

Culturing Performance:
Exploring Performance Elements in Québec Folk Culture

by

Kathryn Rose Jamin
B.A., University of Victoria, 2006

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements of the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department of Theatre

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SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE

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Supervisor

Dr. Anthony Vickery, Assistant Professor (Department of Theatre)
Departmental Member

Mary Kerr, Associate Professor (Department of Theatre)
Departmental Member

Dr. Sylvie Mongeon, Assistant Professor (Department of French)
Outside Member

ABSTRACT

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Abstract Culturing Performance: Exploring Performance Elements in
Québec Folk Culture

This study explores performance elements in Quebec folk culture events in the context of evaluating the resources needed to construct studies in *québécois* theatre history for Anglophone students. Using the metaphor of history as a map that charts the landscape of the past and needs many layers of information to do so effectively, resources dealing with Quebec theatre history in English and in French are surveyed and underdeveloped areas are marked for future research. To deal with the unusual circumstance of a very low incidence of theatre practice in Québec from 1606 until late in the 1800's, juxtaposed against the vibrant and international developments in the last 50 years, three instances of Quebec folk culture are investigated for their performance elements. That research is structured in accordance with the guidelines and definitions in *Living Folklore* (Sims & Stevens, 2005). Performance elements revealed through the study include full body synchronized movements, mask and costume, improvisation, role-playing, choral work and monologues. The relationship of these events to present-day *québécois* theatre is analyzed.

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DEDICATION

to those marvels of my very own *cirque de soleil*,
the little ones who bring sunshine with them
as they perform their lives

my grandchildren
Molly, Gavin, and Gryffin

may you always remember to play!

Chapter One

A Particular Landscape: Towards a map of *québécois* Theatre

Introduction

On November 14, 1606, Marc Lescarbot and his companions initiated Franco-American theatre on the North American continent. With a bitterly cold, scurvy-ridden winter behind them, the *habitants* of Port Royal, as members of the cultural society, *L'Ordre de Bon Temps*, scripted, staged, and performed a masque-like reception to welcome their leaders back from ten weeks of perilous exploration. Today, four hundred years later, French-speaking Québec directors, their plays, and their theatre companies are regularly acclaimed on domestic and international stages.

Although such a span of time might suggest otherwise, formal, staged, theatrical activity in Québec, in French, by French Canadians, for the most part, dates back only to the closing years of the 19th century. Historian Gilbert David sees what he describes as “institutionalized Francophone theater in Quebec” as beginning only in the period 1930-1945 when there were “hardly more than two or three stable theaters concurrently producing plays in Montreal (147, 132). Contemporary *québécois* theatre practice emerged later, in the years following what we speak of as the Quiet Revolution, generally considered to extend across the decade 1960-1970. During this time, led by the Liberal government of Jean Lesage, major reforms were enacted to produce improvements in public health, public education, social services and working - conditions (Linteau 421-23, Tétu de Labsade 82-83). In the realm of theatre,

advances included the establishment of the École nationale de théâtre du Canada (1960), the Association des directeurs de théâtre (1964), the Centre d'essai des auteurs dramatiques (1965) and the Baccalauréat en théâtre at the Université du Québec à Montréal (1969).

While accomplishments such as these and analyses of playscripts, especially in translation, present places to begin in terms of a study of the development of Québec theatre history, there are aspects—distinctive aspects of *québécois* theatre practice—that are harder to catch hold of, because of their nature as elements of performance. To discuss this more elusive dimension, I ask the reader to imagine the development of *québécois* theatre practice as a landscape. And in the same spirit, ask that the following comments and citations be imagined as postcards from travellers who have explored that particular landscape and appreciated the ways in which certain performance elements add shape and definition to its map.

Postcard #1

Marianne Ackerman, Theatre Critic for the *Montreal Gazette*

Circa 1985

Marianne Ackerman, coming from a background of study in journalism and political science, worked as a theatre critic for the *Montreal Gazette* from 1983 to 1987. She entered this phase of her career with a fairly traditional set of criteria for judging the quality of a piece of theatre. Leanore Lieblein, in her essay on Ackerman (1999), writes that the critic privileged elements such as language and wit, dramatic structure, and the play's attention

to social issues (373). Ackerman's stand as a liberal humanist led her to a focus that "makes moral issues, character development, conflict, and resolution -- mainstays of realistic dramaturgy--- central to the kind of dramatic structure she favoured, provided that the play reverberated with 'large questions' and 'universal themes' ([Critique]: Jan. 1986)" (374).

Ackerman's mission was to move the French and English cultures to cross over, to encounter each other, to appreciate and cooperate with each other, and ultimately to invigorate each other. This meant that she covered a great many productions presented in French, primarily in Montréal, and her critiques of these appeared in the *Gazette* alongside her critiques of English-language performances. Lieblein describes a discernible shift in Ackerman's value system as she became exposed to more and more of the character of *québécois* theatre-making. For the critic, "the nonverbal explorations of francophone theatre gradually became one of Ackerman's measures of a theatrical experience" (374). In 1984, Ackerman recognized the originality of Carbone 14's "action-packed spectacle", *Le Rail*. That same year, in a review of *L'Inconception* at Théâtre d'Aujourd'hui, she spoke of "'the wonderful physical energy, one of the chief virtues separating *québécois* from English-Canadian theatre'" In 1985, Ackerman acknowledged Mime Omnibus's strategies through which "[a]cting is stylized with sets, gimmicks, and special effects as important as the text" and she appreciated the energy needed to create their "perfect gestures and smashing images" (374-375).

Lieblein makes it clear that Ackerman never allowed spectacle and physicality to "replace the virtues of a strong script" but it seems the critic began

to feel shortchanged when these elements were not developed to their intelligent and full potential. In that 1985 review, she wonders, " Why is the theatre today so routinely cluttered with heavily furnished TV dramas, when the stage has so long ago been rediscovered as a forum for the mind, spirit, colour, and movement, in short for a journey inward?" (375).

Ackerman had the advantage of having acquired a Certificate in French Studies from the Sorbonne to assist her penetration of theatre created in a language that was not her mother tongue. The aspect of *québécois* theatre that she seems often to have found deeply satisfying was, however, a communication to the senses and, as such, it was something that was readily accessible to spectators in spite of possible linguistic barriers.

Marianne Ackerman left theatre criticism to become a playwright and co-artistic director of Theatre 1774. Such a move enabled her to pursue actively theatre projects that embraced an enmeshment of and cross-fertilization between English and *québécois* theatre people and ideas.

Condensed from Leanore Lieblein's essay, *Establishing Contact between Two Cultures: Marianne Ackerman at the Montreal Gazette, 1983-1987*. In *Establishing Our Boundaries: English Canadian Theatre Criticism*. pp. 371-385.

Postcard #2

Robert Wallace, Canadian Theatre Historian

1990

“Certainly this is true in Quebec where Montreal’s Carbone 14 provides but one example of the many small theatres which have started to attract wide attention. The ascendancy of this experimental company as a major force in international theatre can be documented by its appearance at theatre festivals from Australia to Germany in the last few years, and by the glowing reviews and sold out houses it attracts almost everywhere it tours. Its current popularity in Quebec and abroad attests to the appeal of the imagistic form of theatre it has perfected — theatre that relies on just about every element of performance *except* the spoken word. The fact that Carbone 14 originated as a street theatre marginally positioned to Montreal’s mainstream is not coincidental to its success.⁵ The company’s aesthetic is a direct consequence of its conception as a collaborative enterprise unconcerned with the development of literature. Writing about the company and its artistic director, Gilles Maheu, in 1987, Diane Pavlovic, a member of the collective that now edits *Jeu*, explained that they are “part of that generation of Quebec artists who have worked towards the creation of an organic theatrical discourse drawn from real-life experience and carnal existence rather than literary convention” (Pavlovic, qtd. in Wallace 22).

Introduction, *Producing Marginality*

Postcard #3

Lucie Robert, Author and Professor of Québec Literature

1992

“From Marie Savard’s *Bien à moi, marquise* (1970) and Jacqueline Barrette’s *Ça dit qu’essa dire* (1972) to Louise Dusseault’s *Môman* (1981), Francine Tougas’s *Histoire de fantômes* (1985) and Julie Vincent’s *Noir de monde* (1989), poets and actresses took control of the dramatic material, often engaging in the destruction of authority, that of the playwright as well as that of the stage director... These performances have in common the fact that they all spoke of women’s experiences and of private life: domestic work, motherhood, sisterhood, love, aging, and so on. One after the other women spoke. They spoke until exhausted. Separation or distance from the audience was minimal, unnecessary: life was theatre and vice versa. ...the difference between these shows and the conventional monologue... The “shows” or psychodramas presented in the 1970s contained parts, not characters. The audience was spoken to; thus, the listener was no fictional character. Instead of a conventional theatrical relationship based on separation of the fictional and the real world, or between performers and audience, these feminist shows built a collective *persona* to which both performer and audience belonged and through which they could communicate.” (46)

Changing the Subject: A Reading of Contemporary Québec Feminist Drama. In *Women on the Canadian Stage*.

Postcard #4

Jonathan Weiss, American Theatre Historian

1995

“What is striking above all in the recent history of Quebec theatre is the way in which, beginning in the 1970s, playwrights, directors, and actors have defined their own aesthetic. The great separatist movement of the period induced, in the theater — for the first time — a style and especially a language that was *québécois*. It is no wonder then that even the defeat of the referendum on sovereignty-association did not plunge Quebec theater into a reexamination of its identity. On the contrary, Quebec theater today shows an aesthetic originality and a consciousness of itself that puts it in the forefront of world theater.” (4)

Introduction, *Essays on Modern Quebec Theater*

Postcard # 5

Natalie Bennett, Theatre Reviewer for *Bibliocrit*

January 30, 2006

There are plenty of laughs, with a rapid-fire string of European and Atlantic arts in-jokes that almost, but not quite, descend to a stand-up routine. You are, however, always laughing with Lepage, never at him. On the wilder artistic avant garde: “[W]hat makes the English furious makes the French delirious”.

This is a one-man show, in the sense that Lepage plays not only the would-be librettist, seeking professional and personal validation, but also all of the other characters, from Arnaud, the conniving but troubled administrator of the Paris Opera, to the Dryad of Anderson's tale. Yet there's a long list of technical credits, from the puppeteer who produces a wonderfully believable mutt out of thin air to the "horse cart-maker", and these are well deserved. Every aspect of *The Andersen Project* from the supra-realist video backdrops to the elaborate but designerista set, has been polished to almost eerie perfection. . . ."

Internet review

Postcard #6

Michael Billington, Theatre Critic for *The Guardian*

January 30, 2006

"What holds the attention is less the novelty of the ideas than Lepage's visual brilliance and satiric humour. At one point, he moves seamlessly from the tall albino Frederic to a crinolined dryad emerging from the gnarled bark of a tree. Andersen's doomed love for the Swedish nightingale, Jenny Lind, is beautifully caught in a sequence where he hopelessly strips a fully-clothed female dummy. And only in a Lepage show could Andersen's museum-case luggage turn into a high-speed train rattling between Copenhagen and Cologne.

The show is also very funny about Lepage's own world of international co-production. The Paris opera boss is beset by strikes, double-booked meetings and conflicts of taste. . . ."

Internet review

These messages on these postcards, expressed at different times across the last 20 years, give testimony to performance elements that are particular to *québécois* theatre: that it communicates to the senses through physicality in ways that are readily accessible to spectators in spite of linguistic barriers; that much of it is expressed as an improvised "collaborative enterprise unconcerned with the development of [a] literature" (Wallace); that its style and its language are "especially" *québécois* (Weiss); that, in its latest forms, the settings themselves are "designerista" (Bennett), indicating a use of the imagination that explores ways in which media contribute to theatrical vision; that this "visual brilliance" (Billington) frames a strong emphasis on story-telling and the actor as storyteller; and that the space of the performances was shared (Robert). The aim of this inquiry is to acknowledge the importance of these elements as defining features of *québécois* theatre practice by demonstrating their links to sites of performance in the enactments of customary Québec folklore. My hope is to illuminate the connections and continuities between folk practices and contemporary performance and to ensure that these aspects will always find their place as landmarks in the cartography of Québec theatre art.

John Lewis Gaddis, professor of History at Yale University, explaining his use of mapping as a metaphor for historical research, writes that

cartography succeeds when a map provides the layers and kinds of details its users need to get where they are going (34). The map functions because of its ability to "reduce the infinitely complex to a finite, manageable, frame of reference" and to "provide a way of reversing divisibility, of retrieving unity, of recapturing a sense of the whole, even though it can never be the whole" (32). If, as Gaddis suggests, writing history is like mapping the landscape of the past, then four hundred years of theatrical activity, from the founding of Nouvelle-France to contemporary international festivals in Montréal, can certainly qualify as an infinitely complex landscape. Using his metaphor, this study will attempt to reveal the layers of the map—with performance in folk culture providing one layer—needed in order to create a "manageable frame of reference" with which to explore the terrain of *québécois* theatre. The purpose is to begin to provide one way of "reversing the divisibility" of the "two solitudes" so that this subject might sooner be seen by English-speaking students as a valuable and engaging site of Canadian theatre history and practice.

