

Université de Montréal

THE CANADA COUNCIL, THE REGIONAL THEATRE SYSTEM AND THE
ENGLISH-CANADIAN PLAYWRIGHT: 1957-1975

par
Douglas B. Buchanan

Département d'études anglaises
Faculté des arts et des sciences

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Cette thèse intitulée:
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a été évaluée par un jury composé des personnes suivantes:

..... président-rapporteur
..... directeur de recherche
..... membre du jury
..... examinateur externe

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Abstract

The role of the Canada Council and the Canadian Regional Theatre System in promoting and fostering English-Canadian playwrights and Canadian drama has been a source of considerable controversy but little sustained study since the middle 1960s. This dissertation examines that role through the crucial years from the creation of the Canada Council in 1957 until 1975 when the Council began to lose any real independence as an agency of cultural policy. It begins by examining the state of Canadian theatre in the post-war years prior to the creation of the Council and adumbrates the cultural/political forces that led to that creation: particularly rising Canadian nationalism and the power of the Canadian cultural elite. The confluence of these two forces in the form of the Massey/Levésque Commission sets the stage for the establishment of the Canada Council and, I will argue, also sets in place the basic philosophy of the Council towards theatre repertoire and the place of the English-Canadian playwright within the regional system.

Chapter Three details the founding of the Council and its development of policies and practices that were intended to promote Canadian drama within the newly developing Canadian theatre system and then speculates on their likelihood of success. Chapter Four examines the realities of theatre economics in order to assess the impact of Canada Council (monetary) practices in the creation of the regional system and its use of Canadian plays. Chapter Five examines in detail the activities of the Council from its inception until 1969 and shows the very real gap between enunciated policies and actual practices in the development of the regional system particularly as it affects the use of indigenous artistic material. I will contend that the result of Canada Council approaches and practices (intentional or not) in

scholarship and funding, and particularly in the area of direct commissions, was the neglect of the Canadian dramatist in favour of a repertoire of foreign material. Furthermore, the focus of the Canada Council on two conflicting goals, the growth of regional theatres and a conservative fiscal policy aimed at reducing or controlling deficits, exacerbated this neglect.

The consequences of this neglect are dealt with in Chapter Six with a discussion of the reaction of cultural nationalists, increasingly dissatisfied with Council practices, that led to the creation and promotion of the alternative theatre movement which produced the first concrete steps in the development of an indigenous drama. Since the alternative theatre movement, in its advocacy and encouragement of Canadian playwrights, occupied the role that the Canada Council was intended to fill, Chapter Six compares the funding patterns that helped set it in place (specifically the Local Initiatives Programs and Opportunities for Youth) with the funding patterns of the Council. I will suggest that these two programs (although not designed for that purpose) were much more successful than the policies and practices of the Canada Council in promoting English-Canadian plays, and specify the reasons why this was so. The dissertation concludes with some speculation on future possibilities in the study of Canadian plays based on their origin within an 'alternative' theatre structure rather than within the 'mainstream' regional system and sums up how the development of the Canadian regional system was, in many ways, accomplished at the expense of the Canadian dramatist.

Résumé de synthèse

Le rôle du Conseil des Arts du Canada et du Réseau canadien du théâtre régional de promouvoir et d'encourager les dramaturges canadiens-anglais et le théâtre canadien a été une source de controverse considérable mais pas une source d'études depuis le milieu des années 1960. Cette dissertation examine ce rôle à travers les années cruciales à partir de la création du Conseil des Arts du Canada en 1957 jusqu'en 1975 lorsque le Conseil commence à perdre toute véritable indépendance en tant qu'agence de politique culturelle. Je débute en examinant l'état du théâtre canadien dans les années d'après-guerre avant la création du Conseil et je discute des forces culturelles/politiques qui ont conduit à cette création: surtout le nationalisme canadien montant et le pouvoir de l'élite culturelle canadienne. La confluence de ces deux forces sous la forme de la Commission Massey/Lévesque met en scène l'établissement du Conseil des Arts du Canada et met aussi en place la philosophie de base du Conseil envers le répertoire théâtral et la place du dramaturge canadien à l'intérieur du réseau régional.

