaimed: “Stratford's attitude is particularly bewildering. It's almost as though this famed theatrical institution is trying to sell us on the preposterous notion that there's not enough quality drama, either past or present, available to fill out its seasons any more.” Portman drew specific attention to the adaptation of “quality Canadian fiction,” which, he suggested, “seems an especially hazardous enterprise.” Portman’s implication was clear: adaptation was the product of an appetite for known commodities that overshadowed the desire for quality drama.
As I argued in chapter three, the “known commodity” of Canadian literary celebrities like Margaret Atwood, as well as the availability of canonized Canadian literary “masterpieces,” have proved to be key aspects of the promotion and reception of literary adaptations as “our stories,” even when the narrative content or realities of production are not, strictly speaking, Canadian. From the early proliferation of adaptations in the mid-1970s to the present, the draw of known literary works is evident both in the number of established, or canonical, books that have been adapted, often many decades after their first publication, and in the number of successful contemporary works that have been adapted within several years of publication. For example, a number of books published between the mid-’60s and early-’70s by authors including Mordecai Richler (Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang, 1975), Farley Mowat (The Curse of the Viking Grave, 1966), Dennis Lee (Alligator Pie, 1974), and Margaret Laurence (The Stone Angel, 1964) were adapted and performed on Canadian stages within five to fifteen years, and in some cases almost immediately after publication (see appendix I). Similarly, the selection of adaptations produced between 2000 and 2010 includes several older, established works such as Robertson Davies’ Tempest-Tost [1951] (Stratford Festival, 2001), W. O. Mitchell’s Who Has Seen the Wind [1947] (Theatre Aquarius/Persephone, 2000), and Timothy Findley’s The Wars [1971] (Theatre Calgary, 2007), as well as plays based on recently published novels by established authors, such as Carol Shields’ Unless [2002] (CanStage, 2005), Jane Urquhart’s The Whirlpool [1996] (Nightswimming, 2000), and Austin Clarke’s The Polished Hoe [2002] (Obsidian, 2007).

It appears that the appeal of Canadian content, however framed, still continues to be rooted in the idea that local settings and stories have powerful community-forming and identity-defining effects. One fruitful entry point for considering ways in which adaptations have been used to interpellate particular audiences would be to look at one of the sub-genres of
Canadian literary stage adaptation, such as musical-theatre adaptations, or adaptations that target particular audiences. Some of the most successful Canadian literary adaptations, for example, have been those that deal with issues relevant to young Canadians. The trend of using adaptation to affirm and utilize works of Canadian literature for their expression of “our issues” and “our culture” is often reflected in adaptations of Canadian children’s literature created for young audiences. Joy Kogawa’s *Obasan* would be a particularly generative case study in this regard. Recounting the experiences of a young Japanese-Canadian girl during and after World War II, the novel, and Kogawa’s children’s book, *Naomi’s Road*, which tells the same story, offer a way to introduce children to a troubling part of Canadian history—the measures that the Canadian government took against Japanese-Canadians—and also the concepts of cultural difference and tolerance. The novel was adapted by playwright Paula Wing and premiered at YPT in 1992. Since then it has received more than ten productions internationally and was last performed in 2000 during Asian Heritage Month by Edmonton’s Concrete Theatre, in a production directed by Mieko Ouchi. In addition, the Vancouver Opera was also commissioned to create an opera based on *Obasan* and *Naomi’s Road*. The opera adaptation, *Naomi’s Road*, with a score by Ramona Luengen and libretto by Ann Hodges, premiered in 2005. The production, part of the Vancouver Opera in Schools touring program, toured extensively in B.C., and travelled to Lethbridge, Alberta and Ottawa, Ontario in 2006.

Although children’s plays based on Canadian poetry and fiction make up a comparatively smaller segment of youth-oriented productions, many of the major professional theatres dedicated to the creation of new works for young audiences have drawn from Canadian sources. Nova Scotia’s Mermaid Theatre, for example, has produced adaptations of Susanna Moodie’s *Roughing it in the Bush* (titled *Susanna Moodie*, 1976), Margaret Atwood and Joyce Barkhouse’s *Anna’s Pet* (1982), and Thomas Chandler Haliburton’s *The
Clockmaker, or The Sayings and Doings of Samuel Slick, of Slickville (titled Sam Slick, the Clockmaker, 1983). Several popular children’s novels, including Gordon Korman’s This Can’t Be Happening at MacDonald Hall (Cascade Theatre, 1986), Francis Duncan’s The Toothpaste Genie (Cascade Theatre, 1987) and Janet Lunn’s The Root Cellar (Erewhon Theatre of Canada, 1985), were produced in the 1980s. Another significant producer of adaptations of Canadian children’s literature, Toronto’s Young People’s Theatre (renamed the Lorraine Kimsa Theatre for Young People from 2001-2011), has adapted the works of Canadian writers including Robert Munsch (Love You Forever... and More Munsch, 2008), Dennis Lee (The Ice Cream Store and More, 1999), Bernice Thurman Hunter (That Scatterbrained Booky, 1991), and Mordecai Richler (Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang, 1978).

Although the national frame continues to be significant for the imagined community interpolated by Canadian literary adaptations, a number of examples suggest that the interest in re-telling “our stories” is also manifested in the related phenomenon of what we might call regional adaptations, in which local stories and local authors are prioritized and celebrated, with a similar community-affirming purpose. Adaptations like Theatre Calgary’s 1980 production of The Words of my Roaring, based on Robert Kroetsch’s 1966 novel of the same name, Mulgrave Road Co-Op’s collective 1982 adaptation of Alistair MacLeod’s 1976 The Lost Salt Gift of Blood, Neptune Theatre’s 1987 adaptation of Hugh MacLennan’s 1941 Barometer Rising, based on well-known works with strong regional associations, and produced only once in the region of their setting, represent the effort to re-interpret canonical regional writers and writing through the lens of the theatre. Regional adaptations, however, are also often frequently based on lesser-known works with a claim to local appeal, either because of their local authorship or because of their specific geographic content.
The flurry of adaptations based on the fiction of Sheldon Currie, a Nova Scotia author and English professor, provides the clearest recent example. The first of Currie’s fictions to be adapted to the stage, *The Glace Bay Miner’s Museum*, based on Currie’s 1995 novel of the same name, was quite successful. It not only garnered its author, Wendy Lill, a nomination for the Governor General’s award for Drama, but it also has been in regular production in Canada, the United States and Britain since its premiere at Eastern Front Theatre in 1995. Attention to the adaptation and to Currie was also created by a simultaneous film adaptation, *Margaret’s Museum*, a Canadian-British co-production, adapted by Gerald Wexler and director Mort Ransen. A significant factor in the play’s marketing and reception as it toured across the country was its identity as a work about Atlantic Canada. Set in Cape Breton and highlighting the terrible working conditions of the coal miners, *The Glace Bay Miner’s Museum* was heralded by one local paper as “the cornerstone of Nova Scotia’s arts revival” (Ron Foley MacDonald, “Miner’s Museum All Grown Up Now”). Four more adaptations based on Currie’s fictions have been performed, but their productions have primarily been limited to theatres in Atlantic Canada. Eastern Front, a company whose creative focus is the production of new work by Atlantic Canadian playwrights, also subsequently produced an adaptation of Currie’s 1988 novel *The Company Store*, adapted and directed by Eastern Front co-founder Mary Vignoe, which was first produced by Mulgrave Road Theatre in 1996, and published by Playwrights Canada Press in 1999. Currie himself has written three plays based on his published fiction. *Lauchie, Liza and Rory* and *Two More Solitudes*, based on short stories of the same names, were originally performed at Festival Antigonish in 1997 and 1998, and an

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1 Currie’s novel is itself an expansion of the title story from his 1979 collection of short stories, “The Glace Bay Miner’s Museum”. The published edition of Lill’s play states that the stage adaptation is based on the novel.
expanded version of the former was produced by Mulgrave Road Theatre and toured across Nova Scotia and to the Magnetic North Festival in Edmonton. His play *Anna’s Story*, based on his novel *Down the Coaltown Road*, was produced by Festival Antigonish in 2001 and Eastern Front Theatre in 2002. The regular regional production of adaptations of Currie’s work, with its emphasis on local culture and history, is thus closely connected to both the authentication of the work within a particular geography and to an affirmation of local community and culture.