My Own Perspective

As a Montreal-born and raised English Canadian, I grew up listening to my mother shift effortlessly between the two languages, and I never questioned the idea or the value of studying French through my years in elementary and secondary school. After three months of working in France, I had the transformative (and delightful) experience of starting to think in a second language and to muse on the play of meanings between the two cultures.

In 2004, as Teaching Assistant to THEA 101, I was asked to give a lecture to an anglophone audience of non-theatre undergraduate students on the history of Canadian theatre, one component of which was to address French Canadian (as I then called it) theatre. Anything is possible and it *is* possible to fly through 400 years of theatre history in an hour. But it was while producing this incredibly superficial survey that my early experiences in research for that project became the genesis for this thesis. My difficulty in finding comprehensive sources in English was the catalyst that kept me exploring.

As a theatre historian, I ache to think of how, in this country, the two solitudes continue to be perpetuated inside a discipline that uses, so well, communicative tools that are just as, and often more powerful than, the words we use to tell our stories. And while my fluency cannot really allow me to participate fully in a history that is not “mine,” it does allow me, as it did for Ackerman, entry into those events that made/make Québec theatre history. It does give me the opportunity to bring to/into consciousness the mirroring, through theatre, of a culture that is, and should be seen as, a significant contributor to our national cultural landscape. It does allow me to question where that practice came from and to begin to identify the sites of Québec theatre renaissance in the last half of the 20th century.

Methodology

Maps are built as layers comprising distinct bodies of information. Categories may include: topographical features (mountain peaks and river deltas), waterways, vegetation, transportation networks (roadways and rail lines), points of human habitation (cities and villages), political boundaries, etc. Indeed, in an undergraduate geography course I was shown how computer mapping software allows a cartographer to turn layers on and off, allowing precise observations of how particular features and how they affect each other.

The map I wish to build has certain defining (and thus limiting) features:

1. The territory is the development of *québécois* theatre.
2. The intended users of the map are anglophone Canadian students at an introductory level.
3. The origins of information must, for the most part, be restricted to secondary sources.

With these points in mind I found that the layers for my map would be built up from the following repositories of published information:

Layer 1. Texts dealing with Québec theatre history, written in English.

Layer 2. Texts dealing with Québec theatre history, written in French.

Layer 3. Theatre Journals, written in English.

Layer 4. Theatre Journals, written in French.

Layer 5. Texts dealing with French social and theatre

history in English and French, especially in the

periods of the French Regime, 1534 -1759, and the

mid and later 20th century,

- Layer 6. Texts dealing with American social and theatre history as they pertain to involvement with Québec and the French Canadian people.
- Layer 7. The dramatic literature: Québec and *québécois* (distinction explained in Terms and Definitions below) plays, in their original form and in translation.
- Layer 8. Texts dealing with Canadian social and theatre history as they pertain to involvement with Québec, with special consideration of the “two solitudes”, the perspectives (boundaries) that appear to have stalled the building of this map in the past.
- Layer 9. Texts dealing with the folklore of Québec, the stories, legends, customs and songs, for their imagination, and especially for the practice and elements of performance they make manifest.
- Layer 10. Unpublished, personal experience of *québécois* performance.

These layers will, I believe, provide a good beginning towards the formation of a map. This map will make navigation through the territory of *québécois* theatre history possible and thus become a matrix for the delivery of an essential, and heretofore neglected, component of Canadian theatre history.

Chapter Two will present a review of material I found to construct Layers 1-4 and short discussions of my proposals for Layers 5 and 6. Layer 7 is,

of course, essential but lies outside of the scope of this paper. Chapter Three addresses the content of Layer 8. Layer 9 (Chapter Four) is the site of my major investigation and deals in detail with three instances of performance in Québec folk culture. I explore this rich resource as an aid to comprehending, and understanding, modern and contemporary *québécois* theatre practice. A more specific methodology and the terms for that inquiry are contained therein. Chapter Five speaks to Layer 10, and uses three personal postcards through which I illustrate contemporary links to those early performance elements.

Terms and Definitions

Terms and Definitions may be regarded as the navigational tools that are helpful in negotiating the journey towards understanding and the making of meaning. It is easy to be waylaid or to become confused when meeting the terms referring to the people, and the province of Québec. I place these explanations here because, already in this thesis, I have used a number of words and phrases that may call for definition. The list below is designed to enable the reader to engage more clearly with this text and the ideas that are discussed.

Nouvelle-France refers to the entire territory under French control during the French Regime 1534-1759.

Québec (1) In its French spelling, as a noun, it refers to the province.

(2) As an adjective (eg: a Québec family) it will be a descriptor of things pertaining to the province *before* the time of the Quiet Revolution (ca. 1960-1970).

Canada refers to the country as constituted in 1867.

French Canadian refers to persons living anywhere in Canada who claim French heritage and whose first language is French.

Quebecer refers to a person living in Québec who does not claim French heritage or French as their first language.

Québécois refers to persons who consider themselves as belonging to the nation of Québec, a self-consciousness that emerged from the Quiet Revolution.

québécois, québécoise: adjective; descriptive form of the above.

Franco-American refers to all persons claiming French heritage and French as their first language who live in the Americas.

habitant refers to the people who came from France to settle in Nouvelle-France. Settlers were those who intended to live on the land, and, initially or later, to own land. Under British rule, the word came to refer to the people in the province of Québec, who remained as the core of the French-speaking agricultural and rural community. Today it can be used as a descriptor to refer to country and traditional artifacts and products, but can also be used pejoratively to describe someone who is clumsy or poorly educated.

Culture In its broadest sense, the word culture refers to the customs, civilization and achievements of a particular time or people. Professional and academic study of *folk culture*, as opposed to *elite culture* is practiced to learn about those people overlooked by the conventional disciplines (see Dorson, in Sims and Stephens, 3). This inquiry will later examine elements of performance in three Québec folk culture events.

To culture Used as a verb, it means to maintain (micro-organisms, etc) in conditions suitable for growth. Thus, when I use the expression “culturing

performance” in my title, I am proposing that practices of enactment within customary Québec folklore “maintained” performance skills and readiness “in conditions suitable for growth” towards modern and contemporary *québécois* theatre practice.

These terms and definition will be of value in the examination of the layers of the map that follow. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are those of this author. In spite of my guidelines, the reader will encounter variations in appearance of words such as Québec and Montréal in titles of and quotations from works I cite. My intention, through employing the French spellings in my writing, is to reverse visually, and (if I were ever to be quoted aloud) aurally/orally, the common tendency to appropriate and modify foreign words for the speaker’s convenience: a small measure in support of cultural diversity.

Chapter Two

Running through the Woods: Library Expeditions

Literature Review

Layer 1. Texts dealing with Québec theatre history, written in English.

My hunt for documents that would open up the story of *québécois* theatre began with a source edited by Eugene Benson and L. W. Connolly, *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Theatre* (1989). Two key articles contributed foundation layers of data: *Theatre in Quebec (French)* by Gilbert David and *Drama in Quebec (French)* by Leonard E. Doucette. David's essay chronicles major developments: noteworthy performance events; leading actors, directors, and companies; establishment of associations, theatre buildings, and training facilities; influences and trends in production. Doucette outlines the beginnings and growth of dramatic literature generated in French in Québec. From the base of these two writings a researcher must fan out into a web of related articles to gather a fuller picture of the individuals involved, and the experiences and beliefs that have engendered contemporary *québécois* theatre practice. The book holds a wealth of information, but it requires an epic effort to travel down all the trails, bring the isolated accounts into relation with each other, and create the opportunity for a textured comprehension of the whole. The other major drawback with this volume is in the currency of its coverage; neither Robert Lepage the artist, his productions, nor his company at the time, *Théâtre Repère* received entries of their own. Given that today Lepage has earned himself a place beside such theatre icons as Stanislavsky, Brecht,

Mnouchkine and Wilson, as one of Shomit Mitter and Maria Shevtsova's choices in their publication *Fifty Key Theatre Directors* (2005), I needed to read much more about him than the quarter page allotted to him in Benson and Conolly's reference work. I needed, as well, an opportunity to encounter the other practitioners, ideas and performances occurring in Québec in the 16 years since that publication.

Prompted by previous research into the archival materials (1974 - 1987) of Victoria's Belfry Theatre and the development of alternate theatre in English Canada since 1967, I re-examined some of those resources for their possible coverage of Québec events. Although their dates were still not recent, Renate Usmiani's *Second Stage: The Alternative Theatre Movement in Canada* (1983) and Robert Wallace's *Producing Marginality* (1990) included complimentary discussions of *québécois* theatre practice as it evolved away from text-based work and toward the imagistic creations to which critic Ackerman was witness.

Four hardcover texts dedicate their full attention to my subject but address only partial time periods and frankly admit their privileging of a focus on dramatic literature over other modes of investigation into theatrical activity. Leonard E. Doucette, noted above for his article, covers the early days in *Theatre in French Canada: Laying the Foundations 1606-1867* (1984). While there is no question that this is a unique and very valuable source, Doucette's orientation is to preserved scripts and textual performance reports. He is finished with the period of the French Regime (1534-1759) after the first 35 pages of his 207-page document. He makes his position clear with a quote from a Québec author,

Paul Toupin, who conceives of himself as a writer for “ ‘un théâtre dans un fauteuil’ ” (theatre in an armchair) (Benson & Connelly, *Oxford* 558). Toupin declares, “ ‘the only theatre which exists in Time, is the theatre one reads’ ” (vii). Despite this leaning, I found Doucette very thorough and engaged with his material. His volume reinforces the timeline, uncovers clues and suggests places to begin looking for customs involving performance. His sorting of productions into the categories ‘religious-pedagogic’, ‘political’, and ‘social’ provided a helpful frame of reference.

By the same author, a much more recent volume provides translations and introductions to ten plays that range from 1803-1894 . The anthology *The Drama of Our Past: Major Plays from Nineteenth-Century Quebec* seeks to “demonstrate the the evolution of dramatic forms” with introductions for each piece that offer a variety of discussions including analysis of the plays, language, social, political and historical contexts, and relationships to other literature of the time. A very valuable addition to the resources though it is still partial and centred on dramatic texts.

Jonathan M. Weiss, a name we have already met in chapter one, writing in *French-Canadian Literature*, for *Twayne’s World Authors Series*, produced *French-Canadian Theater* in 1986. While Weiss does treat the time period from 1650 to 1968, he does so in 26 pages. The work is valuable primarily as an in-depth investigation of the decade and a half between 1968 and 1985. Weiss clarifies that his concern is with the “enduring literary texts of the dramaturgy of Quebec ” (Preface). Just before his conclusion, he does address (in two pages) experimental and

feminist theatre developments and then moves quickly on to a brief discussion of the work of Normand Chaurette. Chaurette, he feels, represents a promise for the future of playwriting in Quebec, because of his move away from realism and into imaginary, interior spaces and dream worlds (155). An advantage Weiss offers is that, as an American scholar, he is able to speak of the long-standing conflict between the two solitudes with a detached frankness.

Elaine Nardocchio, in her 1986 publication, *Theatre and Politics in Modern Québec*, takes a close look at the time period 1930 to 1980 through a sociopolitical lens. She, as well, is working mainly through the literature, her emphasis being upon "the thematic and ideological content of indigenous, French language drama and comedy" (xii). While she deals with the time period between 1606 and the 1930s in the first 15 pages, Nardocchio is, throughout, concerned with the ways Québec theatre expresses the people's struggles toward respect, identity and independence. She addresses what she labels the "Revolutionary Theatre Groups", situating developments in experimental theatre in the 1970s beside the playwriting of Jean Barbeau and Jean-Claude Germain, both of whom were shaped by their experiences in early collective work. For my purposes, Nardocchio brings a desire to identify the links between the *québécois* living conditions and aspirations and the theatre they were creating.

The Theater in French Canada (1936-1966) is a soft cover monograph written by Jean Hamelin and published by the Quebec Department of Cultural Affairs in 1968. This work covers a short but very vital stage in the birthing of

modern Québec theatre. As I had seen an almost identical publication in French with Hamelin as author, and as no name is given as a translator for the English version, I must assume that Hamelin was both the author and translator of this document. The text gives the reader more of an architectural look at the structure of French language theatre in Québec with chapter headings that include: early beginnings; the companies; decentralization; aid to the theatre; staging; television and radio; drama schools; and playwrights. In 78 pages, *The Theater in French Canada* delivers abundant precise information. It can slip (not surprisingly, considering the site of its publication) into a somewhat promotional tone but, nevertheless, it does provide a useful counterpoint in perspective as a voice from *within* the culture being studied.