Le troisième chapitre raconte en détail la fondation du Conseil et le développement de ses politiques et pratiques prévues pour promouvoir le théâtre canadien à l'intérieur du nouveau réseau de théâtre canadien et ensuite s'interroge sur leur chance de réussite. Le quatrième chapitre examine les réalités financières du théâtre afin d'évaluer l'impact des pratiques (monétaires) du Conseil des Arts du Canada dans la création du réseau régional et son usage des pièces de théâtre canadiennes. Le cinquième chapitre examine en détail les activités du Conseil à partir de sa création jusqu'en 1969 et démontre l'écart réel entre les politiques énoncées et les pratiques réelles dans le développement du réseau régional, particulièrement lorsque cet écart touche l'utilisation de matériau artistique indigène. Je vais soutenir que le

résultat des approches et des pratiques (intentionnelles ou non) du Conseil des Arts du Canada en bourse et en financement, et plus particulièrement dans le domaine des commissions directes, se traduit en une négligence du dramaturge canadien en faveur d'un répertoire étranger. De plus, l'intérêt du Conseil des Arts du Canada pour deux objectifs conflictuels, la croissance des théâtres régionaux et la politique fiscale conservatrice visant à réduire ou à contrôler les déficits, aggrave cette négligence.

Les conséquences de cette négligence sont étudiées dans le sixième chapitre avec une discussion de la réaction des nationalistes culturels, de plus en plus insatisfaits avec les pratiques du Conseil, qui a conduit à la création et la promotion d'un mouvement de théâtre alternatif qui fit les premiers pas concrets vers le développement d'un théâtre indigène canadien. Puisque le mouvement de théâtre alternatif, dans son soutien et son encouragement des dramaturges canadiens-anglais, a occupé le rôle que le Conseil devait remplir, le sixième chapitre compare le modèle de financement qui a aidé à son établissement (plus spécifiquement l'établissement des Programmes d'initiatives locales (Local Initiatives Programs) et Opportunités pour les jeunes (Opportunities for Youth)) aux modèles de financement du Conseil. De plus, je vais suggérer que ces deux programmes (même s'ils ne sont pas créés dans ce but) ont eu beaucoup plus de succès que les politiques et les pratiques du Conseil des Arts du Canada dans la promotion des pièces de théâtre canadiennes et je vais spécifier les raisons de ce succès. Je conclue la dissertation avec une hypothèse sur les possibilités futures dans l'étude des pièces de théâtre canadiennes basée sur leur origine à travers une structure théâtrale 'alternative' plutôt qu'à travers un système régional 'de la culture prédominante' et je résume comment le développement du Réseau régional canadien a été, de plusieurs façons, accompli au détriment du dramaturge canadien.

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Introduction

What is it that makes Canadian theatre Canadian, beyond the accident of geography? Certainly that theatre is the result of the labours of Canadian theatre artists and workers; it is attended by Canadian audiences and funded to a significant extent by the Canadian taxpayer, both directly and indirectly through government funding bodies. Surely, however, a major part of its definition must relate in some way to the production of plays by Canadian playwrights offering a distinct vision of life and society from a Canadian point of view. Yet, what seems obvious in a statement like this has been a source of controversy within and without the Canadian theatre, in a small way since the turn of the century, and in a major way since the 1960s. It has become almost a given that the Canadian regional theatre system, created and funded by the Canada Council, has been unable to make Canadian drama the majority component of its repertoire to the point where critics such as Mark Czarnecki can state: "by 1978, the failure of the regional system to incarnate "Canadian" theatre had become so apparent that the [Canada] Council issued policy statements assigning 'priority to Canadian plays'" (Czarnecki 43). Why was it that by the early 1970s (and beyond to the present), critics were still wondering when the regional system would begin to base its seasons on Canadian plays, despite the dominant presence of the Canada Council, the oldest national arts funding body in North America, with a mandate to further and enhance the arts, which has spent (relatively) enormous funds in creating and supporting a regional theatre system partially of its own design? Why was it that, within and without the Canada Council funded regional system, put in place to establish 'Canadian' theatre on a professional footing, playwrights had to fight an often losing battle to have their plays produced? And why was it that rather than feel supported by a system, ostensibly put into place partially to aid them, they felt rejected and thwarted by it. Finally, why was it that the

so-called 'golden age' of Canadian drama actually took place *outside* the aegis of the Canada Council and the regional system?