In order to better understand the relationship between perceived content and the way that stories are framed for particular communities, future study in this area would benefit from a greater focus on reception-oriented research. When I first began this project, my investigation could be articulated as two interrelated questions about how perceptions of “Canadian literariness” shape the range of possible expression for theatrical adapters in Canada: first, how does the pressure toward the accommodation or translation of literary form, meaning, or affect, impact upon the selection and utilization of specific dramaturgical forms; and second, how do perceptions of “Canadian literariness” shape the range of interpretive strategies available to Canadian audiences when they are watching theatrical adaptations? As it has emerged and evolved, this dissertation has focused almost exclusively on the first of those two questions, largely because of the materials available. It was possible to trace the explicitly stated and contextually implicit motivations of adapters to formal choices manifested materially in performance with a degree of thoroughness and rigour. Tracing the interpretive strategies available to, and employed by, audiences – a task that would necessitate a full study of audience reception – was not possible without restricting my focus only to new works produced during the course of this study.

Moving forward, a greater focus on audience-oriented research would enable a deeper and more thorough understanding of Canadian literary stage adaptations as a response to
particular environments. First, studies of audience reception could help to map the adaptive tendencies outlined here to particular interpretive communities within the Canadian theatre, as organized across different regions, companies, models of creation, development, and conditions of production. While it is possible to think about narrative and performance elements that might serve to address or hail particular audiences and communities, any consideration of “Canadianness” and other qualities based on identification with particular imagined communities needs to also take into consideration how such meanings are produced through interpretation. Materialist studies of audience response would help to understand how adaptations service particular interpretive communities, and to explain how and why the idea of the nation persists as a frame in literary stage adaptations.

STORYTELLING AND STAGING VOICE: THE MEMORY PLAY

It seems that closely connected to the impulse to stage Canadian stories, or stories by Canadian authors, is the formal tendency of Canadian theatrical adapters to emphasize storytelling. Given the significant number of Canadian literary stage adaptations that participate in a broader trend of using dramatic conventions primarily to emphasize the subjectivity of the narrative presented on stage, it appears that a significant part of the appeal of Canadian literary sources for theatrical adapters has been the opportunity to explore theatre’s potential to convey memories, perceptions, and internal thought processes. The emphasis on what are traditionally considered elements of literary narration – the depiction of mental and perceptual subjectivity, the use of multiple tenses, and the flexible treatment of time – is ubiquitous in Canadian literary adaptations.

Indeed, while there are no obvious narrative or thematic similarities that link the theatrical adaptations of *Wacousta!, The Handmaid’s Tale, The Penelopiad, Coming Through*
While studying Ondaatje’s representations of the past in the novels *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *The Penelopiad*, two of his most challenging works, it became evident that the author consistently focuses on the power of narration as a means of organizing and conveying the narrative. The act of narration, whether in the form of a monologue or a dialogue, is a fundamental element in Ondaatje’s storytelling. The characters in these works often take on the role of narrators, providing insight into their own experiences and those of others. This strategy not only enhances the dramatic impact of the narratives but also invites the reader to engage more deeply with the stories, as they are often framed as personal memoirs or oral histories.

In *Coming Through Slaughter*, the character of ACTOR/BOLDEN, who acts as a narrator, complicates our understanding of the narrative by introducing a layer of ambiguity. This character’s dual role as both an actor and a narrator presents the events unfolding on stage as reconstructions of memories rather than immediate reality. The events are not described in the present tense, but rather in a form of the past, allowing the audience to reflect on the events as they unfold.

In *Divisadero: A Performance*, Anna’s role as a narrator provides a framework for the stories told by Claire and Coop, allowing the audience to see these narratives as part of a larger reconstruction of history. Anna’s descriptions of her experiences and memories serve as a means of understanding the past, and her narrative acts as a bridge between the present and the past.

In *Wacousta!*, the character Reginald Morton takes on the role of narrator in the third act, telling a story of events that took place many years prior to the present narrative. His dual role as both narrator and character adds a layer of depth to the story, allowing the audience to see the past through his eyes.

In conclusion, the use of narration in Ondaatje’s works is not only a strategic device to structure the narratives but also a means of engaging the reader in a deeper exploration of the past. By using these techniques, Ondaatje invites the audience to question the nature of truth and memory, and to consider how these are constructed through the act of narration.
The focus on conventions related to subjective narration as a theatrical strategy in adaptation is common enough that, in fact, all of the shorter examples discussed in previous chapters – *The Edible Woman*, *Not Wanted on the Voyage*, *No Great Mischief*, *The Whirlpool*, *Good Bones*, *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, and *The Stone Angel* – can also be said to participate in the trend. We could read this engagement with theatre’s diegetic possibilities as the product of adapters’ attempts to find “stylistic equivalencies” that link the source and adaptation. As I suggested in chapter three, for example, the emphasis on subjective narration in *The Penelopiad* and *The Handmaid’s Tale* reflects a potential fidelity to Margaret Atwood’s perceived political commitments and personal aesthetics. The search for equivalencies may also respond to broader interpretations of the priorities of Canadian writing as a body of national literature. Although the sources in question are too varied to propose a singular model of “Canadian literariness,” or a singular set of stylistic qualities or representational issues to which adapters were responding, it does appear that the adaptive strategies relate to certain interpretive emphases. For example, while Margaret Laurence’s *The Stone Angel* (1961), a realist novel treating the personal history of its 93-year old narrator, Hagar Shipley, and *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* (1970), a collection of poetry, prose and photographs that defies categorization, and *The Penelopiad* (2005), a novella interspersed with sections of poetry, song, and dramatic dialogue, represent different historical moments, different formal concerns, and the styles of different authors, all three works, broadly speaking, share an interest in the interpretation and reconstruction of the past through the act of personal recollection.

We could also say, however, that the emphasis on storytelling is a result of a particular “fit” with the aesthetics and interests of Canadian theatre practitioners. It appears that the perceived Canadian literary traits are compatible with a genre of Canadian drama, the memory
play, which is popular because of its engagement with the same representational issues. The most consistent feature of the memory play is that a significant portion of the stage action is set in a time, or times, previous to the established present of the story. The enacted scenes that take place in the past are understood to be the recollections of a character, or characters. The term “memory play” is typically said to originate with Tennessee Williams’ introduction to *The Glass Menagerie* (1945), and thus historical definitions of the term tend to be based on the model of Williams’ plays. Paul T. Nolan, who claimed to be the first to define the term in 1966, described its characteristics as follows:

One may easily identify the mechanical devices of a ‘memory play’—a single protagonist who serves as a narrator; a sequence of actions selected from his memory to show his problem or demonstrate his nature; antagonists and supporting characters who exist only in relationship to the protagonist; a staging that borrows techniques from the expressionistic theatre; a method of dialogue, half-narrative in nature, personal in tone.

(153)

Jeanette R. Malkin’s more recent definition of “memory-theatre” offers a more flexible definition based on both the formal characteristics and effects of this dramatic mode:

Memory-theatre might be doubly defined as a theatre that imitates conflicted and sometimes repressed or erased memories of a shared past; and as a theatre that initiates processes of remembrance through practices of repetition, conflation, regression, through recurrent scenes, involuntary voice, echoing, overlap, and simultaneity. (8, emphasis in original)

These definitions, written over thirty years apart, suggest that the memory play – as a historical genre – utilizes many formal conventions that are tied to particular historical moments. Yet its basic insistence on using theatre to stage subjectively constructed and recalled experience,
often to undermine the idea that unfolding action presents “true” events, places it on a continuum with the broader practices of memory-theatre. As several scholars have observed, it is this focus on the personal nature of history and historiography that has led many Canadian playwrights to work within the genre of the memory-play.² Examples of Canadian memory plays include The Occupation of Heather Rose, Memories of You (Wendy Lill), Play Memory (Joanna Glass), Lilies (Michel Marc Bouchard), Albertine, in Five Times (Michel Tremblay), Of the Fields, Lately (David French), The Hope Slide (Joan MacLeod), Getting it Straight, The Komagata Maru Incident, and Moving Pictures (Sharon Pollock).

Within Canadian literary stage adaptations, memory plays tend to operate in two distinct ways, using either what we could call a first-person memory device, as employed in The Penelopiad and The Handmaid’s Tale, or a third-person memory device in which a play’s actions are organized and motivated by one character’s perspective, although that character never acknowledges the audience, or demonstrates any agency over the way the story is presented. An example of the latter category, James W. Nichol’s The Stone Angel, is one of the most successful and well-known memory plays. As the production note in the play’s script suggests, “[t]here are only three real time scenes in the play: the first scene in Act One with Marvin in his windbreaker; the first scene in Act Two, again with Marvin in his windbreaker a little later in the day; and the last scene of the play, when Marvin returns to the hospital. Everything else happens in Hagar’s mind” (Nichol 2, emphasis in original). The fact that the majority of events on stage are Hagar’s memories is communicated primarily through narrative transitions, costume and set cues, and spatial juxtapositions that signal shifts between different

times and locations. The play opens with what the script describes as a “nightmare montage,” establishing through the dream that Hagar’s subjective viewpoint is the organizing narrational principle. Although Hagar never directly addresses or acknowledges the audience—her monologues in which she remembers and comments on the past are realistically motivated as the ramblings of an elderly woman—the scenes presented for the audience are restricted to her perspective.