Two other volumes, while not histories in any strict sense, are important because they are recent and stimulating. *Essays on Modern Quebec Theater* (1995), edited by Joseph I. Donohoe Jr. and Jonathan M. Weiss, was created as part of the Canadian Studies Series at Michigan State University to, "celebrate the arresting development and undeniable richness of Quebec theater as it has emerged over the last three or four decades" (xi). The twelve essays are divided into four categories: theatre culture, language, contemporary perspectives, and interpretation of specific works or authors. Embracing scholarly insights from the United States, France, anglophone Canada, and Québec itself, the collection is particularly valuable as a collage that includes some analysis that comes from a good arm's-length. Chantal Hébert's piece, *The Theater: Sounding Board for the*

Appeals and Dreams of the Québécois Collectivity, provides a very valuable reflection on the ways in which Québec theatre manifested and participated in the developing consciousness of the Québec people by looking at the three decades marked off by the years 1960, 1970, and 1980. Annie Brisset, in *Language and Collective Identity: When Translators of Theater Address the Quebec Nation* speaks of what is lost and gained and recreated in the act of translation. She pointed me to Jean-Claude Germain's various exercises in reclaiming 19th century *québécois* theatre writings. Jane Koustas, while focusing on translation issues, draws a portrait of English Canadian response patterns to *québécois* plays that speaks to a number of the considerations to be kept in mind when creating a course in *québécois* theatre for non-*québécois* theatre students.

Jill MacDougall's book, *Performing Identities on the Stages of Quebec* (1997), examines manifestations of *Québécois* identity in three of its theatrical incarnations: the annual *Saint Jean* parades and celebrations; a series of outdoor performances at the *Place Royale* in the old city of Québec by the collective *Théâtre Parminou* that dealt with *patrimoine* or heritage subjects through parody and entertainment; and finally, through analysis, the epic and cross-cultural venture of Robert Lepage in his *Tectonic Plates*. MacDougall's objective is to understand the shifts in the sense of nationalism taking place between the 1980 and 1995 referenda. She provides a great deal of first-hand witnessing and is able to talk, for example, about specifics such as Lepage's practice of building from tangible objects; about her understanding of *Parminou's* commitment, and

the whole world of performance called up from ordinary parishioners as a result of participation in the national holiday parade and festivities. Mac Dougall's musings on the question of whether the achievement of political independence might break the creative will that stems from the pursuit of nationhood would provide a valuable entry point for discussion in any course on Québec theatre. For, if the dream were to become a reality, would the creative bubble pop and disintegrate, losing its distinct-ness and drive?

Finally, Brian Kennedy, in the new survey text on Canadian theatre history (2004), *The Baron Bold and the Beauteous Maid*, speaks of the struggle to bring together the resources necessary to teach a course in this discipline. Kennedy found, as did I, that the "[p]rimary materials, the plays themselves, are published in a bewildering array—as single texts, as periodical articles, or as collected works. . . . [C]ritical sources for a particular play text, or historical period—the required reading teachers need for senior students—are strewn just as far and wide, among a variety of scholarly publications and critical introductions" (Prologue iii). For the purposes of this study, Kennedy's book provides three and a half pages of well-detailed background, scenes from four important Québec plays, and notes on each of their authors. Interestingly, Lescarbot's *Théâtre de Neptune* of 1606 is Kennedy's earliest entry in the text that he then bookends with Québec playwright Michel Marc Bouchard's *Coronation Voyage*, first performed in 1995. The latter, an award-winning play, was published some ten years before the publication of Kennedy's survey and

so could not be considered representative of contemporary *québécois* theatre. A play from the last decade would have more usefully served as a resource in the pursuit of the question that Mac Dougall raises above.

Layer 2. Texts dealing with Québec theatre history, written in French.

This layer of the map appears on the following pages as Table 1. I present it in this way because there were so many resources available. The table catalogues texts written in French that treat directly the story of the development of *québécois* theatre. This selection includes titles most often referenced, and is a representation of the types of resources available. In this format, the keywords helped me to identify areas that English scholarship had missed entirely or only minimally addressed. In both languages, we have: works covering the early history, dramatic literature and playwrights of the 1960s and 1970s; and reflective, retrospective essays in the 1990s. The material in French, however, includes volumes that focus more intently on various eras (for example: the 1890s, burlesque, *Les Compagnons de Saint Laurent*), state-sponsored chronicles of government support and the cultural work by time periods; works expressing the political agency of theatre practice, movement, stories of the theatre buildings, photographic evidence, surveys of leading plays and characters from the *québécois* repertoire, and testimonies from actors. The histories written on the early years were themselves published at different times in the 20th century and thus reflect changing values and priorities. It is my hope that, in

presenting the French layer in this format, it becomes a useful indicator to resources that can be accessed by students, especially those who already have some proficiency in French as a second language.

The texts are ordered by the column entitled "Period," referring to the period in history that it addresses. Some cover several centuries, some a single season. Those beginning in 1606 are listed first. The other categories given are Title, Author, Year of Publication, and Notes. Notes refers to the points of interest and specificity of each volume. The columns Photos, Graphics, Charts / Lists, and Chronology are presented as a quick graphic reference to those features in the given text.

	Period	Title	Author	Year	Photos, graphics	Charts / Lists	Chronology	Notes
1	1606-1975	Le théâtre québécois: instrument de contestation sociale et politique	Cotnam, Jacques	1976				3 chap: 1606-1937, 1937-65, 1965-75, 2 clerical interdictions
2	1606-1945	L'histoire du théâtre au Canada: pour un retour aux classiques	Houlé, Léopold	1945				history, privilege to the classics, bemoans the "popular", and "folklore"
3	1765-1825	L'activité théâtrale au Québec (1765-1825)	Lafon, Dominique	1974				French heritage, education, clergy, paratheatre, buildings, troupes, repertoire, dramatic literature, charts
4	1825-1980	Le théâtre au Québec 1825-1980: repères et perspectives	Legris, Renée, Larrue, Jean-Marc Bourassa, André-G. David, Gilbert	1988				3 chap: 1825-1930, 1930-65, 1965-80 photo, poster, document exhibit, chronology of companies 1965-80
5	1837-1977	Aspects du théâtre québécois	Duval, Étienne-F.	1977				essays: 1837, 19th c. heroes, 19th c. theatre in Mont., public taste, direction & language, Gurik, Grand Cirque Ordinaire

Table 1. Layer 2. Texts dealing with Québec theatre history, written in French.

	Period	Title	Author	Year	Photos, graphics	Charts / Lists	Chronology	Notes
6	1848-1978	Le fou et ses doubles: figures de la dramaturgie québécoise	Gobin, Pierre	1978				character analysis, dealing with modern alienation, fool types in Québec plays
7	1871-2000	Les personnages du théâtre québécois	Desmeules, Georges Lahaie, Christiane	2000				75 character sketches from Québec plays, archetypes to some extent
8	1888-1988	Cent ans de théâtre à Montréal	Camerlain, Lorraine Pavlovic, Diane	1988				photos, history, exhibit, themes
9	1890-1900	Le théâtre à Montréal à la fin du XIX ^e siècle	Larrue, Jean-Marc	1981				short period, 1810-1890, French vs English stats, clergy, colleges, public taste...
10	1900-1950	Le jeu de l'histoire et de la société dans le théâtre québécois 1900-1950	Duval, Étienne-F.	1983				anthology, plays, themes, excerpts

Table 1. cont. Layer 2. Texts dealing with Québec theatre history, written in French.

	Period	Title	Author	Year	Photos, graphics	Charts / Lists	Chronology	Notes
11	1900-2000	Théâtres québécois et canadiens-français au XX ^e siècle: trajectoires et territoires	Beauchamp, Hélène David, Gilbert	2003				direction, theatres, <i>gestionnaire</i> 1945-2000, publishing, criticism, l'Américanité, Ont, West, Acadie, formation, women, language, ethics, writing Québec theatre history
12	1914-1980	Le Burlesque au Québec: un divertissement populaire	Hébert, Chantal	1981				3 ages, acting, productions, repertoire, preface by Yvon Deschamps
13	1914-1950	Le Burlesque québécois et américain	Hébert, Chantal	1989				burlesque, origins, comparison with American models, purposes, scripts
14	1920-1954	Le Père Émile Legault et le théâtre au Québec	Caron, Anne	1978				early biography, European training, the company, audiences & criticism

Table 1. cont. Layer 2. Texts dealing with Québec theatre history, written in French.

	Period	Title	Author	Year	Photos, graphics	Charts / Lists	Chronology	Notes
15	1921-1998	100 pièces du théâtre québécois qu'il faut lire et voir	Magnan, Lucie-Marie Morin, Christian	2002				14 themes, 1st performance: director, theatre, date author & play indexes
16	1936-1964	Le Théâtre au Canada français	Hamelin, Jean	1964				Companies, troupes, decentralization, govt aid, staging, TV & radio, schools, playwrights
17	1945-1970	Le Théâtre québécois	Godin, Jean Cléo Mailhot, Laurent	1970				10 playwrights, plays, bibliography by playwright: works and studies
18	1950-1989	Le Tragique dans le théâtre québécois et canadien-français, 1950-1989	Nutting, Stéphanie	2000				examination of six plays
19	1951-1954	Textes épars (1935-1959)	Cantin, Pierre Gauvreau, Luc Olscamp, Marcel	2000				Jacques Ferron, Montréal poet, playwright and storyteller, Duplessis era, stories, "chroniques dramatiques",

Table 1. cont. Layer 2. Texts dealing with Québec theatre history, written in French.

	Period	Title	Author	Year	Photos, graphics	Charts / Lists	Chronology	Notes
20	1957-1981	Le Théâtre et l'État au Québec	Gruslin, Adrien	1981				government aid, categories, censorship, power, graphics, photos
21	1965-1980	Le Théâtre québécois de 1965 à 1980 - un théâtre politique	Engelbertz	1989				overview 1534-1965, <i>joual</i> , collective conscience, popular collectives
22	1968-1973	Le Nouveau théâtre québécois	Belair, Michel	1973				autonomy, nationhood, "economic aesthetic 3 currents: Tremblay & popular, TNM & politics, G Cirque O & fables
23	1975-2005	Les Théâtres de création au Québec, en Acadie, et au Canada français	Beauchamp, Hèlène	2005				theatres- histories & vital statistics, dates, size, etc by type of company
24	1975-1995	Le Théâtre québécois 1975-1995	Lafon	2001				institutions, historiography, playwrighting, direction, scenography, exchanges, diffusion, reception

Table 1. cont. Layer 2. Texts dealing with Québec theatre history, written in French.

	Period	Title	Author	Year	Photos, graphics	Charts / Lists	Chronology	Notes
25	1977-1978	Le Texte et la scène	Fortier, André	1979				26 reviews, Germain, Organization O, Maillet, Morency, Garneau, Ducharme
26	1980-1990	Dramaturgies québécoises des années quatre-vingt	Godin, Jean Cléo	1999				Bouchard, Chaurette, Dubois, Marie Laberge, Carbone 14, Repère
27	1988-1989	La passion du jeu : livre-théâtre écrit par 54 comédiens et comédiennes du Québec	Alonzo, Anne-Marie	1989				comments on lives in theatre in Québec, short bios, photos & illustrations

Table 1. cont. Layer 2. Texts dealing with Québec theatre history, written in French.

Layer 3. Theatre Journals, written in English.

Journals add texture, they provide a layer of counterpoint to, or confirmation of more extensive resources, and are useful sources for dealing with the immediate past. As a means of structuring theatre and performance studies, journal articles create a rich supplement to the textbooks; they are, however, an unlikely site from which to draw the bulk of materials. I have consulted recent scholarship in the *Canadian Theatre Review*, and the following issues have provided valuable information: *Theatre and Translation*, Spring 2000 (102); *Canada on the World Stage*, Winter 2001 (105); *The Body*, Winter 2002 (109) featuring *Carbone 14*, and *Activist Theatre*, Winter 2004 (117) highlighting 30 years of practice for *Théâtre Parminou*. The most recent issue of *Canadian Theatre Review*, titled, *Canadian, Eh?*, March 2006, provided an interesting short digest of Québec theatre history written by Louis Patrick Leroux (discussed in the next chapter). The translation issue of *Theatre Research in Canada* 1-2 (2003) provided me with the Jane Koustas' article, "Zulu Time: Theatre Beyond Translation". Two other articles offer further openings into the two ends of the timeline of Québec theatre history, both in Vol. 20, No. 1, 1999 of *Theatre Research in Canada*: Jane Moss discusses recent work in "Yvan Bienvenue and the Conte Urbain" and Greg Nichols introduces four additional *réceptions* in the tradition of *Théâtre de Neptune*.

Layer 4. Theatre Journals, written in French.

When I was in Montréal in the winter of 2005/2006, I was able to examine issues of *Cahiers de Théâtre Jeu* (which has been in publication since 1976), at the Library of the National Theatre School / *École nationale de théâtre du Canada*. Michel Vais, in *Contemporary Canadian Theatre: New World Visions* described *Jeu* as “so important” because of its role as the “only completely independent periodical dedicated to theatrical activity in Québec” (127). Other important periodicals in French include *L’Annuaire théâtral*, *Théâtre/Public*, and *Études Littéraire*. I have not had access to these. There are also regular bulletins that are issued by *Centre d’essai des auteurs dramatiques*.

Layer 5. Texts dealing with French social and theatre history in English and/or French, especially in the periods of the French Regime, 1534 – 1759, and from circa the 1930s to the present .