This thesis, a study of the impact of the Canada Council on the Canadian Regional Theatre System and the development of English Canadian plays from the inception of the Council in 1957 until 1975, is an attempt to answer these questions. It begins with an examination of the status of Canadian theatre and the status of the playwright from the end of the Second World War in order to set the stage and then moves on through the Massey/Levésque Commission, the founding of the Council and the work of the Council up until 1975. At that point the Council completed its metamorphosis from a mostly arms-length funding body to a much more politicized funding body; from an (almost) independent promoter of Canadian Arts, Sciences and Humanities to a body that often acted -- willingly, or unwillingly -- as an agent of government cultural policy, often reflecting the aims and interests of the government in power particularly in the area of promoting 'national unity.' This happened as result of the need for additional funding, over and above the original endowment grant provided for the Canada Council, that successive governments chose to meet through direct funding -- sometimes with specific purposes attached -- rather than additions to the endowment fund. The best intentions in the world -- and surely those best intentions were present throughout the history of the Council up to, and including, the present -- cannot totally escape the realities of power inherent in direct funding. Therefore I have restricted my study, except in examining some consequences of funding decisions, to the period 1957-1975.

This study is by no means a history of the Canada Council, the creation of the regional theatre system nor the development of playwrighting in Canada. The Canada

Council has served, honourably, many more functions than that of patron of Canadian theatre; the history of playwrighting in this country goes far beyond the bounds of this thesis both in time and area covered, and the regional theatre system is more than the troubled locus of thwarted indigenous drama: it has manifold successes in its other artistic areas. This thesis is, rather, a history of the relationship of these three elements over a crucial period of time in their development, when decisions were made, patterns set place in and policies (and opposition to policies) hardened even when they were clearly less than fruitful. It is the decisions made by the founders of the Canada Council and by the early Council itself that dictated the relationship between English Canadian playwrights of the time and the newly developing regional theatre system. Once those decisions were made -- particularly in the area of repertoire and finance -- a relationship was established that placed the regionals in a position of power and the creative writers in the position of suitors, usually denied suitors.

This thesis is also not an analysis of the plays written during the period covered. It does, however, offer considerable background material in preparation for such an analysis. In particular, it suggests strongly that some crucial structural and formal elements of Canadian drama, particularly those developing out of the alternate theatre movement were, in some measure, dictated by funding, theatre size and even the cultural battles between the alternates and the regionals. In Chapter Six I provide a few examples of what might be done, following and extending the work of Renata Usmiani in this area, but I believe the surface has only been scratched and that where we are tempted to see esthetic motives behind playwrighting choices, there are often more pragmatic concerns at work. Playwrights are enormously aware that what theatres often want are cheap plays ("two hander, single set, couple of props, good jokes: run forever!" -- as the joke goes on the US regional circuit).

Other exigencies are less obvious but still operate, and sometimes in ways that surprise. In large theatres, like the regionals, large cast plays are problematic and therefore generally discouraged. In small, ‘shoe-string’ theatres, no cast size is affordable, and therefore it doesn’t matter if the show has a large cast; some way to do it is generally found.

There is no attempt, here, to offer a history or analysis of cultural politics in general or the politics of grantsmanship and funding, although the thesis does gesture in that direction in Chapter Five. Such a study would be most productive since, increasingly, regional (and other) theatres have either chosen to lapse into bureaucratically-enriched administrations or have continued to fight for artistic freedom against excessive control by the ‘culture brokers’ (a term of opprobrium used frequently by Tom Hendry). What I *have* tried to show is that cultural practices (as opposed to, often fictitious, policies) have dictated choices in the areas of repertoire, finances, audience (via ticket price and repertoire) and nationality of artist; in other words cultural practices affect practically everything, since the aforementioned areas also largely dictate form and content. And behind these practices are cultural agendas, such as the privileging of “high culture” by the financial, social and political elite. In fact, high culture exerts a hegemony in the Canadian theatre that has led to the slow development of Canadian drama and the penalizing of Canadian playwrights in a theatre structure that was (partly) built for their benefit.