While further case studies would undoubtedly reveal additional information about the contextual overlaps that form connections amongst the formal practices of Canadian authors, Canadian playwrights, directors, designers, and performers, what I find most interesting about the theatrical use of subjective narration in adaptation are the questions it raises about theatrical effect and affect. As I argued in chapter three, there is a strong connection between the way that the direct address of a performer to an audience communicates that a message is meant for “us,” and the way that such speeches invoke an imagined community, and in turn, the nation. I suggested there that the power of this theatrical relationship between performer and spectator stems to an unknown degree from the emotional labours channeled by the actor’s live performance. Taking this thought further, what is exciting to consider is the way that the formal emphasis on subjectivity, memory, and personal emotion functions to exploit the intimacy that theatrical performance can create.

Bruce Barton’s research on intimacy, outlined in his article “Subjectivity <> Culture <> Communications <> Intermedia: A Meditation on the ‘Impure Interactions’ of Performance and the ‘In-Between’ Space of Intimacy in a Wired World,” is particularly instructive in this context. Within the numerous psychological definitions that Barton surveys, he identifies several key recurring principles. He suggests, for example, that within psychological discourses intimacy is frequently understood to be “first and foremost, about one’s self,” that
is, about the ways that selfhood is established, maintained, or protected through the interpersonal dynamics of intimacy. Often considered in relation to a conception of the ‘true self’ that lies buried and protected underneath the social self, intimacy thus exists in relation to the capacity to be shared with others. He also suggests that intimacy is frequently perceived as a safe space for self-disclosure. Of greatest relevance to our current study, however, is the distinction that Barton, following Karen J. Prager, makes between intimate relationships and intimate interactions. In particular, I believe his observations on how traditional theatre dynamics replicate the situation of intimate relationships offer a particularly useful model for thinking about the particular appeals of dramatic narration as an adaptive strategy. Barton explains that:

[i]ntimacy as a relationship is apparently a time machine, heavily loaded with the frustrations of the past and expectations for the future. It is a primary process of self-definition and maintenance, a pull and push, attraction and withdrawal. It is an engagement with an other in which the components and boundaries of subjectivity are configured and demarcated via regular and regulated intersubjective negotiation. Performance that seeks an intimate relationship with its audience thus must confront its spectators’ individual and composite histories of experience with performance. (Barton 81)

Memory plays, which structure their subject material as either conscious confessions uttered by a fictive subject, or as unconscious, and unwitting, acts of self-disclosure, thus imitate the dynamics of an intimate relationship, in which performers regularly undergo the risks of vulnerability and visibility, within the conventionally, and predictably, structured interaction of a traditional theatrical configuration.
The fit of literary narratives that take up the theme of the nature of memory, subjectivity, and the construction of history with a popular form in the Canadian theatre thus goes beyond the convenience of a built-in narrational analogue. The genre of the memory play, in particular, as a way of activating the affective power, intimacy, and presence of a dramatic narrator, not only offers a way of sharing personal and local stories, but also offers a powerful tool for affirming the self-perception of Canadian audiences as the privileged, knowing audiences of adaptation.

STORYTELLING AND METATHEATRICALITY

If my case studies demonstrate the prevalence of an adaptive focus on the use of dramatic storytellers, they also reveal the tendency of Canadian literary stage adaptations to focus on the process of storytelling. Although these preoccupations are clearly linked, the formal principles involved warrant distinct consideration. To varying degrees, each of the five productions considered in my case studies highlight the unstable and manufactured nature both of representation and of history as a narrative construction. The events depicted in The Handmaid’s Tale and Coming Through Slaughter, for example, are framed as the product of historical research; the opening scenes of these two works, described in detail in chapters three and four, thematize the elusiveness of their subject matter as well as the necessary subjectivity of the (re)construction effort. Notably, in both cases, the plays raise questions about whether the past being depicted is accurate, and about how the researcher’s biases have influenced the presentation of the past, and do so earlier and more directly than in either source novel. Similarly, The Penelopiad and Divisadero: A Performance are framed as attempts at autobiography. In telling the story of their own lives, Penelope and Anna wrestle with the role that narrative plays in the construction of personal experience and reality. Both characters
comment not only on the inevitable inaccuracy of their accounts, but also on the functions of self-representation. In one of the early speeches of Divisadero: A Performance, for example, Anna articulates the organizing principle of the play’s narrative, proposing that the stories we tell are a way of understanding and therefore containing the influence others have on our lived experience:

   Everything is biographical, Lucian Freud says. What we make, why it is made, how we draw a dog, who it is we are drawn to, why we cannot forget. Everything is collage, even genetics. There is the hidden presence of others in us, even those we have known briefly. We contain them for the rest of our lives, at every border that we cross (16).

In the final speech of the performance, Anna returns to this theme: “‘We have art,’ Nietzsche says, ‘so that we shall not be destroyed by the truth.’ For the raw truth of an episode never ends, just as the terrain of my sister’s life and the story of my time with Coop are endless to me” (267). Beyond articulating the theme of the piece, Anna’s comments offer a rationalization for the production’s organization, which, considered from the perspective of conventional dramatic structure, otherwise seems weakened by its lack of clear progression and causality.

   What appears to be a trend in Canadian literary stage adaptations also connects, once again, to broader trends within the Canadian theatre and Canadian literature. As Ric Knowles suggests, there is a significant body of Canadian theatrical works that concern themselves with “explorations of history and historiography as themselves self-reflexive probings into present constructions and reconstructions of an unfixed and ever-changing past through which we (continually) remake what we ‘are’; and with various forms of contestation of the control of time and history and therefore of the forces that constitute ‘us’ as us in the present, from the perspectives of local community, class, gender and race” (Theatre of Form 77-78). Knowles goes on to argue that a theoretical preoccupation with the instability of both history and
dramatic texts has historically been manifested in presentational, non-illusionistic modes of theatrical creation:

[I]n a country in which the mainstream of theatre was dominated for many decades by imported plays and foreign directors, Canadian drama has been shaped by the fact that it has tended to occupy alternative spaces and to play an alternative role culturally: for reasons of size and budget, its treatment of historical subjects has required nonillusionistic devices such as doubling, modern dress, and rudimentary, metonymic props; moreover, its tendency under the circumstances has naturally been toward both politically alternative deconstructions of dominant national myths and metatheatrical questionings of dominant dramatic forms that it views as oppressive or colonialist in impact. (123-124)

Adapting Linda Hutcheon’s concept of Canadian “historiographic metafiction,” Knowles describes this model of Canadian theater as “historiographic metadrama,” characterized by its use of “the metatheatrical possibilities of nonillusionistic, presentational theatre to re-present the making and remaking of history as a necessarily ongoing process” (124). Knowles’ analysis of James Reaney’s The Donnellys, a trilogy written shortly before Reaney began work on Wacousta!, is a particularly useful entry point into the application of this concept to stage adaptations. Knowles writes that Reaney “sees the process of the theatrical creation and recreation of history and myth as necessary and valuable in its own right, […]and] he uses metatheatre to deconstruct any attempt at a stable or objectifiable historiography. For Reaney, however, it is the need for a constant and ongoing reimagining of history by each new audience as a communal invention of self in the shared process of creation that calls for metatheatrical self-consciousness, and for him ritual and game playing are the central activities of a theatre in which engagement with process is paramount” (124). Like Wacousta!, The Donnellys involves
a process of historiographic re-creation. While *The Donnellys* draws from historical
documents, including local newspapers and published non-fiction accounts of an historical
incident, *Wacousta!* draws on Canadian history as imaginatively constructed by John
Richardson. In *Wacousta!*, as I suggested in chapter two, metatheatrical devices underline
tensions between Richardson’s representation of history and contemporary (1970s)
perspectives on the events depicted, most notably in Pontiac’s final speech, in which he
narrates his own fate, and in the use of toy cars crossing the stage to represent the image of
modern-day Detroit under the shadow of the Renaissance Building.