I discovered almost nothing in texts dedicated to Québec theatre history to constitute a “French Connection,” Act 1; that is to say, material connecting theatre practice in France before and during the French regime (1534 -1759) to theatre practice in Nouvelle-France. Although few productions were mounted during those first 100 years, colonists *were* emigrating and bringing with them traditions and familiarity with a range of theatrical and performance experiences: from the newly developing neo-classics through court masques and fireworks; touring provincial troupes and fairground *commedia del arte*; circus and folk culture. To imagine the works of Molière and Racine, not as we think of

them now as, perhaps, fixed and conservative, but as avant-garde and cutting edge, would help to initiate a more engaging context for learning.

In addition, I looked for and found no attention given to what could be termed the “French Connection,” Act 2, beyond the mention of some Québec artists in the 20th century traveling to France to study. There is little written on the developments in drama that followed the Paris student riots of 1968. Here again, there may be significant events and performance shifts that influenced theatre practice in Québec following the Quiet Revolution. One example, companies were formed in France committed to collective creation and political action, and playwrights were largely dismissed in favour of powerful directors like Roger Planchon who employed “scenic writing” (Bradby and Sparks 41-45). Also missing are what might be seen as influential links through France with theatrical developments in the United States; the Living Theatre, for instance, was involved in a number of international theatre festivals in Avignon, France. For Quebec, a French-speaking minority within a 20th century North American continent, the connection with France is more than simply familial.

Layer 6. Texts dealing with American social and theatre history as they pertain to involvement with Québec and the French Canadian people

There is much topography to be explored in the relationship between the United States and Québec: the shared anti-British sentiments; the dramatic opposition of religious beliefs in the early years of colonization (Québec Catholic versus Anglo-Saxon Protestant); the American support for the 1837-38 *Patriotes*; the exodus to the mills of New England in the Depression; and the take-over of Las Vegas by the *Cirque de Soleil*, to name just a few. While not directly connected to theatre practices, American ideals and dreams have, and continue, strongly to influence the *québécois* imagination. Pierre L'Hérault in his essay, *L'américanité dans la dramaturgie québécois*, speaks about the connection between Québec and the United States:

C'est par un semblable rapport que s'exprime l'américanité dans la pièce-culte de Dominic Champagne, Cabaret neiges noires (Champagne et al., 1994). Sous le désordre formel de la pièce, trois références importantes sont autant de fils retenant ensemble les morceaux disparates: le célèbre discours "I have a dream..." du pasteur Martin Luther King et son assassinat en 1968; le rêve québécois de la Révolution tranquille et la Crise d'octobre 1970; et la citation de la devise "Je me souviens." Ici, comme dans Le Dortoir de Maheu, le rêve québécois — et son échec — semble inextricablement lié au rêve américain, pour le meilleur et pour le pire, serais-je tenté d'ajouter. (173)

(It is by way of a similar connection that *l'américanité* is expressed in the "cult" piece by Dominic Champagne, *Cabaret neiges noires* (Champagne et al., 1994). Under the formal disorder of the production, three important references act as threads holding together the disparate pieces: the celebrated speech "I have a dream..." of pastor Martin Luther King and his assassination in 1968; the *québécois* dream of the Quiet Revolution and the October Crisis of 1970; and the quotation of the motto "I remember."

Here, as in Maheu's *Le Dortoir*, the *québécois* dream — and its failure — seem inextricably bound up with the American dream, for better or for worse, I would be tempted to add. [173])

The American touring productions out of New York at the turn of the last century are often discussed (Larrue 53-69; Edwards 36-83) but opera-in-a-tent, the circuses with pantomime shows, the vaudeville and burlesque performers and troupes and the influence of American films and television are all under-represented in the existing Québec theatre history texts.

Layer 7: The dramatic literature of Québec and the *québécois* plays, in their original form and in translation.

The dramatic literature is, of course, an essential component in any study of theatre history. However, it is not within the purview of this thesis to discuss or identify those plays that would be appropriate indicators and demonstrations of particular periods.

The next chapter will consider Layer Eight, a formation of the map that deals with social and theatre history in anglophone Canada. The content will explore not so much the resources in this area as the perspectives that have maintained the long separation of energies in two cultural "solitudes" in this country.

Chapter Three

Surveying the Boundaries: Identifying Cultural Barriers

Layer 8. Texts dealing with Canadian social and theatre history as they pertain to involvement with Québec with special consideration of the “two solitudes”, the perspectives (boundaries) that appear to have stalled the building of this map in the past.

Neither the map nor the course would be fully functional without a layer of information drawn from the resources of theatre experience as it has occurred in the rest of Canada. Discussion of this layer has been given its own chapter for several reasons. Firstly, because anglophone Canadian students will find they, themselves, belong somewhere in this part of the story. Secondly, where France and America might be considered *influences* in the development of *québécois* theatre practice, English Canada has *parallel developments*, especially in the last sixty years. Thirdly, besides a discussion of events in English-Canadian theatre history as they relate to developments in Québec, materials in any course on Québec theatre history would have to deal, self-consciously and constructively, with stereotypes and clichés, and the perceptions, attitudes and possible prejudices participants might hold with regards to the people and culture of Québec. These abstract barriers, like political boundaries on any map, contribute to the disjuncture, the isolation, the separation between the two theatre communities in this country.

Resources

For the purposes of this layer, several valuable texts have already been mentioned. Benson and Connolly's *Oxford Companion to Canadian Theatre*, Usmiani's *Second Stage: The Alternative Theatre Movement in Canada*; Wallace's *Producing Marginality*; Kennedy's *The Baron Bold and the Beauteous Maid*; *Contemporary Canadian Theatre: New World Visions* and *Establishing Our Boundaries: English Canadian Theatre Criticism*, both edited by Anton Wagner, all cover activity across the country. To address this particular layer substantively, we must add: Alan Filewod's *Collective Encounters; Up the Mainstream: The Rise of Toronto's Alternative Theatres, 1968-1975* by Denis Johnston; *The Theatre of Form* by Ric Knowles; and three volumes by Herbert Whittaker: *Whittaker's Theatre: a Critic Looks at Stages in Canada and Thereabouts, 1944-1975*; *Whittaker's Theatricals*; and *Setting the Stage: Montreal Theatre* (for English theatre in that city). Murray Edwards's *A Stage in Our Past* and *English Canadian Theatre, 1765-1826* by Yashdip S. Bains are both very helpful in regard to early phases of development.

A small, slim volume entitled *English-Canadian Theatre* (1987) by Eugene Benson and L. W. Connolly remains, I believe, a touchstone survey text and overview of theatrical activity, tracing events from examples of pre-contact rituals of First Nations peoples to countrywide events in the late 1980s. True to its title, it revealed nothing concerning works conceived of and performed by Canadians whose native language was not English and I have not found any comparably comprehensive document written in French about *québécois* theatre.

This list is far from exhaustive, but represents publications I am familiar with and that would provide a good foundation on which to track general similarities and differences between developments in French theatre in Québec and that of English speaking Canada. A list still to be developed is sources for regional Maritime and Acadian theatre developments, and Franco-Canadian theatre activity in Manitoba and elsewhere in the west.

Perspectives: the "two solitudes" dilemma

"Come to Québec, go to the theatre, make friends who will be your continuing contact with French Canada when you have moved on"

In 1985, Marianne Ackerman, critic and playwright, issued this invitation and, perhaps, challenge, in the closing paragraphs of her essay, *Bridging the Two Solitudes: English and French Theatre in Quebec* (136). Twenty-one years later, difficult distances seem to remain. In the latest edition of *Canadian Theatre Review*, Winter 2006, Louis Patrick Leroux gives us a 6-page pocket version of Québec theatre history from *Felix Poutré* in 1862 to the present. Pointing to one lapse in understanding, the opening paragraph of his article is amusing, embarrassing and revealing.

There was stunned silence, followed by awkward glances back and forth. Someone's face puckered as if in reaction to an unfortunate smell. I had breached the decidedly unhip topic of "*identitaire*" drama in Québec. My culturally astute colleagues in Montréal wondered why on earth anyone would be interested in such a topic in this day and age. "It's a commission for an English Canadian journal," I managed to plead. Ah! That explained it all (62)

Certainly, Leroux would know, when he began his research, that the focus of drama in Québec had moved past that of national identity. But his choice to head up the article with this joke betrays the extent to which it is not a joke. It is a choice that underlines the degree to which Canadians have perhaps not yet found the “energy and resolve” to build the cultural bridges dreamt of by Marianne Ackerman (Lieblein, 136).

In her 2003 essay, “Zulu Time: Theatre Beyond Translation”, Jane Koustas speaks of how Robert Lepage wrestles with the trope of isolation in face of and in spite of languages and codes, related to international air travel, created for the express purpose of “universal” communication. Lepage “clearly force[s] Canadian and Quebec audiences to step beyond this dichotomy,” writes Koustas, referring to the *zeitgeist* Canadians have inherited from Hugh MacLennan in the title of his 1945 novel, *Two Solitudes*. (16). Koustas’s essay appears to confirm that forces such as the politics of language are still blocking potential cultural exchanges and innovation.

Why does this situation persist? It is clear that language is an important factor. The *québécois* people, as they have become more and more determined to proclaim and know themselves since the developments of the Quiet Revolution, are first of all, and most powerfully, distinct as a society in the reality of the French language. A language that is performed around the globe in a kaleidoscope of varied spoken expression. From Madagascar to Haiti, from Louisiana to Switzerland and to St-Pierre-et-Miquelon the abstract concept of classical, *authorized*, textbook French is elaborated through rich particularities of rhythm, inflection, and vocabulary. Much as dramatic literature only becomes

theatre when it is spoken and heard, the *oralité* of a language is where its vitality resides.

In Québec this living language is now heard on the stage. *Québécois* dramatic literature became accessible to anglophone audiences with translations of Gratien Gélinas's and Marcel Dubé's plays. Then, for social as well as theatrical reasons, Quiet Revolution playwright Michel Tremblay demanded focus from the rest of the country. While other dramatic authors had placed vernacular speech in the mouths of their characters, Tremblay broke unwritten rules by staging an exclusively female group of inter-related, Montréal working class citizens; allowing them to speak aloud about their unhappiness in the particularity of the spoken expression of their *quartier*, about the frustrations of their private and even their sexual lives; and permitting them to utter curses in the course of their conversations. The public reactions in Québec to this 'airing of dirty laundry' caught attention and curiosity outside of that province (Weiss, *French-Canadian Theater* 28-31). Since then, ongoing translations of Tremblay's work and that of many other prominent dramatists have diffused, to some degree, the difficulties that language can present.

Beyond the plays themselves, as we have seen, there is a wealth of information for those who are able to enter this history through the French language. However, there is no current volume in English that serves as a comprehensive historical survey and reference to performance practice. Most of what does exist for Anglophones covers only partial time periods or is outdated. As for the last two decades (1985-2006), research in *québécois* theatrical activity

and the politics of Québec culture exists primarily in essay or chapter form, as journal articles (like Leroux's) or as encyclopedia entries.

Within those publications in English, we must listen for priorities that are conveyed by the tones and inflections of voices from inside and outside *québécois* culture. As Marcel Rioux, author of *Québec in Question* (1969), pointed out, "We are interested . . . in the way history has been written, how it has been taught and how, above all, it has been woven into the tissues of ideologies" (8).

For instance, Jonathan Weiss, who celebrates modern *québécois* work, is nonetheless strongly dismissive of the significance of Gratien Gélinas's 1949 play *Tit-Coq*, measuring it in terms of literary innovation. He pronounces it "does little to break out of conventional realism; the plot unfolds through dialogues some of which are easily predictable, and, aside from the play's hero, Gélinas's characters have little to make them memorable." He rejects Jean-Cléo Godin's statement, made in 1970, that this play marked the "explosive beginning of Quebec theater" (Godin and Mailhot 36) and claims that the value of the play lies in "showing us a state of mind that existed just as Quebec was beginning the process of change that was to culminate in the Quiet Revolution" (*Fr-Can Theater* 12). As a counterpoint, Québec poet, playwright and folklorist Jacques Ferron, writing in 1951 in his *Chroniques Dramatiques*, refers, not to the written play itself, but to the two hundredth performance of *Tit-Coq* as marking the birth of "le théâtre canadien" and the "début de notre littérature dramatique." He credits this second centennial of *Tit-Coq* in performance as sending a signal of confidence to *québécois* writers, directors and audiences and compares its

force to that of works like *Le Cid*, *Hernani*, and *Cyrano* in terms of the renewal of the French theatre. He states that in the two year period (1949-51) "au moins dix pièces canadiennes ont été créées. Il n'y a plus de doute que le jour n'est pas loin où les pièces étrangères passeront au deuxième plan, après notre production nationale. Alors notre pays sera devenu adulte"(142-3). (at least ten *canadien* plays have been created. There is no longer any doubt that the day is not far off when foreign plays will shift to second place, behind our own national production. Then our country will have become adult.)

The perspectives and perceptions of English authors must, therefore, be examined for judgments made as detached outsiders, and for the omission, wittingly or not, of a sense of Québec temperament and values.