While this thesis focuses on the institutional impact of these forces on English Canadian playwrights and their work, I have tried, briefly, to illustrate some of the parallels and differences in the impact of the same forces on French Canadian and (later) Québécois playwrights. Although some major differences (the creation in 1961 of a Québec Ministry of Culture as a major theatre funding body, the contributions of the centre d’essai des auteurs

dramatiques in developing new work as well as a largely divergent direction in nationalism) have had a fundamentally different impact on playwrights working in French, I have tried to show, through the use of Théâtre du Nouveau Monde as an example, how Canada Council policies have had a somewhat similar impact on repertoire choice and the use of indigenous drama in Québec.

As far as my critique of the Canada Council as an institution (and to a lesser extent the Massey/Levésque Commission) is concerned, my methodological approach has been based partly on Gans' subdivisions of culture (see Chapter Two) and largely on Charles Taylor's efforts to define a public institution in the Canadian context. Gans offers a breakdown of cultural groupings within a modern industrial society, that happens to correspond to categories of 'taste' and audience demographics within the theatre. Taylor shows how public institutions, supposedly neutral, can carry with them unacknowledged agendas. There is an understandable tendency to view the Canada Council as a complete break from the past Canadian tradition of the state ignoring the arts; as a *tabula rasa*, promoting culture but neutral as to which culture (high, middle, mass, pop): the essential difference between public (service) and 'private' institutions. (see Taylor 123-4) This is, however, not true of the Council, as I have tried to show, partially because of its roots in the Massey/Levésque Commission, partially because of its politically appointed board and partially because its early funding structure was clearly modeled on the private patronage system (see Chapter Three also Wilson 5).

While some public 'service' institutions "have a merely instrumental relation to our lives, even if the service they supply is very important" others can become "environments characterized by practices that are the primary sites in which we define important values and

hence the possible poles of identity.” Within such an institution, “with its implicit normativity, a practice can thus embody a moral standard or an ideal” (Taylor 123). In theory, “[t]he institutions that retain a dimension pertaining to identification are supposed to be “private”; membership in them is voluntary, and they are not at all (or, at most, very loosely) tied to public power” (Taylor 124) but in practice, as I have tried to argue, the Canada Council, in its early years, acted more like a “private” institution. This is not unusual since neutrality, even in a democratic state, is an unrealistic ideal and “it is difficult to conceive of a democratic state that would really be devoid of any dimension pertaining to identification” (Taylor 125-6). Having said that, it follows that “a state,” or a public institution, “that identifies with a certain conception of life will favour some people at the expense of others” (Taylor 125). I have tried in this thesis to show how the Council adopted practices that favoured, in the development of Canadian theatre, high culture over the work of indigenous playwrights.

The terms “regional theatre” and “regional theatre system” are used throughout the thesis, even though these terms are highly problematic, and are, in fact, no longer used by the Canada Council itself. They are difficult to define precisely, although I have tried to do so in Chapter Five. In Québec, for example, regional theatres have been commonly referred to as “institutional” theatres since the 1970s. The confusion springs from the fact that the term ‘regional’ has no precise correspondence with either its geographical or literary counterparts. It means (or came to mean) essentially a theatre located in a major metropolis that also served and drew support from the surrounding area. Thus, there can be a ‘regional’ theatre in Edmonton and also in Calgary, although in every other sense, they share a region. I have argued in the thesis that the term “metropolitan” would be a more

accurate description based on Maurice Careless' theories. However, since all articles and books refer to this system as the 'regional' system (although it's not a system and not regionally based), the term must stand.

The largest problems in pursuing this task have been curiously contradictory. The history of professional Canadian theatre (as opposed to that of foreign companies touring Canada for profit) is relatively brief: the history of a generation. As a result there are few large-scale studies available that study the phenomenon of Canadian professional theatre comprehensively; rather, writers have chosen to deal with the subject in discrete portions: by epoch, by region, by company or by individual. Information on playwrights, particularly in their conflicts with regional theatres, is also sparse. For example, Robert Wallace and Cynthia Zimmerman's useful volume on Canadian playwrights, *The Work*, generally focuses on problems of style and material and offers little on the playwright's struggle, in the early years, to get her/his work onto the stage of the regional theatres. In part, this is a consequence of the process outlined in this thesis: many of the early playwrights who fought that battle, eventually left the theatre for more congenial work, while most of the playwrights of the 1970s, 1980s and beyond, began their work within the alternate theatre system.