As Knowles’ application of Hutcheon’s literary theory suggests, metatheatricality, like
the memory-play, also offers a significant point of overlap between certain thematic concerns
and formal strategies dominant in Canadian literature since the 1960s and Canadian theatrical
modes common in the same period. Because the theatrical adaptation of Canadian literature is,
overwhelmingly, a post-1960s phenomenon, the structural experiments and formal explorations
of postmodernism in both theatre and literature form what appears to have been a particularly
generative space of creative overlap.

For example, in *Not Wanted on the Voyage*, adapted from Timothy Findley’s novel of
the same name by Richard Rose and DD Kugler, metatheatrical staging techniques help to
establish the tone of the novel’s subversive, seriocomic revision of the biblical tale of the flood.
In particular, the choice to use Mottyl as an initial dramatic narrator helps to recreate the
novel’s critical perspective. In Findley’s version of the Noah story, Mottyl, a blind and less-
than-perfect specimen of a cat, is rejected by Doctor Noyes, who has allowed only the
healthiest, most beautiful and perfect creatures to board the ark. Mottyl stows away on the ship,
breaking Noyes’ rigid structure of “two by two” admission, and becomes a key member of the
resistance that takes place on the lower decks as the voyage proceeds. As a symbol of alterity
and marginalization, she spearheads the play’s critique of the oppressive and fascist dogma of Doctor Noyes, and, in turn, of the Judeo-Christian patriarchal tradition. In Findley’s novel, Mottyl is an important character, but not a narrating figure. In Rose and Kugler’s adaptation, Mottyl becomes the play’s initial framing narrator. The play begins with a comical staging of the traditional biblical scene of Noah and his family boarding the ark:

Slide: “And Noah went in, and his sons, and his wife, and his sons’ wives with him into the ark, because of the water of the flood…” (GENESIS 7:7)

Music: Small marching band plays RULE BRITANNIA.

Image: NOAH and his SONS relax on deck sipping port; MRS. NOYES and her DAUGHTERS-IN-LAW flutter up the gangplank beneath umbrellas. They call to their friends: “goodbye everybody!” The friends shout: “bon voyage!”

Music: Ensemble sings OVER THE SEA TO SKYE. […]

Hum. MOTTYL appears from the house – refers to the slide.

MOTTYL: Everyone knows it wasn’t like that.

They make it sound as if there wasn’t any argument, any panic, – none of the animals howling, none of the people screaming blue murder. They make it sound as if the only ones who wanted to get on board were Doctor Noyes and his family. Presumably everyone else, the rest of the world so to speak, stood off waving gaily behind a distant barricade – SPECTATORS WILL NOT CROSS THE YELLOW LINE, THANK YOUR [sic] FOR YOUR COOPERATION – and all the baggage neatly labeled – WANTED or NOT WANTED ON THE VOYAGE.

They also make it sound as if there wasn’t any dread – like an excursion.

Well.
It wasn’t an excursion.
It was the end of the world. (2).

Mottyl’s entrance and dismissal of the scene and the biblical quote on the slide, pointedly establishes the revisionist critique of the play.

Deborah Porter also makes a case for this kind of postmodern “fidelity,” or affinity between source and adaptation when she argues that the Necessary Angel production of Ondaatje’s *Coming Though Slaughter* “foregrounds the authorial intrusions of the novel, and in so doing creates a subject/object dialectic that provides the thematic force of the play” (17). What Porter identifies as a key component of Ondaatje’s novel is the mediating figure that appears as the narrative “I” in part three of the book (18). Notably, this figure is one of the postmodern devices that the novel uses to blur the boundaries between biography and fiction and to complicate the conventions of autobiography (Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern* 21). Porter observes that “[t]he authorial intrusion is recuperated by the introduction of the Actor as a character in the Necessary Angel script. This character inhabits the body of the same performer who plays Bolden.” To achieve this, she suggests, the production draws on the nonillusionistic conventions of metatheatre: “Because the performer is required to make a double surrogation (Roach 53), sliding between the Actor and Bolden, and because the Actor observes Bolden, these transitions produce an effect of alienation. [...] To the extent that his discourse describes Bolden, the Actor’s speech patterns retain a formal literary quality, and a careful, measured cadence largely denied Bolden” (19). Similarly, the moments when the Actor directly addresses the Audience, Porter suggests are “distancing devices, intended to remind an audience that what they are seeing is a fiction” (19).

What is revealing to me about the use of metafictional adaptive strategies is the way that literary elements are employed to highlight the possibilities of theatricality as perceptual
tension. When Michael Ondaatje suggested in his introductory notes for The Collected Works of Billy the Kid that “[w]hen there are scenes of action they should be very physical and active to balance the amount of talk” (“A Note”) he articulated the exploration of balancing the perceptual experiences of listening and seeing, of intellectual comprehension and visceral affect. In drawing attention to the devices and means of the theatre, this self-reflexive engagement with the process of storytelling moves us in the direction of thinking about how theatre as a medium and as a mode of representation functions. Perhaps not surprisingly, then, adaptations that employ metafictional strategies tend to demonstrate significant overlap with the trend of using intermedial and interdisciplinary elements in adaptation.

INTERMEDIAl “LITERARINESS”: INTERDISCIPLINARY EXPLORATIONS IN LITERARY AFFECT

The last trend I consider is the one that seems to have the most potential, going forward, both because it appears to have increased in frequency over the past decade and because it has generated the greatest variety of adaptive approaches and priorities, and thus has been most fruitful as a source of exploration and innovation. What I have called the trend of “intermedial literariness” is not a unified approach, but rather includes a number of intermedial and interdisciplinary approaches to adaptation. Common to these approaches, I suggest, is the interest in expanding the tools of the theatre and in exploring its possibilities to create different kinds of experience. Thus while some adapters might focus on the poetics of literary language, as in Necessary Angel’s Coming Through Slaughter, and others might focus on the visual translation of literary imagery into movement or dance, as in Nightswimming Theatre’s The Whirlpool, still others might make use of digital media and/or projections, as a number of
adaptations have done. Such diverse approaches are linked by their greater interest in the innovative creation of literary and theatrical effects than in the “translation” of literary conventions.

Intermedial and interdisciplinary approaches to the adaptation of Canadian literature are not new, and yet they appear to be an increasingly significant component of Canadian literary stage adaptations. Since the mid-1970s adapters have been interested in integrating the resources of other art forms – their formal concepts, their vocabularies, their modes of presentation and their technologies – into the process of adaptation. Reaney and his collaborators, for example, drew inspiration from the cinematographic and editing techniques of film, and from the combination of music, vocal performance, mime, dance, and acrobatics of the Peking Opera. In contemporary practice such explorations take a wide range of forms. At one extreme of this tendency is a kind of restrained theatricality – as employed in Divisadero: A Performance. As I argued in chapter four, Necessary Angel’s exploration of the theatrical possibilities of reading seeks to create a doubled experience in which both the dominant medium of theatre and the absent medium of the written text are perceptible and in tension. In repressing the illusionistic presentation of action, and radically restricting the amount of information conveyed through visual and spatial channels, creating a largely static effect, adapters exaggerate the basic tension between the words of the text and the physical presence of the actor. At the other extreme might be an adaptation like The Four Horsemen Project. Based on the sound poetry of Rafael Barreto-Rivera, Paul Dutton, Steve McCaffery and bpNichol, the adaptation by Volcano Theatre’s Ross Manson and Kate Alton combines choreographed vocal performance and dance, as well as extensive use of video projections and

3 Recent examples include Unless, Not Wanted on the Voyage, The Wars and Civil Elegies,
animation, including archival footage of Nichol performing. Based on poetry that was recorded as spoken performance – recovered from tapes of old recordings – the adaptation augments and re-interprets its sources by exploiting all the multiple tracks available to live theatrical performance, as well as the added conventional vocabularies of other disciplines (dance) and other media (video, animation). As these two contrasting examples demonstrate, a key issue in intermedial and interdisciplinary approaches to adaptation is the question of what kind of weight will be given to text as one element among many. Such adaptations, in consciously engaging with the relationship between the multiple tracks of theatrical performance, must choose whether, and how, to set visual, sonic, graphic and movement elements in competition, or to recess one in the interest of showcasing another.

Concerned with the performative possibilities of the voice and body, in combination with, or in contrast to, the visual and spatial possibilities of scenography, neither *Divisadero: A Performance* nor *The Four Horsemen Project* offers a mimetic, dramatic treatment of narrative events. As I suggested in chapter four, at least one of these productions, *Divisadero*, signals an awareness of this distinctive “non-dramatic” emphasis by describing itself as a “performance” rather than a “play”. This potential expansion of theatrical categories presents a number of questions that would be fruitful for future consideration. For example, given that many comparatively traditional dramatizations of Canadian literature that integrate intermedial references have been met with mixed critical response, are performance-oriented, non-dramatic adaptations that attempt a kind of intermedial imitation a better fit for the expectations of audiences and reviewers? That is to say, is there more space for audience openness on the explicitly non-narrative, ‘spectacle’ end of this spectrum?