Leroux manifests his priorities. He does address the phenomenon of Québec companies who create works with less dependence on authors and scripts, but he contains this report in a single short paragraph. Its deliberate placement in juxtaposition to a description of new playwrights could be read as placing a lesser value on work not generative of dramatic literature. As Ackerman admitted in the 1980s, this was the value system she had been schooled in as an anglophone Canadian. Leroux writes:

Normand Chaurette, Michel Marc Bouchard and René-Daniel Dubois would spearhead the "*nouvelle dramaturgie*" trend. Playwrights from the eighties, more educated than ever, and specializing in writing plays, sought to eradicate realism, explicit political commentary and "typical" Québécois themes and characters. In parallel to this, the image-based and thus international aesthetic and apolitical theatres of Gilles Maheu and his dance-theatre company Carbone 14, of Denis Marleau and his Théâtre Ubu and of Robert Lepage and the Théâtre Répère (sic) (and later Ex Machina) were a well appreciated breath of fresh air for audiences. This theatre was eminently exportable and would indeed charm audiences across the continents. (66)

And so—predictably I propose—we see the publication in 1986 of *Quebec Voices: Three Plays* featuring the work of Charette and Dubois in translation. But, beyond the star fascination with Lepage, I have seen no English volume dedicated to physical, experimental, imagistic, feminist, or collaborative *québécois* performance work.

While anglophone Canada remains out of touch with developments in *québécois* performance and dramatic literature, Jennifer Harvie, in 2001, outlined the reasons why the Canadian presence on the world stage is dominated by Québec work. Besides the general growth in Canada's national theatre scene, structures within Québec provide the facilities that produce artistic projects of a very high standard. The assertive promotion of cultural products on the international market and financial assistance for translation supports work that is expressly designed to tour (5-8). In the case of the United Kingdom, Harvie also speaks of a 'resonance', of the shared experiences "of small nationhood, of rural life, of religious culture" (5). If bridges can be built so effectively with communities in the British Isles, why does it appear so difficult for theatre workers and companies in Anglophone Canada and their counterparts in Québec to become friends who play together, as Ackerman invited us to do?

Other issues certainly complicate relationships in this country. Anglophone Canadians have experienced the federal imposition of bi-lingualism and bi-culturalism. They have lived through the fearful times of the October crisis in 1970, and all the struggles around the issues of separatism, independence, sovereignty-association and referenda. But, in 1985, Ackerman wondered whether, at its base, the alienation was simply the product of disinterest. She

quotes Toronto director Bill Glassco who, in spite of his own efforts to promote *québécois* theatre at the Tarragon, said he felt that “nothing of English culture is of any interest to Quebec, and we aren’t really interested in them” (128).

Construction of this 8th layer of the map would have to include a background in all these issues, allied with self-reconnaissance on the part of participants in terms of their personal/ political readiness to become a *voyageur*.

To counter the selective attention that has been paid by anglophone Canada to the development of theatre in Québec, there must be an investigation into components that have been omitted or only touched upon lightly: from the earliest scripts, through the burlesque, the revues, drama on radio and television, the amateur but rigorous re-taking up of the French classics, to the innovative interpretations of the French *avant-garde*. As well, strategies are needed to create ‘interest’ among students in the dimensions of performance testified to in the post cards of Chapter One: the kind of work that features physicality and the body (Gilles Maheu and Carbone 14); vital female voices (Pol Pelletier and Julie Vincent); the involvement of new media and technology (Robert Lepage and Ex Machina); improvisation (Ligue nationale d’improvisation); image (Cirque du Soleil), *racontage* (Yvan Bienvenue and Théâtre Urbi et Orbi); and other combinations and permutations.

As someone looking for openings onto theatre practice in Québec for anglophone students, the timely appearance of Leroux’s retrospective of *québécois* theatre history in an English Canadian journal is welcome. Parts were also disturbing. Leroux omits, for example, all mention of the fruitful 20 years of collective creation—an important bridge to the appearance of collective theatre in

English-speaking Canada. He does, however, point in a direction that is of interest to this study. After enumerating a list of dramatists and plays involving autobiographical elements, including Lepage's *The Andersen Project*, he suggests that "[p]aradoxically, through having so many individualities staged, a communal sense of identification is again possible, without the political overtones associated with earlier, explicitly *identitaire* works" (67).

Leroux never considers the existence, presence, *survivance* in these performances of the traditional *québécois* raconteur; that the number of *québécois* artists engaging in this "individualistic" genre might simply be slipping quite comfortably back into material and roles not that far detached from the centuries of their oral tradition. There are clues to this possibility. Moss, in 1999, describes Yvan Bienvenue's award-winning work using the *conte urbain* as a "new hybrid dramatic form [that] combines the monologue and the traditional oral tale, using a mixture of popular language and poetic speech" (16). The publication, *Contes Cornus, légendes fourchues*, (1997) is a collection of tales and songs, scripts and photos of productions built from traditional stories and legends that was spear-headed by the young actor-creator Bryan Perro and inspired by the old storytellers like Raoul "Le Red" Tremblay. These events generate an important question: How much more might Anglophones, and all outside enquirers, comprehend *québécois* theatre if they chose to investigate the folk history of performance; to inspect the ground out of which contemporary *québécois* theatre springs, and to look for clues in the areas that Harvie identifies—in the practices of small nationhood and rural life? The next chapter will embark on just such an exploration.

Chapter Four

Culturing Performance: A Sampling

Layer 9. Texts dealing with the folklore of Québec, the stories, legends, customs, and songs, for their imagination, and especially for the practice and elements of performance they manifest.

Gaps revealed themselves through my research. There is little mapping of the experience and practice of theatre that the colonists would have brought with them as they came across the ocean throughout the 1600s—a very rich time in the development of French stagecraft and scripting. Even more elusive is any investigation of the customary practices and perspectives of life as *habitants* that may have contributed to the performance readiness and the imagination of the post-Quiet Revolution theatre community in Québec. The need to look to these traditions arises because of a ban, that lasted from 1694 until after the conquest of New France by British forces in 1750, during which the citizens of Nouvelle-France were commanded by their church leaders, under pain of penalties as extreme as excommunication, to have nothing to do with theatre (Doucette *Foundations* 30; Larrue 17). I found myself looking for the para-theatrical practices, occasions in which traditions and folk activities might encourage, support, "culture" performance. If there were cultural activities, permitted by the church, that would provide sites, instances of performance, the very performance of them would reinforce the culture, and might lead to and build up a

confidence and readiness to inform stage performance when the opportunities to do so became available.

This chapter will use a sampling of resources to unearth and analyse three general and three very specific instances of performance elements that occurred traditionally in the lives of the *habitants*, outside of any formal concept of theatre.

Folklore Texts in English

Four texts in English were central to this inquiry. Anglophone William Parker Greenough published, in 1897, the memoirs of his encounters with communities in rural Québec in a volume entitled *Canadian Folk-life and Folk-lore*. His accounts are anecdotal, but very detailed, respectful, and perceptive. The volume is illustrated with many sketches and etchings. He speaks warmly of the storyteller Nazaire who is a long-time work acquaintance and friend and that relationship gives validity to his eyewitness accounts of the context and content of Nazaire's stories.

Living Folklore, published in 2005 and written by Martha C. Sims and Martine Stevens, provided me with an understanding of contemporary approaches to folklore theory and practice and their definitions guide the shape of my examples. Their long chapter on performance was especially helpful. *Folk Tales of France*, 1968, edited by Geneviève Massingnon, is primarily a collection of traditional tales from many different parts of that country. It provides indexes of motifs and types as well as a table of contents by region of origin. Its knowledgeable foreword is written by Richard Dorson, who is quoted three

times in *Living Folklore* and noted for his concern with the manipulation of "fakelore" for profit and political reasons (Sims and Stevens 86). Finally, the second part of Marcel Trudel's *Introduction to New France*, 1968, deals with *Institutions* and gives a valuable survey of social organizations and their practices.

Folklore Texts in French

In French, my key resources were Jean Provencher, *C'était l'hiver*, 1986, and *Corvées et quêtes*, 2002, by Jean Pomerleau. These both deal with traditional customs, folk events and rituals. Pomerleau is useful as the history of these events is carried up to the very recent past. Both authors draw heavily on archival sources and often relate portions of memoirs.

Le Québec, un pays, une culture by Françoise Tétu de Labsade, 2001, is a comprehensive cultural survey in its second edition. Professor Tétu de Labsade has been teaching *québécois* civilization and literature at the Université de Laval since 1967. Her unit *De l'oral à l'écrit* is particularly informative as she places the oral tradition in a continuum of verbal forms of expression.

Besides consulting various collections of *contes* or stories from both France and Québec and a monograph on Québec folk songs, I found a special edition of the *québécois* magazine, *L'actualité*, entitled *101 mots pour comprendre le Québec*, published March 2006. It is a unique and timely repository of meditations that are valuable for their immediacy. Contributors were chosen from a wide range of perspectives. Some are public figures, others experts in their fields. They each chose a word for the list and gave a brief

presentation of why they made that particular choice. It is interesting to note that the word "Theatre" was not on the list, but "Festival" was.

Folklore Terms and Definitions

In order to discuss the instances of Québec folk performance, I have drawn the following definitions from Sims and Stephens' *Living Folklore* (discussed above).

Folklore: Folklore is informally learned, unofficial knowledge about the world, ourselves, our communities, our beliefs, our cultures and our traditions, that is expressed creatively through words, music, customs, actions, behaviours and materials. It is also the interactive, dynamic process of creating, communicating, and performing as we share that knowledge with other people (Sims and Stephens 8).

Three genres of Lore:

verbal: involves words, expresses beliefs and values, it may educate;

material: permanent or ephemeral (food), always tangible, often made by the folk group, often handcrafted;

customary: a repeated, patterned and habitual action or behavior in which a person's participation indicates membership (13,16). Note: ritual is a more elaborate, purposeful type of custom (281).

In a given instance of folklore, the three genres often intersect and/or layer; for example: a child playing with (custom) a dreidel (material) while speaking the words of the game (verbal) (Sims and Stephens 16-17).

Tradition: Tradition is often thought synonymous with folklore. It involves both the lore and the process by which we share it. It is marked by an emphasis on **continuity**, the importance of time and repetition. It is something that creates and confirms **identity** and something that the group identifies as a tradition.

Performance: Performance is the site where the components of folklore—people, texts, behaviours and ways of communicating—come together through enactment. Performance is an expressive activity that requires participation, heightens our enjoyment of experience, and invites response (Sims and Stephens 128).

Culture: To further clarify general definitions given above: an umbrella word encompassing both *elite* and *folk* culture. Folklorists study *folk culture* to learn about the general mass of humanity. As Dorson writes, “historians write histories of the elite, the successful, the visible; literary scholars study elitist writings; and critics of the arts confine their attention to the fine arts. Anthropologists venture far off the beaten track, and sociologists look at people statistically” (in Sims and Stephens, 3)

Three General Instances Influencing Performance

There are many aspects of the daily life and seasonal patterns of the thousands of people who emigrated to become the colonists of Nouvelle-France that can be examined for their practice of or influence on performance. They will be found in the tradition of the French legal system, in the strategies of Jesuit education, in public speaking, in the rituals and the celebrations of the Catholic Church. They can be found, too, in the immense collections of *chansons folkloriques*, the *contes*, and *légendes* and, I believe, in the mentality generated by joining and living within a highly organized agricultural system that relied primarily on waterways for transportation. While I deal in more depth with three specific examples, I begin by briefly addressing other areas to be marked as layers that invite exploration.

Education

Leonard Doucette has specifically noted the influence of the Jesuit priests, who from the establishment of their college in 1635 and their seminary in 1663, always included Rhetoric as primary subject. The fathers of the missionary order, renowned for their own skills in persuasive argument as they championed the Counter Reformation in Europe, often structured evaluation of their students by having them demonstrate their learning and critical thinking abilities through the mechanisms of public speaking and debate. It was under their auspices that senior students were allowed to enact religious or approved dramatic literature.

Doucette tells us that drama was an "integral part" of the training the

priests themselves went through; dramatic texts were used “as a way of instilling self-confidence and providing experience for a student body that, by and large, was expected to provide intellectual, moral, and social leadership for its generation” (*Foundations* 11). It was within their schools and the convents of the Ursulines, where instruction was provided for girls and young women, that, for the most part, the only formalized dramatic performances took place at all in the period between 1694 and 1774. It must be admitted that this cadre of education had always been reserved for the children of the elite, and the value placed on becoming adept in the use of the spoken word has not been displaced over time. Tétu de Labsade affirms that, “[l]es collèges, depuis le XIX^e siècle, formaient principalement des jeunes gens pour des professions libérales: des juristes, des hommes politiques, des enseignants dont la profession s’appuie précisément sur le bel usage de la parole” (494). (The colleges, since the 19th century, principally train young people for the liberal professions: the law, politics, education; professions that depend very particularly upon the wise use of words.) The ability to speak *ex tempore* continues to be an important area of the educational curriculum and its influence can be seen in a variety of modern *québécois* theatre practices: improvisation, for example; street theatre; and the monologue or storytelling.

The Law

French territory in the new world came under the codes of law of France. The *Coutume de Paris* was first introduced in 1627 and in 1664 was established by Louis XIV to the exclusion of all other systems (Trudel *Intro* 217). The principal underlying this system held that an accused person was guilty until proven innocent. In his *Introduction to New France*, Marcel Trudel states:

Denied the assistance of a lawyer and still not knowing the nature of the evidence against him, the accused person was subjected to a harsh interrogation, sometimes accompanied by torture (this was called the *question préparatoire*). He was confronted with the witnesses to make him say whether or not he denied the allegations ... The harshness of this procedure was nevertheless reduced in several ways: [one being] the skill of the accused during questioning . . . (218).