The early history of the regional theatres is also fraught with difficulties. Despite the brevity of the history of the regional system, much has been lost and much more is in danger of being lost. Few theatres have maintained archives and those that exist are largely uncatalogued by item (such as the Guelph collection of the St. Lawrence Centre) or are totally uncatalogued. The archives of Centaur Theatre in Montreal, for example, are in the process of being catalogued by a volunteer and contain little beyond copies of reviews.

Documents relating to funding, grant applications -- present in the St. Lawrence Centre collection-- are unavailable. Other archival evidence is scattered, lost in provincial bureaucracies or largely unedited and unanalyzed. A great deal of work must be quickly done if this information is not to disappear.

Even more problematic is the fact that because artistic directors, producers, business managers etc. at the regional theatres are regularly changed (or rotated) through the theatre system, no company retains much in the way of first hand memory of its own early history, though that history may be only thirty years old or less. In addition, certain crucial, explosive events (such as the failure of the Crest Theatre of Toronto, the battle for control of the St. Lawrence Centre and the refusal by Vancouver's Playhouse Theatre to produce the commissioned play *Captives of the Faceless Drummer* by George Ryga) are so mired in controversy, that many of the principals involved still refuse to speak about them.

My inquiries were often responded to (when responded to at all) by counter inquiries -- could I fill them in on questions relating to the regional system, for example. More often, the response was that no-one at the theatre had been there longer than a few years, and that those who would know had left theatre or gone to the U. S., or elsewhere. Those that remained, and were willing to speak (such as Malcolm Black, Joy Coghill, Ken Kramer, Tom Hendry and Bill Glassco), offered some invaluable insights. In addition, two of the regionals, The Manitoba Theatre Centre and the Neptune Theatre, have published booklets on the history of their theatre that have been of some assistance (particularly that of MTC) in this project.

The Canada Council itself has been most co-operative in the project and their minutes from 1957 until 1969 are mostly complete -- although there are a number of curious

lacunae. After that date the minutes are sparse and the remaining material in the archives is difficult to access (due to serious financial restrictions) and is in the form of endless files of applications and evaluations of applications that offer little help in evaluating the overall picture. The Council itself, in the person of head researcher Irene Boillard and theatre officer Robert Allen were both helpful and forthcoming in response to questions. Clearly, however, further research into some of the specific questions I have raised in the thesis, will be difficult.

On the other hand there are quite a number of in-depth studies that I have made extensive use of in discrete areas of this thesis. Betty Lee's *Love and Whisky: The Story of the Dominion Drama Festival* is the source of much of the material on that organization but it makes no attempt to relate the forces she sees at play there even to contemporary events, such as the Massey/Levésque Commission, much less the professional theatre. Similarly, the work of Paula Sperdakos on the New Play Society is often called upon with the same reservations. The section on the National Theatre question and the Massey/Levésque Commission leans heavily on various critical works by Dennis Salter, Alan Filewood and Paul Litt, particularly Litt's book, *The Muses, the Masses, and the Massey Commission*. Again, these works are specific in their target areas and do not move, except speculatively, beyond them. My goal is to tie their cogent arguments, a few of which I disagree with, into the larger canvas of the thesis. Some of the organizational details concerning the early Canada Council rests on the work of Hugo McPherson and Frank Milligan (at one time a member of the Council) but I have chosen to go beyond them to illustrate, expand upon and, at times, differ from their views using the Council's own minutes and correspondence as a basis. I have also drawn upon Walter Whittaker's *The Canada Council*, an early history of

the founding of the Council, although I have disagreed with a number of his conclusions based on the further evidence of passing time.

The Chapter on theatre economics is based heavily on W. J. Baumol and W. C. Bowen's *Performing Arts: The Economic Dilemma*, as are virtually all economic studies of theatre (whether they acknowledge it or not) since Baumol and Bowen were the first to analyze the arts from a business point of view and to perceive the perennial problem of the "income gap." While their study is based on American theatre in the 1960s, their conclusions have wider applications and I have tried to make what modifications are necessary for Canadian theatre. The section on 'alternate' theatre relies largely on the books of Renate Usmiani and Dennis Johnston for historical background, although not for all the conclusions since I have tried to contrast the achievement of that movement against those of the regionals only in the area of the development of English Canadian playwrights. Statistically, I have relied primarily on the studies conducted by Frank Pasquill at York University and on the subject of funding comparisons I am in complete sympathy with his findings. All these sources have proven invaluable in their specific areas. My purpose has been to incorporate both their findings and my own discoveries into a larger, and yet narrower, framework.