The stakes of balancing the communication of narrative information with scenographic, multi-media exploration in traditional dramatic adaptations do seem to be elevated. For
example, an adaptation like Richard Ouzounian’s musical *Larry’s Party*, based on Carol Shields’ novel of the same name, was widely criticized for its reduction of nuance and its restrictive “literal” fidelity to Carol Shields’ words. At the same time, the Theatre Calgary and Vancouver Playhouse co-production of Timothy Findley’s *The Wars* [2007] used media projections as a particularly illusionistic solution to the problem of adapting the novel’s multiple historical locations. However, this was an element of the play that was frequently criticized in reviews for detracting from the emotional core of the narrative. As Jerry Wasserman observed, the novel’s juxtaposition of the depictions of home life in Canada and the terror of the World War I killing fields, was, in performance, rarely experienced except through theatrical pyrotechnics (“The Wars”).

In contrast, poetic sources may leave adapters more freedom for experimentation than traditional narrative sources like novels, precisely because of the freedom from dramatic convention. *Civil Elegies* [2009], for example, is an adaptation based on the poems of Dennis Lee that featured performer Mike Ross sitting at a piano, against a backdrop of changing projections, interspersing a recital of Lee’s poems with the performance of poems set to music, in an arrangement that created “a new quasi-dramatic path through the elegies” (Lee). The play was positively received, notably by Dennis Lee himself, who wrote a response praising the “surprisingly textured feel to the show”; the “human presence of Mike Ross on the stage,” who conveyed the unusual qualities of “an open heart, a somewhat bruised, wry vulnerability that is still dedicated to exploring the deep dimensions of being human”; and, above all the decision “to respect the integrity of words-on-the-stage, not be hobbled by the (equal) integrity of words-on-the-page” (“Putting”).

If intermedial and interdisciplinary approaches to adaptation have not yet found a consistent fit within the environments of Canadian theatrical production and reception, it is
because this remains a territory of exploration and uncertainty. More than any other adaptive approach, intermedial and interdisciplinary approaches experiment with ways to create new experiences of reception. For the phenomenon of Canadian literary adaptation these approaches offer the most innovative potential in terms of finding new ways for spectators to recognize relationships between source and adaptation, and to experience the pleasure of familiarity and the thrill of renewal. They also offer the greatest risks, as they come up against deep-rooted assumptions about competing “loyalties” to the novel and to the stage, and as they abandon established conventions that render their efforts more intelligible. The territory they carve may well offer the greatest insight into the changing relationships between contemporary Canadian theatrical practices and literary practices in the years to come.
APPENDIX I: STAGE ADAPTATIONS OF ENGLISH-LANGUAGE CANADIAN FICTION AND POETRY 1970-2011

Allen Powe, Bruce, *The Aberhart Summer*
Pub: Toronto: Penguin Canada, 1984
Adapt: Massing, Conni, *The Aberhart Summer*
Pub: Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1999
Perf: Fort Macleod, Jul. 1994, Great West Theatre, Dir. David Mann
Perf: Calgary, 1999, Alberta Theatre Projects, playRites Festival; Edmonton, Jan. 2000, Citadel Theatre, Dir. Stephen Heatley

Atwood, Margaret, & Joyce Barkhouse, *Anna’s Pet*
Pub: Toronto: J. Lorimer, 1980
Adapt: Thury, Fred, *Anna’s Pet*
Perf: Wolfville, NS, Sep. 1982, Mermaid Theatre

Atwood, Margaret, *The Edible Woman*
Pub: Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1969
Adapt: Carley, Dave, *The Edible Woman*
Perf: Fergus, ON, Oct. 2000, Theatre on the Grand, Dir. Christopher McHarge
Perf: Vancouver, BC/Toronto, ON, Feb. 2002, Vancouver Playhouse & CanStage co-production, Dir. Timothy Bond

Atwood, Margaret, *Good Bones*
Pub: Toronto: Coach House, 1992
Adapt: Coulter, Clare, *Good Bones*
Perf: Toronto, Jan. 1999, Tarragon Theatre, Dir. Urjo Kareda
Perf: Toronto, Nov. 1999, Tarragon Theatre, Dir. Urjo Kareda
Perf: Kingston, Apr. 2011, Theatre Kingston, Dir. Anne Hardcastle

Atwood, Margaret, *The Handmaid’s Tale*
Pub: Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1985
Adapt: Ruders, Poul and Paul Bentley, *The Handmaid’s Tale (Tjenerindens fortælling)*
Pub: Copenhagen, Dacapo, 2000 [sound recording]
Perf: Toronto, Sep. 2004, Canadian Opera Company, Dir. Phyllida Lloyd

Atwood, Margaret, *The Penelopiad*
Pub: Toronto: A. A. Knopf Canada, 2005
Adapt: Atwood, Margaret, *The Penelopiad*
Pub: London: Faber and Faber, 2007
Perf: Ottawa, Sep. 2007, National Arts Centre & Royal Shakespeare
Company co-production, Dir. Josette Bushell-Mingo
Perf: Toronto, Jan. 2012, Nightwood Theatre, Dir. Kelly Thornton

Atwood, Margaret, *The Year of the Flood*
Pub: Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2009
Adapt: *Year 25 Vigil*
Perf: Toronto, March 2011, Humber Theatre at Theatre Passe Muraille,
Dir. Raymond Bobgan and Karin Randoja

Barreto-Rivera, Rafael, Paul Dutton, Steve McCaffery and bpNichol, [various]
Adapt: *Manson, Ross and Kate Alton, The Four Horsemen Project*
Perf: Toronto, Feb. 2007, Volcano and Factory Theatre co-production;

Beresford-Howe, Constance, *The Book of Eve*
Pub: Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1973
Adapt: *Fineberg, Larry, Eve*
Perf: Stratford, Jul. 1976, Stratford Festival

Blum, Martha, *The Walnut Tree*
Pub: Regina, Coteau Books, 1999
Adapt: *Ursell, Geoffrey, The Walnut Tree*
Perf: Saskatoon, Sept. 2009, Persephone Theatre

Bowen, Gail and Ron Marken, *1919: The Love Letters of George and Adelaide*
Pub: Saskatoon, Western Producer Prairie Books, 1987
Adapt: *Bowen, Gail and Ron Marken, Dancing in Poppies*
Pub: Regina: University of Regina, 2002
Perf: Regina, 1993, Globe Theatre, Dir. Susan Ferley
Perf: Regina, 1994, Globe Theatre, Dir. Susan Ferley

Boyle, Harry J., *A Summer Burning*
Adapt: *Chislett, Anne, A Summer Burning*
Perf: Blyth, ON, 1977, Blyth Festival

Boyle, Harry J., *Mostly in Clover*
Pub: Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Co., 1961
Adapt: *Roy, James, Steven Thorne and the Original Cast, Mostly in Clover*
Perf: Blyth, ON, 1975, Blyth Festival
**Carrier, Roch**, *La Guerre, yes sir!*
Adapt: **Carrier, Roch**, *La Guerre, Yes Sir!*
Perf: Stratford, 1972, Stratford Festival

**Clarke, Austin**, *The Polished Hoe*
Adapt: **Taylor, Colin**, *The Polished Hoe*
Perf: Toronto, Feb. 2007, Obsidian Theatre, Dir. Colin Taylor

**Connor, Ralph**, *Glengarry School Days*
Pub: Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton, 1902
Adapt: **Chislett, Anne with Janet Amos**, *Glengarry School Days*
Perf: Blyth, ON, 1994, Blyth Festival

**Corbeil, Carole**, *In the Wings*
Pub: Toronto: Stoddart, 1997
Adapt: **Corbeil, Carole and Nicky Guadagni**, *In the Wings*
Perf: Toronto, Nov. 2002, Theatre Passe Muraille, Dir. Layne Coleman

**Coupland, Douglas**, *Life After God*
Adapt: **Mclenan, Michael Lewis**, *Life After God: The Play*
Perf: Vancouver, Nov 2006, Touchstone Theatre and Theatre at UBC co-production, Dir. Katrina Dunn

**Crummey, Michael**, “After Image” [story story]
Pub: Flesh and Blood, Toronto, Anchor Canada, 2003 (expanded ed.)
Adapt: **Chafe, Robert**, *Afterimage*
Pub: Toronto, Playwrights Canada Press, 2010
Perf: Toronto, 2009 Harbourfront, St. John’s, NF, May 2010, Artistic Fraud of Newfoundland, Dir. Jillian Keiley