The significance of this passage is that it makes it clear that any citizen knew the kind of trial procedure he/she would be up against and every accused person had to be ready to argue in his or her own defense in order to escape penalties. This surely sets up a particular mentality and a consciousness of the moment when one might have to put on the performance of a lifetime. Besides encouraging oral prowess, this skill could well develop a sense of self-sufficiency that tends to develop leaders sooner than followers. It is interesting to consider how this might help to shape collaborative endeavors created to accommodate a range of individuals, all eager to have their ideas heard. And how, at other times, they might want simply to stand and tell their own stories.

The Catholic Church

A great deal has been written about the influence of the Catholic Church on the people of New France. And, despite the fact that it is assumed the children of today have “lost” religion, this is not true *au fond*. “[L]a religion a construit notre imaginaire, a marquée notre histoire, a défini les contours de notre morale,” (Religion has constructed our imaginary, has marked our history and has defined the contours of our morality), writes Denise Bombardier in *L’Actualite* of 31 March, 2006 (107). The psychological influence of this institution, whose viselike grip on Québec’s social and spiritual life only lost its secure hold after 350 years of tenure, provides fertile ground for investigation in terms of performance and imagination. There is room here only to begin the list. Areas of interest would include the rituals associated with all the sacraments and feast days, daily prayers, the vestments and places of worship (often luxurious, exquisite in workmanship, and grandiose compared to any average dwelling), the performance elements of weekly sermon giving, and the imaginary universe of devils, angels, hellfire and miracles. I can affirm such items from my own experience as a graduate of 13 years of schooling at the hands of Catholic lay and religious teachers, the oldest child of an (English) Québec family of seven, the recipient of story books filled with the miracles of child saints, the memorizer of catechisms and creeds, and the youngster who sat awed by the multitudes of shimmering candles and powerful rejoicing choruses at Midnight Mass.

The architecture of the parish organization was itself a place that could be seen to encourage a certain sense of autonomy within the *habitant* community. In spite of activities based operationally around the seigneurial

system, the parish church was at the heart of that community. From early on, the members of the parish council were elected to their positions. So, while the seigneur sat in a special and reserved pew at Sunday worship, the maintenance of the church buildings and parish business was placed in the hands of a democratically constituted body. (Greenough, 67) Again, it is possible to believe that such an organizational structure would engender a sense of self-sufficient collective action, as an antidote to the remnants of a secular aristocracy and the insistent presence of theocracy.

Three Specific Samples

These samples are presented to demonstrate how there are many vistas through which to discover perspectives on *québécois* performance practice, even through centuries that were almost void of formal dramatic presentations. How does this dimension of French Canadian life—the Québec folk culture—link with the earlier heritage of France and New France? How might this information illuminate our understanding of modern *québécois* theatre practices? Specifically, what connections might there be between Québec folk culture and the collectives and collaboratives of the seventies and eighties whose productions were born from image and imagination and framed by a strongly emphasized physicality through improvisation? I will now move on to examine three cases in greater detail. As examples of the influences of folklore on present-day *québécois* theatre, I have chosen to discuss the *Corvée*, the *Quête*, and the *Raconteur*.

Each case will pass through three filters:

- A type of event known to occur in *Nouvelle-France/Québec* will be presented and confirmed as an instance of folklore
- Accepted as an instance of folklore, the event will be investigated for its performance elements
- Links from these performance elements to *québécois* theatre practices as they have emerged since the time of the Quiet Revolution, will be demonstrated under the headings of Collectivity, Physicality, Artistic Expression and Improvisation.

A. LA CORVÉE

In a general sense, the *corvée* is an event that occurs when there is a task to be done that requires the efforts of a group. Under the seigneurial system, both in France and Nouvelle-France, the inhabitants of a given seigneurie owed to the seigneur, who owned the land and provided common services, such as a mill to grind the grain, a certain number of days of unpaid labour each year. Marcel Trudel explains that the "*droit de corvée* (right to forced labour) consisted of a number of statutory days (three per annum, rarely four) determined in the cession contract (*Intro* 176). Françoise Tétu de Labsade suggests that the obligation might have been as much as eight days and that the time was used to assist with larger projects like the maintenance of roads, bridges, quays and public buildings (69).

The spirit of the scheme was that the undertakings were always meant to produce results from which all would benefit. None-the-less, as Jocelyne Mathieu, ethnologist at the University of Laval remarks in the preface to Jeanne Pomerleau's recent volume, *Corvées et quêtes*, people were much more pleased to partake in the voluntary *corvées* which became the norm after the British conquest in 1759. While built around the same necessary processes of material survival, participants incorporated "*l'air de parties de plaisir*" (an air of picnic or fun) (19).

This last is the kind of *corvée* we will look at. It is familiar to Francophones today throughout North America and is marked by the following characteristics. Either participants expect no remuneration beyond knowing that the others will voluntarily help them out in turn, or there could be a pre-

arranged exchange of labour, but not of money. A *corvéé* may involve: seasonal events such as harvesting; one time events such as raising a barn; or coming to the aid of a neighbour dealing with hardship in the form of illness or natural disaster. The event would almost always be "*accompagnée d'un ou deux repas pris en commune et d'une soirée divertissante*" (accompanied by one or two meals in common and an evening of entertainment) (Pomerleau 23). In the French-Canadian community of Acadia, New Brunswick, the same kind of event is referred to as a *frolic*. (21)

Example: *Le foulage de l'étoffe* (The Fulling of Woven Fabric)

1. Description

Jean Provencher in *C'était l'hiver: la vie rurale traditionnelle dans la vallée du Saint-Laurent* explains that one of the major group activities undertaken in the course of the winter was the fulling of newly woven fabric. Finely spun wool would result in a finer fabric, a flannel, but when the strands of yarn were spun thicker and woven tightly they produced a fabric that could be "fulled," a condition approaching a felt but not quite (Pomeleau 306). Fulled fabric became more resistant and able to stand up to work done in outside weather. It was not uncommon for clothing made from this cloth to last a lifetime (Provencher 61, 64).

2. Genres of folklore

Verbal: Both Provencher and Pomerleau note the chants or songs the *fouleurs* would sing as they worked. Pomerleau gives an example:

"Fendez le bois, chauffer le four.
Venez la belle, il est grand jour!" (305)

("Split the wood, heat the oven.
Come, my pretty one, it's a grand day!")

Material: The *fouleurs* use a set of tools employed only for this purpose: specially carved sticks of two different lengths and a trough of specified dimensions (Provencher 62-63)

Customary: There is a precise sequence of steps to effect the desired changes in the cloth, including successive immersions in hot and then cold water, and a particular pattern of agitation. It is also habitually done in the months outside

the growing and harvesting seasons.

3. Tradition

Continuity: Because textiles are perishable and in Nouvelle-France the boats with supplies came seldom, we can assume that weaving and preparation of fabric existed from very early on in the colony. Pomerleau tells us that it was only beginning around 1860 that weavers could take their cloth to be fulled in mills, but the custom of fulling at home continued for many families (310-311).

Identity: The cloth produced by this process was important in terms of physical survival in the Canadian winter, but it became a sort of badge of honour following the rebellions of 1837-38. This *étouffe du pays*, literally translated as “the stuff of the country” or the “country cloth”, the “homespun”, symbolized the struggle for self-government. All who did not wear it risked being considered as traitors (Massicotte, qtd. in Pomerleau 304).

4. Performance

Context : When pieces of cloth were ready, a family would ask neighbours to convene for an session of fulling. The equipment had to be gathered and assembled as some times these were owned in common by the parish. It might be set up outdoors, but often in a stable, barn or bakehouse where it would not matter that soapy water might splash onto the floor or ground.

Framing (opening): To begin, a large cauldron of water was put on to heat on a fire outside the house. The fabric was then placed into the trough with boiling water and soap. Taking the sticks or *foulons*, the team of eight men would

position themselves, two at each end and two on either side of the centre area of the trough. Traditionally, it was the men who performed this task because of the long continuous hours of effort requiring strong arm muscles. The women had already put many hours in spinning the wool and weaving the yarns into textiles.

Enactment: The two *fouleurs* on the ends of the trough, holding their *foulons* at an almost horizontal angle would push the piece of fabric towards the middle, through the steaming hot water. The four centre *fouleurs* would then use their shorter tools to *écraser* (crush, squash, squeeze) the material and to lift it in and out of the water. Periodically, the workers on one end of the trough would push the fabric towards one side of the trough while the ones on the other side pushed it towards the opposite side, causing the fabric to reverse its position in the trough and thus to receive a more even treatment (Provencher 62). When the water cooled off, it was replaced with cold water, and then with a new batch of boiling water. This sequence continued until the person who was most competent judged the shrinkage to be *à point*. (Pomerleau 305). To co-ordinate their efforts and to help the time go by, and to entertain themselves and family members, they sang songs such as the refrain mentioned above and other longer ones known as *chansons de foulons*. (Pomerleau 308)

Of note: One group in Saint-Sébastien de Beauce were known to use their bare feet instead of the *foulons* and to enter the trough and dance the cloth to the necessary degree of fullness. And because it was also a habit to punctuate their work with wee rations of rum to keep their strength up, they were known to do a good deal of singing and laughing as accompaniment to the dancing. They were

known, on occasion, to get a bit of a bath out of the event, as well. (Provencer 62).

Framing (closing): To close the event, all participants would partake of a lavish dinner and an evening of recreation (Massicotte, qtd, in Pomerlau 308).

5. Performance elements and links to québécois theatre.

Collectivity: We see collectivity here in the readiness to come together to work side by side, in the co-ordination needed to accomplish the task, and in the celebratory meal. All these elements contribute to a greater understanding of the long history of collective creation and collaborative theatre work in the *québécois* companies, not to mention the stamp-licking *corvée* in Tremblay's *Les Belles-Soeurs*.

Physicality: The strength, perseverance, and co-ordination necessary for the *corvée* point to physical control, choreographic features and full-body synchronization that all parallel the work of Gilles Maheu and the company, Carbone 14.

Artistic Expression: This can be seen in the songs, in the skill of the performers in knowing just when the fabric has transformed itself effectively, and in the resulting artifact. This reveals the standards of the artisan and informs us about attitudes today in terms of design and the drive of someone like Lepage to create magic with technology.

Improvisation: The Saint-Sébastien de Beauce group offer an example of group improvisation when they take the traditional structure of the *corvée* and, with a sense of joy and purpose, put their own imprint upon it.

B. LA QUÊTE

The word *quête* translates as "collection" or "quest". At fixed times each year, members of the parish community would gather for the purpose of collecting articles or money that would then be delivered to help those in need. Some of the collections were organized to gather money, some were to round up foodstuffs, and some, as those at *Mardi Gras* and *Mi-Carême* were to collect treats and candies primarily for one's self (as is done at Halloween). Typically, between November and March, seven collections would be made, the first on the eve of *la Toussaint*, then on the occasion of each of the following celebrations: *La Guignolée* in December; *La quête de l'Enfant Jésus* in January; *La Chandeleur* on February 2; *Le Mardi gras* just before the beginning of Lent; *La Mi-Carême* half way through Lent. The last—*La quête du bedeau*—was held to help support the beadle, a person who worked for the parish for free except for these customary donations.

The *quêtes* were generally undertaken by young men who passed from house to house amusing the inhabitants as a way of giving thanks for the gifts received. Like the *corvée*, each collection was followed in the evening by a gathering of those who had participated earlier (Pomerleau 328-9).

Example: *La Mi-Carême* (Midway through Lent)

1. Description

This collection was held on the third Sunday after Ash Wednesday, approximately half way through Lent. Fasting, as prescribed by the Catholic Church, was in force for the 40 days before Easter and this, thus, became a day of celebration when sacrifices could be put aside. The whole community was involved and everyone disguised themselves. The rationale was that they had all been abstaining so well from rich food that they had grown thin and ill. As a way of demonstrating their condition, the costumes were made up of old clothes and rags. The collection that was taken up was for treats. The instance to be described involves an old woman character who collects sweets to distribute to the children.

2. Genres of folklore

Verbal: The character, who had no specific name other than *la mi-carême*, has a set preamble to the giving of treats.

Material: Her posture and costume are described in detail. She is bent over almost double, a reference to the time of Lent being cut in half. Her clothes are a crude assembly of rags with decorations such as fish bones and tails hanging off her garments (Pomerleau 369). She leans on a hobnailed stick and one can hardly see her face for her funnel-shaped scarecrow hat. What can be seen is smeared with tobacco juice and she wears a pair of eye glasses, with no lenses, askew on her nose—which is grotesque enough all by itself. (Provender 124). She carries a large old sack with "*bonbons*" for the children who have been good.

Customary: Her arrival at a house or parish gathering is an expected part of the celebrations and occurs on the third Sunday after Ash Wednesday—an important holy day instituted as the beginning of Lent in 590 in Rome (Provencher 120) and which remains within the church calendar in Canada.