Chapter One examines the status of theatre -- amateur and professional -- in Canada just prior to the creation of the Canada Council. It looks at both amateur and professional theatre in order to establish two principal concepts. The first is that Canadian amateur theatres, both individually and then under the auspices of the Dominion Drama Festival, were already committed to a repertoire of European (principally British and French) works with some popular American plays included. This commitment, because of the Little Theatre's roots in the European "art theatre" movement, was strengthened due to amateur

theatre's location among the upper classes of Canadian society and its concern with social behaviour and socially 'proper' culture. Inversely, early professional and semi-professional theatre (principally in Toronto and Montreal in the 1950s) made significant attempts, without funding assistance, to produce Canadian works and to encourage and commission Canadian plays. They discovered, to their own surprise, that these indigenous plays were often their most successful productions.

Chapter Two focuses on the Massey/Levésque Commission and the forces that led to its creation and, in many ways, dictated its course. It concentrates on showing the rise of Canadian nationalism and its expression in cultural lobby groups, the vexed 'National Theatre' question and the creation of the commission itself. At the same time it presents Gans' divisions of culture and shows the alliance, in the form of the Massey/Levésque Commission, of the forces of high culture and nationalism in order to force the government of Canada into taking action in the cultural field. It attempts to lay out all the principal trends and agendas that would later be brought to bear on the Canada Council; from within and without. It concludes by presenting and analyzing the commission's view of the state of theatre in Canada and the conclusions of the commission as they directly affected the future of theatre. Of particular importance here is the recommendation that some form of theatre system must be put into place before playwrights could be assisted in having their work produced.

Chapter Three deals with the founding, composition and mandate of the Canada Council. The focus here is on the Council's own *ad hoc* development of policies towards the development of some form of a Canadian theatre 'system' and how those policies mirrored many of the earlier biases outlined above. Also crucial to this Chapter are the

philosophies of theatre and culture that these policy decisions were based upon and their implications for the future. Finally, I outline the planned methodology of the Council in its application of these policies and suggest some of the flaws inherent in that methodology.

Chapter Four is wholly concerned with the economics of theatre. This is crucial, since any examination of the Canada Council's practices necessarily involves things as basic as: who gets the money and under what conditions? Based on Baumol and Bowen, and including other modifications of their theory by later theatre economists, this section introduces and explains the idea of the "income gap" and how its impact on twentieth century theatre is on-going and pervasive. It attempts to demonstrate clearly the fact that once government, through funding bodies, enters the field of the performing arts, there is no possibility of grant recipients ever achieving a state of balanced books again -- subsidy will remain a continuing necessity. It also shows how this economic necessity, if not understood, becomes a constant, unremitting pressure on theatre companies to find ways to save money at the expense of experimentation, creative expression and artistic license. It also could, and did, become an excuse that the Council was prepared to accept for not producing indigenous work.

Chapter Five is largely based on a detailed reading of Canada Council minutes and is a chronological account of the practices of the Council from 1957 until 1969. After further clarifying the Council's methodology, it mainly concerns itself with a year by year account of the Council's activities in the area of theatre focusing on two topics: the creation of the regional system and the Council's practices relating to the promotion of the work of English Canadian playwrights. It presents a detailed analysis of the ways that the Council viewed itself, rhetorically and practically, as enabling productions of Canadian plays. It also shows

the inadequacy of these practices and the strong contrast between the Canada Council's public statements of support for playwrights and their lack of concrete action. This Chapter also illustrates the growing disenchantment of Canadian nationalists with the Council and with the alliance with high culture forged by the Massey/Levésque Commission. Chapter Five concludes by demonstrating the development of a standard 'safe' repertoire within the regional theatre system that effectively excluded the work of indigenous playwrights while privileging high culture.