**Currie, Sheldon**, *The Company Store*
Pub: Ottawa: Oberon Press, 1988
Adapt: **Vignoe, Mary**, *The Company Store*
Pub: Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 1999
Perf: Guysborough, N.S.,1996, Mulgrave Road Theatre, Dir. Mary Vignoe

**Currie, Sheldon**, *Down the Coaltown Road*
Pub: Toronto: Key Porter Books, 2002
Adapt: **Currie, Sheldon**, *Anna’s Story*
Perf: 2001, Festival Antigonish
Perf: 2002, Eastern Front Theatre
Currie, Sheldon, *The Glace Bay Miner’s Museum*
  - Adapt: Lill, Wendy, *The Glace Bay Miner’s Museum*
  - Pub: Burnaby, B.C., Talonbooks, 1996

Currie, Sheldon, “Lauchie, Liza and Rory” [short story]
  - Adapt: Currie, Sheldon, *Lauchie, Liza and Rory*
  - Pub: Winnipeg: Scirocco Drama, 2004
  - Perf: Antigonish, N.S., 1997, Festival Antigonish
  - Perf: Guysborough, N.S., 2003, Mulgrave Road Theatre; Edmonton, 2004, Magnetic North Theatre Festival
  - Perf: Frankie Productions tour, Dir. Mary-Colin Chisholm: Halifax, N.S., Apr. 2010, Eastern Front Theatre, Ottawa, ON, Apr. 2011, National Arts Centre

Currie, Sheldon, “Two More Solitudes” [short story]
  - Adapt: Currie, Sheldon, *Two More Solitudes*
  - Perf: Antigonish, N.S., 1998, Festival Antigonish

Curtis, Herb, *The Americans Are Coming*
- Pub: Fredericton, N.B.: Goose Lane, 1989
  - Adapt: Munday, Jenny, *The Americans are Coming*
  - Perf: Fredericton, March 1997, Theatre New Brunswick, Dir. Donnie Bowes

Curtis, Herb, *The Last Tasmanian*
- Pub: Fredericton, N.B.: Goose Lane, 1991
  - Adapt: Munday, Jenny, *The Last Tasmanian*
  - Perf: Fredericton, Apr. 1999, Theatre New Brunswick, Dir. Donnie Bowes

Davies, Robertson, *Tempest-Tost*
- Pub: Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, & Co., 1951
  - Adapt: Rose, Richard, *Tempest-Tost*
  - Perf: Stratford, ON, 2001, Stratford Festival, Dir. Richard Monette

Davies, Robertson, *World of Wonders*
- Pub: Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1975
  - Adapt: Hayes, Elliott, *World of Wonders*
Perf: Stratford, ON, 1992, Stratford Festival, Dir. Richard Rose

**Diamond, Marc, *Property***
Pub: Toronto: Coach House Books, 1992
Adapt: **Kugler, D. D., *Property***
Perf: Toronto, 1992, Theatre Passe Muraille

**Doyle, Brian, *Angel Square***
Pub: Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1984
Adapt: **Davis, Alan, *Angel Square***
Perf: Chilliwack, B.C., 1986 Chilliwack Players Guild, Dir. Alan Davis
Perf: Ottawa, ON, Dec. 1988, National Arts Centre, Dir. Janet Irwin

**Doyle, Brian, *Easy Avenue***
Pub: Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1988
Adapt: **Davis, Alan, and Janet Irwin, *Easy Avenue***
Perf: Chilliwack, B.C., 1991, Chilliwack Players Guild, Dir. Janet Irwin
Perf: Ottawa, ON, 1991, Great Canadian Theatre Company, Dir. Janet Irwin

**Duncan, Francis, *The Toothpaste Genie***
Pub: Richmond Hill: Scholastic, 1981
Adapt: **Silver, Jerry and Peter Oliver, *The Toothpaste Genie***
Perf: Toronto, 1987, Cascade Theatre

**Fawcett, Brian, *Cambodia: A Book for People Who Find Television Too Slow***
Adapt: **Brown, Ken, *Cambodia: A Play for People Who Find Television Too Slow***
Perf: Edmonton, AB., 1990, THEATre PUBLIC , Dir. Brian Paisley

**Findley, Timothy, *Not Wanted on the Voyage***
Pub: Toronto: Viking, 1984
Pub: MS, Toronto Metro Ref. Library
Perf: Toronto, Jan 1992, Necessary Angel

Adapt: **Bartram, Neil** (music and lyrics) and **Brian Hill** (book) *Not Wanted on the Voyage.*

**Findley, Timothy, *The Wars***
Pub: Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Co., 1977
Adapt: **Garnhum, Dennis, *The Wars***
Perf: Calgary, Sept. 2007, Theatre Calgary; Vancouver, Oct. 2007, Playhouse Theatre, Dir. Dennis Garnhum
Fitch, Sheree, *There’s a Mouse in My House*
Pub: Toronto: Doubleday, 1997
Adapt: Costello, Carrie, *There’s a Mouse in My House*
Perf: Toronto, 2007, Lorraine Kimsa Theatre for Young People, Dir. Pablo Felices-Luna

Fraser, Sylvia, *My Father’s House*
Pub: Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 1987
Adapt: Morton, Brian, *My Father’s House*
Perf: Hamilton, ON, 1992, Theatre Erebus

Freeman, Bill, *First Spring on the Grand Banks*
Pub: Toronto: J. Lorimer, 1978
Adapt: Milner, Arthur, *First Spring on the Grand Banks*
Perf: Ottawa, ON, 1981, Great Canadian Theatre Company

Freeman, Bill, *Shantymen of Cache Lake*
Pub: Toronto: J. Lorimer, 1975
Adapt: Milner, Arthur, *Shantymen of Cache Lake*
Perf: Ottawa, ON, 1980, Great Canadian Theatre Company

Gibson, Margaret, “Making It” (Short Story)
Adapt: Fraser, Brad, Music: Joey Miller, *Outrageous*
Perf: Toronto, ON, Sept. 2000, Canadian Stage, Dir. Brad Fraser.

Haliburton, Thomas Chandler, *The Clockmaker; or The Sayings and Doings of Samuel Slick of Slickville*
Pub: Halifax, 1836
Adapt: Gillis, Andrew, *Sam Slick Goes Ahead: A Play*

Adapt: Ledoux, Paul and Al MacDonald, *Sam Slick the Clockmaker*
Perf: Wolfville, NS, Aug. 1983, Mermaid Theatre

Harrison, Charles Yale, *Generals Die in Bed*
Adapt: Potter, Miles, *Generals Die in Bed*
Perf: Toronto, 1983, Theatre Passe Muraille

Hiebert, Paul, *Sarah Binks*
Pub: Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1964
Adapt: Donklin, Eric, *The Wonderful World of Sarah Binks*
Horwood, Harold, *Tomorrow Will Be Sunday*
Adapt: Walsh, Des, *Tomorrow Will Be Sunday*
Perf: Trinity, NFL, 1992, Rising Tide Theatre

Humphreys, Helen, *Wild Dogs*
Adapt: Hardecastle, Anne, *Wild Dogs*
Perf: Toronto, 2008 Nightwood Theatre in association with CanStage,
Dir. Kelly Thornton

Hunter, Bernice Thurman, *That Scatterbrained Booky*
Pub: Richmond Hill: Scholastic, 1981
Adapt: Miller, Joey, *That Scatterbrained Booky*
Perf: Toronto, Mar. 1991, Young Peoples Theatre

Adapt: Silver, Jerry and Peter Oliver, *That Scatterbrained Booky*
Perf: Toronto, Mar. 1987, Cascade Theatre

Jameson, Anna, *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada*
Pub: 1838
Adapt: Carey, Pauline, *Anna Jameson*
Perf: Toronto, 1975, Art Gallery of Ontario

Janes, Percy, *House of Hate*
Pub: Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1970
Adapt: Mazumdar, Maxim, *House of Hate*
Perf: St. John’s, Spr. 1987, Rising Tide Theatre

Kellerhais-Stewart, Heather, *She Shoots, She Scores*
Pub: Toronto: Women’s Press, 1975
Adapt: Davis, Alan, *She Shoots, She Scores*
Perf: Chilliwack, 1982, Chilliwack Theatre Festival

Kogawa, Joy, *Naomi’s Road*
Pub: Toronto: OUP, 1986 (adapted from her novel, *Obasan*)
Adapt: Quan, Betty, *Naomi’s Road*
Perf: Toronto, 1996, Young Peoples Theatre