3. Tradition

Continuity: Pomerleau tells us that *La Mi-Carême* only dropped off as a widespread celebration in the 1950's (374) but it is still practiced in some regions where certain villages on the north coast of the St. Lawrence river interpret it with animation, masquing, dancing and "quêtting" (368).

Identity: A key element in terms of identity in this case is tied to Catholicism. *La Mi-Carême* was part of religious practice and as a community of shared belief, they fasted and feasted together.

4. Performance

Context: Neighbours would gather, many of whom were disguised to the point that people had fun trying to guess who was who in "*l'allure fantomatique*" (the ghostly allure). They would gather in homes or parish halls but also roamed the village streets.

Frame (opening): *La mi-carême* enters the room. Her appearance is so odd that many may laugh at the apparition, but she maintains an imperturbable seriousness (Pomerleau 371).

Enactment: She swallows a sip of rum and then makes a tour around the room, speaking to everyone with the impertinence that her role allows (Pomerleau 371).

Reprimanding and complimenting appropriately, Provencher records her as having a nasal voice in which she announces,

*J'sommes ben fatigués.
J'marchons sans arrêter depuis l'Mercredi des cendres...
Vous avez trouvé que j'mettions ben du temps à v'nir
vous autres, hein, les jeunesses? Mais c'est égal.
Ceuze-là qui m'ont-z-attendu avé patience, j'vas les
récompenser...
et ceuze-là qui ont pas voulu m'attendre vont s'en
repentir.
On va voir tout ça tantôt. (123,124)*

(I'm so tired
I've been walking without a stop since Ash Wednesday
You've found that I have taken a long time getting to
you,
Eh, my young ones? But that's alright.
Those of you who have waited with patience, I'm going
to reward you, and those of you did not want to wait for
me are going to do penance for it
We will see about all this very soon.) (123,124)

She then proceeds to give out gifts to the children according to merit—for those who have been good, there are “*dragées*” or sugared almonds and other sweets. For those who have misbehaved, there are potatoes that have frozen or empty husks of nuts carefully wrapped in paper. These will often elicit laughter from the parents and a few tears from the disappointed youngsters.

Frame (closing): After emptying her sack and using up her repertoire of pranks, she entreats the festive company to respect what remains of Lent and then leaves as she had entered. The party, however, goes on joyously until the stroke of midnight (Provencher 124).

5. Performance elements and links to québécois theatre

Collectivity: Obviously, this a very community-embracing event. All ages participate in the whole day, and work hard to create impressive costumes. At Saint-Antoine-de-l'Isle-aux-Grues, they keep a collection of *Mi-Carême* costumes (Pomerleau 374). There is a strongly suggested complicity amongst the Mi-Carême character and the adults in maintaining an atmosphere that combines amusement and awe as regards the power of this St. Nicholas character type. These habits of public celebration foretell the shape of local and international festivals that are ever more present in Quebec. In 2004 there were 200 festivals or similar events, 21 of which were international in scope (Falcon 63).

Physicality: This is most evident in the physical presence of *La Mi-Carême*: her bent over character; her nasal voice; her air of authority that embraces the embodiment of righteous self-deprivation with just a pinch of mischief.

Artistic Expression: The costume is, itself, like a work of installation art, and her outfit is an index to the masquerade of the whole community. Records speak of people creating papier-maché masks and hunting through old accessories to strike the right note of poverty and buffoonery (Pomerleau 374). The creativity in these events forecasts both design developments and the emergence of the characters and the spirit of Cirque du Soleil, and early collective groups such as The Grand Cirque Ordinaire.

Improvisation: *La mi-carême*, in her role, must deal with each individual she meets in homes and groups, and children are not always the easiest of audiences. This performance demonstrates the background from which emerge the skills of street theatre improvisation as a means of creation in collaborative productions.

C. LE CONTE ET LE RACONTEUR

There is little contestation of the folk tale as an element of folklore. In *Folktales of France*, Dorson tells us how the courtiers attending to Louis XIV “amused” themselves by reciting for each other the tales of the country folk. The first putting down of these stories was published as *Contes de Ma Mère l’Oye* (*Stories of Mother Goose*), by Charles Perrault in 1697 (v). But serious collecting and analysis (which was to form the basis of folklore studies today) was not begun in France until after 1860 with the work of folklorists Emmanuel Cosquin, Henri Gaidoz and Paul Sébillot (vii).

In Québec, the major figures to collect folktales were Honoré Beaugrand, Louis Fréchette, Pamphile Lemay and Joseph-Charles Taché, all of whom were at work during the 19th century (Tétu de Labsade, 498). They formed part of a literary movement (*École patriotique de Québec*) that was the primary and most important development until the *École littéraire de Montréal* in 1895. The movement was, in part, dedicated to proving that Lord Durham had been wrong in his report of 1839, where he had described the French Canadians as a people without a history or a literature. The mission of this movement was to recapture the glorious figures and events of their past and to enshrine and celebrate their religion and their agricultural way of life. L’abbé Raymond Casgrain, a supporter and spiritual mentor for the original group in the 1860s, proposed that a French Canadian literature should be essentially religious and, “*le miroir fidèle de notre petit peuple*” (the faithful mirror of our little people) (Lessard). Thus the collection and recording for posterity of folk tales, which had been the core of an oral tradition, occupied part of the energies of certain of the

poets, playwrights and novelists of the period.

In reaction to these sentiments, Leopold E. Houllé, author, in 1945, of one of the first histories of Québec theatre, disdains the elements of folklore as they were manifested on burlesque and vaudeville stages and in artificial folklore concerts and scenes in the early 1900s. He called for a return to the classics, expressing his wish to see “serious drama” performed by French Canadians in Québec (143-145). By the 1960s, however, Jean-Claude Germain refused to accept that the classical work done by Les Compagnons de Saint-Laurent in the period 1937 to 1952 could be defined as the “starting point of a genuine, native art form” (Usmiani, 136). Instead, he writes that,

... the theatre of Québec did not depend on such ties with a foreign tradition; it had been alive and well, all along — albeit relegated to the level of “folklore” and unable to develop beyond the minor genres possible in an oral tradition: monologue, sketch, satirical revue. [He] insists that Québec has had an independent, dynamic theatrical life of its own since the beginning of the nineteenth century. But its manifestations were not considered “respectable” and thus were never allowed to enter the mainstream of culture.” (Usmiani 136)

In his introduction, Germain praises the 1972 edition of Frechette’s *Originaux & Detraqués*, for its recollections of more authentic Québec types. He suggests links to characters such as those portrayed by the Guimonds, *père et fils*, favourites of Québec burlesque audiences, and to Gratien Gélinas’s loved character of *Fridolin* (28-30).

Tétu de Labsade confirms the huge popularity and success of artists of the monologue: Yvon Deschamps, Sol, Daniel Lemire and Pierre Légaré are some she cites amongst others. She points to the fact that there are more than 10,000 *contes* (or stories) registered in Québec with CELAT (Centre d’études sur

la langue, les arts et les traditions populaires des francophones en Amérique du Nord). Thus storytelling, by itself, may be seen to contribute an important landmark in our understanding of *québécois* theatre through the place that the stories, the storytellers and the art of their storytelling continues to occupy in the hearts of the *Québécois* even into the present day.

Example: *Une soiree avec le raconteur* (An evening with the storyteller)

1. Description

Storytelling in Québec could occur in many settings. In the evenings, after events such as the projects of work (*les corvées*) or the charitable collections (*les quêtes*), one of the most popular activities was storytelling (*racontage*). It was not limited only to these gatherings, but was also a key element of diversion for the men who worked in the lumber camps and would be away from their homes for many weeks at a time. Indeed, storytelling could be found in any group of people who looked for relaxation after a hard day's work. There was another way in which storytelling took place and that was through entertainment provided by a traveler. For a culture where literacy levels were low and books in French were few, the visit of someone who could spin a yarn was a welcome one. It is this last event that will be analyzed.

We receive this event through the memoirs William Parker Greenough, published in 1897 as *Canadian Folk-Life and Folk-Lore*. Explaining it was his business relations that brought him into close contact over many years with the country communities of Québec, Greenough shares reports and reflections that were first related orally and then, later, through the circulation of

a single manuscript, before appearing in print (xi). We can, therefore, safely assume that the conditions he describes were extant over at least the last third of the 19th century in rural Québec.

In a chapter entitled *Amusements: Contes and Raconteurs*, he furnishes us with an embedded account of the dynamic of the storyteller, one who, while he is familiar to the group, is an itinerant, rather than a permanent resident among them. This is often a necessary part of his identity as he is the bearer of news to clusters of a society who, in resistance to being schooled in English and in the absence of public education in their own language, had in large part, stubbornly declined literacy. Tétu de Labsade reminds us that "a petition presented to the government in 1827, collected 87,000 signatures of which 78,000 were simple crosses (X)" (494). She also emphasizes the isolation and the sedentary quality of the organization of rural life as she notes this travelling storyteller "*deviens alor le lien avec le monde inconnu qui commençait avec la paroisse voisine*" ("becomes the link with the outside, unknown world that began with the next parish") (494).

2. Genres of folklore

Verbal: This event is, of course, primarily verbal. The evening would consist of a telling of news from the villages and cities, perhaps even of events abroad. Then would come the telling of a few "tall tales" after which everyone would settle down to hear the *raconteur* tell a classic *conte*.

Material: Traditionally (and still in use today), the classic prop for the storyteller is the simple wooden chair, the "*proverbiale chaise de bois du conteur*" (Leroux,

Contes 7).

Customary: There were the preliminary exchanges of news and tall tales, the call for the *conte* and the settling down to listen. Greenough tells us that a telling might last a couple of hours or extend over more than one evening (50). He describes the pattern:

Nazaire's soirées in camp usually began with about half an hour's talk about woods, logs, the depth of the snow, what this man, that, and the other was doing, and similar matters of general interest. Then someone who knew how to lead the good man on would probably tell some improbable or impossible story. Nazaire had one to give back at the shortest notice (47).

3. Tradition

Continuity: As discussed above, the stories were certainly being told in France in the 1600s and are still being told today, albeit in modern re-incarnations. There is a story from Savoy, France, called *The Scalded Wolf*. It ends like this:

The scalded one came up to the barrel and sniffed at it, and then he began to scratch around it a little, growling. In the end he went right round it. Now at one point the wolf stopped, and the woodcutter saw the wolf's tail swinging in front of the hole. He put his hand through the hole and grabbed the end of the tail and pulled it in. Then he shouted, "Pour away, Jeanette! Pour away!" Our wolf at once imagined the kettle of boiling soup hanging overhead. He set off as fast as he could, dragging the barrel and the woodcutter after him. He climbed up the ravine in this fashion, and helter-skelter they went over the Col des Prés again. Then he reached the chalets of La Fraissette.

When the woodcutter saw the smoke from the chimney of his house, he let go of the wolf's tail and came to a halt in front of his home. He called his wife, "Jeanette! Jeanette!" Jeanette came up to the barrel. She saw that it was her husband shut up in there and she set him free. (Massignon 207)

The scalded one was never seen again. (Massignon 207)

This final episode of this tale feels very much like an early version of one of Nazaire's tall tales:

Dalbec was in the woods making maple sugar, when he saw a bear coming round as if bent on mischief. Having no gun Dalbec crawled under an empty hogshead (such as are often used to hold the sap as it is collected). The bear came smelling up, trying to find a way to get in. At the right moment Dalbec reached his hand through the bung-hole and seized him by the tail. The bear started off on a run down the hill, dragging the hogshead after him with Dalbec inside of it. They came to a lot of fallen timber, where the hogshead stuck, but Dalbec held on til the tail came out and the bear escaped. (Greenough 48)

Identity: Stephens and Sims point out that stories "can express group and individual identity — [this is] one feature that establishes the traditionality of this kind of text... The collective nature of the attitudes and values illustrated in an individual's stories helps place the stories in a particular group's tradition"(168). The critical element here is that the *habitants* identified with each other in their collective decision to refuse to be schooled in English (Tétu de Labsade 494). Every instance of storytelling was a moment of resistance and "survivance". The cultivation, therefore, of the oral tradition preserved their language and set them apart from the English community. Greenough held no ambivalence as to the distinct nature of the *habitants* of the province of Québec. He clarifies that he is speaking of the "country people", the simple farmers, a group that English and Americans visiting for summer holidays, or even for the winter carnivals, would meet very little (x). Lower Canada, he proposes " has scenery, climate, institutions, people, history, of its own, all peculiar and unlike those of any of the other Provinces" (3).

Greenough makes it clear that he knows he is an outsider:

I should never be able to tell of *contes* and *raconteurs* without referring at once to our faithful ranger Nazaire, as we call him, in his early and middle life, a prince among story-tellers (46). Having him with me I was sure of a welcome in any camp, for if the men cared nothing for me they all knew and liked Nazaire and were sure of an evening's entertainment (47).

And it is Greenough's relationship with Nazaire that provides us with such a clear window onto this very characteristic cultural activity that continues to provide a fine evening's entertainment.

4. Performance

Context: The bunkroom of the lumber camps, the common room of the family home or in summertime, the verandah; an environment that was warm and inviting, often a circle that shuts the world away for the moment of the storytelling.

Frame (opening): After the preliminaries (see above) and the request for a story, and "after a proper show of reluctance and a corresponding amount of persuasion, Nazaire would begin with the "*Tiens-bon-là*," following it up with a classic dramatic "hook". For example, "*L'histoire de mon petit défunt frère Louizon*." ("Hold on, there. The story of my little dead brother, Louizon") (Greenough 50).

Enactment: Sitting on the chair, Nazaire would tell one of the old tales. We would now consider this a "fairy tale", as it involved characters like princes and princesses. The one he told that night concerned a *curé* who was in love with the baker's wife and who tried to cause the baker to be executed by the king for

boasting about his amazing powers. A fairy comes to the aid of the baker several times until he manages to get a notarized promise from the king of fortunes for his family in perpetuity.

Frame (closing): Greenough does not mention any specified formulaic closing to the stories.

5. Performance elements and links to québécois theatre.

Collectivity: While the storyteller is in an individual role, the listeners know their roles and contribute by creating the psychological environment and the warm-up activities. The perpetuation of the “*monologuistes*” which, while it would include what we think of as stand-up comedy, is more than this in Québec. They also tell stories of different natures as exemplified in the 1999 publication, *Contes d'appertenance* (Stories of Belonging). Incidentally, of the *conteurs* in this latter book, 5 out of the 6 are working in theatre.

Physicality: In this instance, much of the “telling” is through small-scale gestures, allied to a subtle re-shaping of the body as the storyteller shifts between voices and roles. Today, we can see those same skills at work as Robert Lepage, in his one-man show, *The Andersen Project*, shifts “seamlessly from the tall albino Frederic to a crinolined dryad emerging from the gnarled bark of a tree” (Billington np).

Artistic Expression: Much of the artistic expression can be enfolded in the physicality discussed above, and it is the skill of the storyteller to interpret the story in ways that engage an audience even when they have heard the story before. Robert Wallace notes in *Producing Marginality*, how impressed he was,

as an Anglophone, with the strength of numbers and habit of attendance that marked *québécois* audiences. "Indigenous theatre", he writes, "is highly regarded in Quebec; it is perceived and positioned by both the media and the government as integral to the life of the people. Montrealers "go" to the theatre: indeed, for many productions, they line up in droves" (41).

Improvisation: Nazaire knew well how to work his audience and adapt to their moods. It is the gift of a great storyteller, not only to remember the story but also to be able to adapt it to the locale and to weave in the changes (political, social and so on) that have occurred since the last telling. This improvisatory skill can be seen at work both as a rehearsal device in creating a piece of collective or collaborative theatre and as a performance device in that such works are often performed in a variety of locales.

Daily life and seasonal patterns. We have just considered a series of events drawn from daily life and seasonal patterns: a fulling of the cloth so necessary to equip *habitants* for their encounters with the winter; an annual festival steeped in the cycles of the Catholic faith; and an evening of recreation with the oral tradition, which was both a practical necessity in the absence of reading materials in French, and a cultural action with political agency.

The performances in each of these events reside along a spectrum of theatricality. *La Mi-Carême* is most obviously playing a role with the attendant theatrical requirements (script, physicality, costume, and so on), while the *fouleurs* are entertaining themselves like all good neighbours and setting the example for the vigorous performances of contemporary collective theatre

companies. The storyteller has secured his/her place already on today's stages. None of these characters or practices appears in existing histories of the development of theatre in Québec. But such a rich collage of roles, acting, improvisation, costume creation, choreography, collaboration and music deserves illumination.

In a course designed to navigate anglophone students through the routes (and roots) that map the shape of contemporary Québec theatre, a consideration of these formative elements reveals that there is a more engaging and authentic geography to be surveyed because of the basic strata upon which the present topography rests. I begin my concluding chapter with three postcards from my own journey. These personal appreciations allow us to see how those formative elements continue to shape and invigorate the *québécois* theatre of today.

Chapter Five

The Cartography of *Appartenance*

A small volume containing six original *contes urbains* created for a gathering of modern French Canadian *conteurs* in 1999 in Sudbury calls itself *Contes d'appartenance*. Patrick Leroux, (not the Patrick Leroux to whom I have previously referred), explains that storytellers affirm and legitimate their own communities by reinventing this traditional practice (7-8). The word "*appartenance*" means "a sense of belonging" and I see this as the medium that permeates all the other layers, holds them together and makes meaning of them.

Layer 10: Unpublished, personal experience of *québécois* performance.

In the last year, I responded to Marianne Ackerman's invitation. I went to Québec. I attended three pieces of *québécois* theatre that became, for me, "the continuing contact"—the touchstones to which I returned often during the writing of this thesis. I offer the following three personal postcards to act both as a means of complimenting my research and as evidence (albeit anecdotal) of this dimension of belonging and collective identity.

Postcard # 7

L'asile de la pureté (2005)

École nationale de théâtre du Canada

In the fall of 2005, I attended a production by the graduating students of the École nationale de théâtre du Canada. They had mounted a piece by Claude Gauvreau, called *L'asile de la pureté* (The Asylum of Purity). The lead male character (played for part of the time by a woman and for part of the time by a man) has decided he can no longer write because of the death of his muse. Friends, relatives, and professional acquaintances try to persuade him from committing suicide by starvation. For him, it is the only pure solution because life without his muse would also mean a life without art and that would be too soul-destroying for him to bear. The tragedy of the play, however, is not his death but his decision, finally, to allow himself to be coerced into choosing life. At this decision, the set wall, painted a flat beige / off-white and featureless except for an observation booth, lights up like a crossword puzzle game show. The wall becomes a garish marquee, full of advertisements for consumer goods. The music rocks on. Everybody celebrates. They are not celebrating his decision to live but, rather, that in choosing not to die, he has joined them, thus confirming the value system by which *they* have chosen to live.

The students were tireless in working with the 100 page script. A very mobile hospital bed, multiple costume changes, periodic falls, in rigid body stance, off the front edge of the stage into the orchestra pit (as a recurring motif of suicide), are only a few of the impressive interpretive strategies they used. I was struck by the fierce sophistication that resulted from the marriage of a dark,

poetic piece of drama from 1953 with the black humor, control, and sensuality of today's emerging artists.

Postcard # 8

Les Fridolinades (2005)

Théâtre Denise-Pelletier

The afternoon following *L'asile de la pureté*, I went to the Théâtre Denise-Pelletier in the East End of Montréal to see *Les Fridolinades*, an *hommage* and a new incarnation of the archetypal "*petit*" Québécois created by Gratien Gélinas in the 1940s. Set in and out of Europe during the Second World War, there was song and dance, parachuting with bungee cords, pyrotechnics, updated political satire and a finale that consisted, in large part, of material from the sketch that inspired Gélinas's celebrated (in both Canadas) play, *Tit-Coq*. Because Gélinas had played the character in that old theatre space, there was something almost transcendent about being there. This sense was only heightened when, in the discussion with director and actors afterwards, I heard audience members speak of how they had seen the original performances; how they had seen the "real" Fridolin half a century ago in the same building. But in all the discussion of the research and production processes, the point that impressed itself on my consciousness was a statement by the young actor who played the lead character. He said that it took him only seconds to say "yes" when offered the part, confirming my strong sense that, for the cast and crew, it

was a privilege to be a part of the production. This commitment spoke to the concept of *appartenance*—of belonging to a theatre that was theirs in both a physical and a metaphoric sense. I became highly aware, without any feelings of animosity, of my position as "other."

Postcard # 9

Hosanna (2006)

Théâtre du Nouveau Monde

This year, at the beginning of March, I walked through the Montréal cold to the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde to see a reprise of *Hosanna*, Michel Tremblay's play that was first produced 30 years ago. The lobby was packed and, compared to the audience at the Pelletier performance, many more fur coats and leather jackets could be seen. When we were let in to the theatre, the set was revealed as a hyper-naturalist shoebox-on-its-side: a one-room apartment from the '60s, complete with ceiling, in browns and oranges, chrome-legged kitchen furniture, a pull-out sofa bed, and practical sink, counter and cupboards. The whole was effectively static and claustrophobic. Periodically, stark white lights from the bathroom on one side and the hall on the other, would break into the space as did the huge green neon "BEAUDOIN PHARMACY" sign that could be seen through the upstage window. As the play opened, I heard, for the first time, the clipped and insistent rhythm of the "essentially poetic and theatrical" version Michel Tremblay created of the vernacular speech of his home

neighbourhood in Montréal (Denoncourt 15).

The "gest" of the scenography became apparent in the second act. In preparation for Hosanna's monologue, the giant shoebox-on-its-side began, over the next two or three minutes, to draw back towards the cyclorama, leaving the Hosanna/Cleopatra character front and centre, up close to the audience with only the storyteller's chair. S/he then proceeded to perform solo, almost without interruption, for about 45 minutes. S/he told the story of how terribly s/he was betrayed, by her/his lover, certainly, but more—by all the things s/he thought s/he wanted and thought s/he could construct: to be a woman; to be English; and to become famous in Hollywood (*Hosanna* program notes).

Finally, the set moved forward in space. It seemed to be floating in a sea of black. It reinstated the couple's shared space. It became the place where they, in the end—tentatively—came together as men, as lovers, as *Québécois*. The audience, who had been respectfully quiet throughout, rose immediately in a standing ovation and stayed standing through three curtain calls. Their response brought the actors from their appreciative, warm, professional smiles to a shy, slightly overwhelmed look of gratitude, of being not quite certain how, graciously, to break the moment.

Conclusions

French Philosopher Paul Ricoeur speaks, in his 1992 publication, *Oneself as Another*, about the way our storytelling creates our self, our identity:

“The narrative constructs the identity of the character, what can be called his or her narrative identity, in constructing that of the story told. It is the identity of the story that makes the identity of the character.” (147-48)

In all three of these postcards, it was clear to me that, even though all three plays had origins that lie in the mid 20th century, the players, their plays (stories) and the audiences belonged to each other; that each event was a celebration of who they were, what they held in common and how rooted they all were in the communicative celebrations that represent theatre today in Québec. It is this quality of *appartenance*—of belonging—that, I believe, constitutes the layer of the map that does the most to create the distinct-ness of *québécois* theatre while being, at the same time, the least distinct, in the sense of being visible. I could not help envying them. But I am not *Québécoise* and nor are the students who may take this course. We can never belong but we can, as Ackerman asks us to do, “make friends”. And learning about its theatre is an important way to make that happen.

I began this inquiry only one year ago. I was astounded by how little I knew about the place where I had grown up. My search has been to identify reliable sources as a basis for the construction of an introductory level course on the subject of *québécois* theatre. The first layer of information on my map was provided by the small but growing number of English-language texts dedicated to theatre history in Québec. While there are a number of texts that are useful resources, those texts that devote most of their coverage to selected play scripts

do not answer satisfactorily the needs of theatre historians and their students. To look at a whole era through one "representative" play script is not always the wide portal it would appear, or like, to be. If, as historian Gaddis suggests, we might consider that "the past is a landscape and history is the way we represent it," current scholarship in English often seems like having a map that only reveals the tops of hills and mountains (33).

The next step was to see what was offered on the same subject in French. Here the selection became very wide indeed. Texts addressed the history, offered play analyses, covered more periods in more depth, and presented unusual approaches, such as a "gallery" of characters from top plays. There were collections of the 100 plays that must be seen, pictorial histories and a genre of document not replicated in English texts: provincially-sponsored chronicles full of essays on the state of theatre in Québec, issued at two or three decade intervals. As the histories in French are more numerous and start earlier, they not only confirm or modify landmarks noted in English texts but they add valuable data and useful interpretations of the map.

The gaps in information I spoke of were, for the most part, not about unavailable material, but about materials sparsely, if at all, included in the histories: who were the immigrants who came over and what might we know of the theatre or cultural performances they would have brought with them? When students and professionals in the 1900s did go back to study theatre in France, whom did they meet and learn from? If one wonders about the influences that were evident in the resurgence of imagistic theatre, improvisation, and the collective collaborative companies in Québec in the last half of the 20th century,

theatre trends and developments in France provide some valuable answers. And we must not neglect the powerful American presence and influence. Aspects of social, political and theatre history in the rest of Canada create a very crucial additional perspective. Brought together as layers of information within a multi-textured map, this material would enrich the journey for students by exploring the connective highways as well as the back roads, the bedrock as well as the prevailing winds..

This thesis proposes that, in addition to drawing from all the resources mentioned above, a course in Québec theatre history must include an introduction to the performance elements that emerged from over 300 years of folk culture. They are not only a significant part of *québécois* history but in a sometimes changed form or as direct inheritance, these living dramatic strategies create a rich resource from the perspective of performance studies within a theatre department. In the spirit of Ric Knowles's strategy to include the training of actors as part of the "conditions of production" of a given performance, I propose that there is a considerable motherlode of performance "training," rehearsal, and elaboration to be discovered in folk culture practices (*Material* 32).

A deeper understanding of this "other" culture inside our own country will not only open up career opportunities for our theatre students. The simple fact is that the mental exercise of entering—through the history of events, occasions and rituals of daily life—into the thought patterns of another language, its rhythms and imagination, can only be of benefit to students, whatever their disciplines. This investigation has provided me with a richer understanding of,

and an increasingly rewarding re-encounter with, my home ground.

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