Adapt: Wing, Paula, *Naomi’s Road*
Pub: In YPTThree: Three plays from YPT Toronto: Playwrights Canada
Press, 1994
Perf: Toronto, Apr. 1992, Young People’s Theatre

Adapt: Luengen, Ramona (composer) and Anne Hodges (libretto),
*Naomi’s Road*
Perf: Vancouver, 2005, Vancouver Opera
Perf: 2006 Red Deer, Lethbridge, AB, Ottawa ON, Vancouver Opera
Touring Company

Korman, Gordon, *Bruno & Boots: This Can’t be Happening at MacDonald Hall*
Pub: Richmond Hill, Scholastic, 1978
Adapt: Silver, Jerry, *This Can’t be Happening at MacDonald Hall*
Perf: Toronto, Fall 1986, Cascade Theatre

Kreisel, Henry, *The Broken Globe*
Pub: In Stories from Western Canada Toronto: Macmillan, 1972
Adapt: Moher, Frank, *The Broken Globe*
Perf: Edmonton, Feb. 1976, Theatre 3

Kroetsch, Robert, *The Studhorse Man*
Pub: Toronto: Macmillan, 1969
Adapt: collective, *The Studhorse Man*
Perf: Toronto, Apr. 1981, Theatre Passe Muraille

Kroetsch, Robert, *The Words of my Roaring*
Pub: Toronto: Macmillan, 1966
Adapt: McNair, Rick, *The Words of my Roaring*
Perf: Calgary, Jan 1980, Theatre Calgary

Kurelek, William, *A Prairie Boy’s Winter*
Pub: Montreal: Tundra, 1973
Adapt: Birdsell, Sandra, Martha Brooks, & David Gillies, *A Prairie Boy’s Winter*

Laurence, Margaret, *The Stone Angel*
Pub: Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1964
Adapt: Cook, Michael, *Portrait of a Lady: Introduction to Hagar Shipley*
Perf: Summerland, B.C., Apr. 1976, Giant’s Head Theatre Co.
Perf: Summerland, B.C., Sept. 2011, George Ryga Awards Evening/Tour

Adapt: Nichol, James, *The Stone Angel*
Perf: Toronto/Winnipeg, 1993, Theatre Passe Muraille and Prairie Theatre exchange co-production, Dir. Maureen White
Perf: Winnipeg/ Ottawa, Oct./Nov. 1994, Prairie Theatre Exchange and National Arts Centre co-production, Dir. Michael Springate
Perf: Montreal/ Halifax, 1995, Centaur and Neptune co-production, Dir. Allen McInnis
Perf: Toronto/London, 1999, Canadian Stage and Grand Theatre co-production, Dir. Janet Wright

Lee, Dennis, *Alligator Pie*
Pub: Toronto: Macmillan, 1974
Adapt: Amos, Jane, Clare Coulter and Gez Kovaks, *Alligator Pie*
Perf: Toronto, Dec 1982, Theatre Passe Muraille
Perf: Winnipeg, 1984; 1985, Manitoba Theatre for Young People
Adapt: Selody, Kim and Cathy Nosaty, *Jelly Belly Makes Garbage Delight of Alligator Pie*
Perf: Winnipeg, 2005, Manitoba Theatre for Young People and Carousel Players co-production

Lee, Dennis, *Civil Elegies*
Pub: Toronto, Anansi, 1968
Adapt: Ross, Mike and Lorenzo Savoini, *Civil Elegies*

Lee, Dennis, *Garbage Delight*
Pub: Toronto: Macmillan, 1977
Adapt: Chevrier, Micheline, Paul Shilton and Myles Warren, *Garbage Delight*
Perf: Gravenhurst, ON, Sum 1987, Muskoka Festival

Lee, Dennis, *The Ice Cream Store*
Adapt: Selody, Kim, *The Ice Cream Store and More*
Perf: Toronto, Nov. 1999, Young People’s Theatre

Lunn, Janet, *The Root Cellar*
Pub: Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1981
Adapt: Cervello, Santo, *The Root Cellar*
Perf: Toronto, 1985 Erehwon Theatre

MacLennan, Hugh, *Barometer Rising*
Pub: Toronto: Collins, 1941
Adapt: Ouzounian, Richard, *Barometer Rising*
Perf: Halifax, Nov. 1987, Neptune Theatre

MacLeod, Alistair, *The Lost Salt Gift of Blood*
Pub: Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1976
Adapt: collective, *The Lost Salt Gift of Blood*
Perf: Mulgrave, NS, Oct. 1982, Mulgrave Road Co-op
MacLeod, Alistair, *No Great Mischief*
   Pub: Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1999
   Adapt: Young, David S., *No Great Mischief*
   Pub: Winnipeg: Scirocco Drama, 2006
   Perf: Toronto, 2004, Tarragon, Dir. Richard Rose

Major, Kevin, *Far From Shore*
   Pub: Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Co, 1980
   Adapt: Surette, Roy and company, *Far From Shore*
   Perf: Trinity, NL, 1993 Rising Tide

McCormack, Derek, *The Haunted Hillbilly*
   Adapt: Cuthbertson, Graham, *Haunted Hillbilly*
   Perf: Montreal, May 2012, Centaur Theatre

McLean, Ann, *A Nun’s Diary*
   Adapt: Rubess, Banuta, *A Nun’s Diary*
   Perf: Toronto, 1988, Nightwood Theatre

Mitchell, William Ormond (W. O.), *Jake and the Kid*
   Pub: Toronto: Macmillan, 1961
   Adapt: Mitchell, William Ormond (W. O.), *Royalty is Royalty*
   Perf: Winnipeg, Fall 1987, Manitoba Theatre Centre
   Adapt: Rogers, Greg, *Cabin Fever*
   Perf: Toronto, Sept. 1978, Young Peoples Theatre

Mitchell, William Ormond (W. O.), *The Kite*
   Pub: Toronto: Macmillan, 1962
   Adapt: Mitchell, William Ormond (W. O.), *The Kite*
   Perf: Calgary, 1981, Theatre Calgary

Mitchell, William Ormond (W. O.), *Who Has Seen The Wind*
   Pub: Toronto: Macmillan, 1947
   Adapt: MacDougall, Lee, *Who Has Seen The Wind*

Montgomery, Lucy Maud, *Anne of Green Gables*
   Pub: Boston: L. C. Page 1908
   Adapt: Harron, Don, Norman Campbell, Mavor Moore and Elaine Campbell, *Anne of Green Gables: A Musical*
   Perf: Charlottetown, 1965-Present, Charlottetown Summer Festival
Adapt: **Ledoux, Paul, Anne**  
Pub: Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 1999  
Perf: Toronto: 1998, Young Peoples Theatre

**Montgomery, Lucy Maud, The Blue Castle**  
Pub: Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1926  
Adapt: **Stinson, Hank, Blue Castle**  
Perf: Oakville, 1995, Oakville Summer Theatre  
Perf: Charlottetown, 1996, Orwell Corner Historic Village

**Montgomery, Lucy Maud, Emily of New Moon**  
Pub: Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1923  
Adapt: **Ouzounian, Richard, Emily**  
Perf: Charlottetown, Jun. 1999, Charlottetown Festival

Adapt: **Stinson, Hank and Dean Burry, Emily of New Moon**  
Perf: Charlottetown, 1998, Beaconsfield Historic Site

**Montgomery, Lucy Maud, Rainbow Valley**  
Pub: 1919  
Adapt: **Stinson, Hank and Dean Burry, Rainbow Valley**  
Perf: Charlottetown, Mar. 2000, Castle Co. & Stage Door

**Moodie, Susanna, Roughing it in the Bush**  
Pub: 1852  
Adapt: **Smyth, Donna, Susanna Moodie**  
Perf: Wolfville, Sept. 1976, Mermaid Theatre

Adapt: **Hopkins, Beth and Anne Joyce, Daughter by Adoption: A Play Based on the Writings of Susanna Moodie**  

**Mowat, Farley, The Curse of the Viking Grave**  
Pub: Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1966  
Adapt: **Matthews, Robin, The Curse of the Viking Grave**  
Perf: Ottawa, 1979, Great Canadian Theatre Company

**Munro, Alice, Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage** [story collection]  
Pub: Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2001  
Adapt: **Johnson, Marcia, Courting Johanna**  
Perf: Blyth, ON, 2008, Blyth Festival

**Munsch, Robert, The Paper Bag Princess; Love You Forever; and others**  
Adapt: **Colella, Stephen and Allen MacInnis, Love You Forever... and More Munsch**  
Perf: Toronto, 2008, Lorraine Kimsa Theatre for Young People
Musgrave, Susan, *Gullband Thought Measles Was a Happy Ending*
Pub: Vancouver, J. J. Douglas, 1974
Adapt: Musgrave, Susan, *Gullband*
Perf: Vancouver, Dec. 1977, Touchstone Theatre, Dir. Paully Jardin

Nowlan, Alden, *Various Persons Named Keven O’Brien: A Fictional Memoir*
Pub: Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Co, 1973
Adapt: Hanna, Paul, *Lockhartville*
Perf: Fredericton, Apr. 1988, Theatre New Brunswick, Dir. Terry Tweed

Ondaatje, Michael, *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid: left handed poems*
Pub: Toronto: Anansi, 1970
Adapt: Ondaatje, Michael, *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*
Pub: MS, Toronto Metro Reference Library
Perf: Toronto, 1971, Toronto Arts Foundation, Dir. Martin Kinch
Perf: Stratford, 1973, Stratford Theatre, Dir. John Wood
Perf: Toronto, 1974, Toronto Free Theatre, Dir. Martin Kinch
Perf: London, 1975, Grand Theatre, Dir. Ken Livingstone
Perf: Winnipeg, 1975, Manitoba Theatre Centre
Perf: Toronto, 1990, Tarragon Theatre, Dir. JoAnn McIntyre
Perf: Victoria, 1993, The Belfry, Dir. Bill Dow
Adapt: devised, *Days Above Ground*
Perf: Montreal, 2007, SaBooge Theatre

Ondaatje, Michael, *Coming Through Slaughter*
Pub: Toronto: Anansi, 1976
Adapt: Ondaatje, Michael, *Coming Through Slaughter*
Perf: Toronto, 1979, Theatre Passe Muraille, Dir. Paul Thomson

Adapt: Kugler, D. D. and Richard Rose, *Coming Through Slaughter*
Perf: Toronto, 1989, Necessary Angel

Ondaatje, Michael, *Divisadero*
Adapt: Ondaatje, Michael, *Divisadero: A Performance*
Perf: Toronto, Feb 2011; Feb 2012, Necessary Angel, Dir. Daniel Brooks

Ondaatje, Michael, *the man with seven toes*
Pub: Toronto: Coach House Press, 1969
Adapt: Ondaatje, Michael, *the man with seven toes*
Perf: Stratford, 1969, Stratford Theatre Workshop, Dir. Paul Thompson

**Pinsent, Gordon, John and the Missus**
Adapt: **Pinsent, Gordon, John and the Missus**
Pub: Toronto: Playwrights Co-op, 1977
Perf: Halifax, 1976, Neptune Theatre

**Pinsent, Gordon, The Rowdyman**
Adapt: **Pinsent, Gordon, The Rowdyman**
Perf: Charlottetown, 1976, Charlottetown Festival

**Redhill, Michael, Lake Nora Arms**
Pub: Toronto: Coach House Press, 1993
Adapt: **Miller, Jane and Brian Quirt, Lake Nora Arms**
Perf: Toronto: Aug. 2009, Summerworks Festival, Dir. Liza Balkan
Perf: Kitchener, ON, May 2005, Theatre & Company, Dir. Stuart Scadron-Wattles

**Richardson, Bill, Bachelor Brothers’ Bed & Breakfast**
Pub: Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1993
Adapt: **Dow, Bill and Martin Kinch, The Bachelor Brothers on Tour**
Perf: Vancouver, 2000, Vancouver Playhouse

**Richardson, John, The Canadian Brothers; or, Prophecy Fulfilled**
Pub: Montreal: A. H. Armour and H. Ramsay, 1840
Adapt: **Reaney, James, The Canadian Brothers**
Perf: Calgary, 1983 University of Calgary

**Richardson, John, Wacousta; or, The Prophecy; A Tale of the Canadas**
Pub: London: T. Cadell, 1832
Adapt: **Reaney, James, Wacousta!**
Pub: MS, Toronto Metro Reference Library
Perf: Ontario Tour, 1978, NDWT Company

**Richler, Mordecai, The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz**
Pub: Don Mills: A. Deutsch, 1959
Adapt: **Richler, Mordecai, Jerry Lieber and Mike Stoller, Duddy**
Perf: Edmonton, 1984, Citadel Theatre
Adapt: **Gallardo, Edward, Gary William Friedman and Eyal Britton, The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz**
Perf: Montreal, 1997, Saidye Bronfman Theatre
Richler, Mordecai, *Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang*  
Pub: Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1975  
Adapt: Book and lyrics by Peg McKelvey, Pat Patterson, Dodi Robb; with music by Joy Alexander and Pat Patterson, *Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang*  
Pub: Toronto: Playwrights Canada, 1981  
Perf: Toronto, 1978, Young Peoples Theatre  
Perf: Winnipeg, 1987; 1997, Manitoba Theatre for Young People  
Perf: Calgary, Jan. 2002, Calgary Young Peoples Theatre

Riis, Sharon, *The True Story of Ida Johnson*  
Pub: Toronto: Women’s Press, 1976  
Adapt: Jardine, Paula, *The True Story of Ida Johnson*  
Perf: Toronto, 1979, Nightwood Theatre (at Theatre Passe Muraille)

Roberts, Charles G. D., *The Heart That Knows*  
Adapt: Rhindress, Charlie, Music: Dean Burry, *The Heart That Knows*  
Perf: Sackville, New Brunswick, Live Bait Theatre, July 2008, Dir. Mary Ellen MacLean

Rooke, Leon, *Shakespeare’s Dog*  
Pub: Toronto, Stoddart, 1983  
Adapt: Chafe, Rick, *Shakespeare’s Dog*  
Pub: Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2009  
Perf: Ottawa/Winnipeg, 2008, National Arts Centre and Manitoba Theatre Centre co-production, Dir. Larry Desrochers

Ryga, George, *Night Desk*  
Pub: Vancouver, Talonbooks, 1976  
Adapt: Smedley, Ken and David Ross, *The Last of the Gladiators*  
Perf: Summerland, BC, 1976, Giant’s Head Theatre Company

Pub: In Songs of a Sourdough, Toronto: W. Briggs, 1907  
Adapt: Betts, Jim, with John Bertram, *The Shooting of Dan McGrew*  
Perf: Edmonton, 1982, Theatre Network

Service, Robert, [various] *The poems of Robert Service*  
Adapt: Book by Morris Panych Music by Marek Norman, *Wanderlust*  
Perf: Stratford, June 2012, Stratford Festival

Sheard, Sarah, *The Swing Era*  
Pub: Toronto: A. A. Knopf, 1993  
Adapt: Carley, Dave, *The Swing Era*  
Perf: Toronto, 1995, Factory Theatre
Shields, Carol, *Larry’s Party*
Adapt: Ouzounian, Richard and Marek Norman, *Larry’s Party*

Shields, Carol, *Unless*
Pub: Toronto: Random House, 2002
Adapt: Cassidy, Sarah and Carol Shields, *Unless*
Perf: Toronto/ Vancouver 2005, CanStage and Arts Club Theatre Company co-production; Victoria, BC, 2005, Belfry Theatre, Dir. Roy Surette

Simonds, Merilyn, *The Convict Lover: A True Story*
Pub: Toronto: McFarlane, Walter & Ross, 1996
Adapt: collective, *The Convict Lover*

Smart, Elizabeth, *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept*
Pub: London: Editions Poetry, 1945
Adapt: Anglin, Anne and Nancy Beatty, *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept*
Perf: Toronto, 1986, Theatre Passe Muraille

Toews, Miriam, *Summer of My Amazing Luck*
Adapt: Craddock, Chris, *Summer of My Amazing Luck*

Urquhart, Jane, *The Whirlpool*
Pub: Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1986
Adapt: Quirt, Brian, *The Whirlpool*

Ward, Frederick, *Riverlisp: Black Memories*
Pub: Plattsburgh N. Y.: Tundra, 1974
Adapt: Henry, Jeff and Frederick Ward, *Riverlisp: Black Memories*
Perf: Montreal: 1975, Centaur Theatre

Weinzwieg, Helen, *A View From the Roof* [story collection]
Wiseman, Adele, *Crackpot*
Pub: Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1974
Adapt: Wyatt, Rachel, *Crackpot*
Pub: Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 1995
Perf: Calgary, 1995, Theatre Calgary

Woo, Terry, *Banana Boys*
Pub: Toronto: Riverbank Press, 2000
Adapt: Aureus, Leon, *Banana Boys*
Pub: Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2004
Perf: Toronto, 2005, Fu-Gen Theatre and Factory Theatre co-production, Dir. Nina Lee Aquino
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~ 258 ~


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~ 266 ~


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