Chapter Six deals with the period 1970 to 1975 but does not proceed chronologically. Rather it deals with the period in separate, discrete packages. It attempts a general overview of the (by then, nearly complete) regional theatre system in the area of repertoire choice and then looks at several specific examples within the system: including the increasing practice of 'second stage' production of Canadian plays. A detailed look at the funding patterns within Canadian theatre (at the time) is presented that strongly confirms the conclusions of Chapter Five and lays the groundwork for the coming discussion of the Local Initiatives Program and Opportunities for Youth as well as the 'alternate' theatre of the early 1970s.

At that point we turn to the forces that rose in opposition both to the Council's policies (particularly in relation to English Canadian playwrights) and to the repertoire choices of the regionals. The Gaspé Manifesto is introduced and the Local Initiatives Program (LIP) and Opportunities for Youth (OFY) programmes are briefly presented to show their funding patterns. Finally, the alternate theatre program is examined, specifically in the area of the production of Canadian plays and the creation of a new audience. The Massey/Levésque Commission had felt strongly -- indeed, it became the basis

of the alliance between nationalists and the exponents of high culture -- that, given the opportunity, the average Canadian would attend the theatre, making the theatre audiences more democratic and less elitist. Under the regional system this had not fully taken place, but I will argue here that the alternates had succeeded in this endeavour.

The Canadian regional theatre system, with all its financial and artistic resources had failed to produce by 1975 more than a handful of English Canadian plays, most of them in the West. The Canada Council, despite all its efforts, had failed to spur them on to accomplish more; in fact, I will argue, had held them back from further efforts. Chapter Six will make this clear by contrasting the funding policies of the Council, with the funding policies of LIP and OFY. It will also contrast the success in the development of new Canadian plays between the regional system and the alternate theatres of the early 1970s. In the course of this section, the political battles between the Council and the Office of the Secretary of State will naturally enter the discussion and illustrate how after 1975 it becomes considerably more difficult to discern Council policy from government policy. The Conclusion will, of course, recapitulate the argument.

In the course of this thesis, I have assiduously attempted not to attach unnecessary blame; often decisions were taken out of honest ignorance, or because of severely limited financial choices. Any decision, for instance, concerning the public financing of theatre taken before 1968 (the year Baumol and Bowen were published) was *necessarily* taken in partial ignorance, since it was widely believed that theatre operated much like any other business. On the other hand, when public bodies make statements in principle and then engage in practices that run counter to those statements, blame must be attached. One of the keys to approaching an institution such as the Canada Council (or any other semi-independent

funding body) is to closely watch the gap between rhetoric and practices. Funding bodies, as institutions, present themselves as their rhetoric, but *are*, and should be held accountable for, their practices. I have tried to base my methodology on this principle. But I have not neglected the rhetoric. Often, particularly in documents not intended for publication (such as minutes), rhetoric reveals more about basic attitudes than, perhaps, the writer or speaker intended.

**Chapter One: The Status of Canadian Theatre from the End of the Second World
War to the Creation of the Canada Council**

An Overview

Any study dealing with the effect of the Canada Council on Canadian theatre in general, and the English-Canadian playwright in particular must take as its starting point an examination of Canadian theatre as it was before the creation of the Council. Although the status of Canadian theatre prior to the advent of the Canada Council has been compared by John Coulter to the art of dinghy sailing among the Bedouin, this is an unnecessarily bleak point of view. While it may have been applicable to the status of the playwright prior to the 1950s, and to long periods of theatrical domination by foreign touring companies, Canadian theatre does have a distinctive history from at least the turn of the century with companies like the Marks family and Tavernier's company. But Canadian playwrights were largely excluded from the scene since audiences for touring shows -- even Canadian companies -- were provided with melodramas and farces (less than) fresh from the American and British stage. Canadian theatre was, with a few exceptions, foreign theatre performed in Canada.

After the Second World War, although there was continuity in certain areas of Canadian Theatre (such as the Dominion Drama Festival and the amateur Little Theatre movement), there was also a decisive change. Admittedly on a small scale, Canadian theatrical workers (actors, writers, designers etc.) were beginning to see the possibility of semi-professional and professional repertory theatre in a number of different locations, predominantly in eastern Canada. Though Coulter's bleak vision was somewhat ameliorated, at least as far as actors were concerned, with the appearance of a few semi- and professional companies, things were as dismal as ever in other areas. No new theatre spaces were constructed (and a *very* few old ones remained unconverted to movie houses)

and no training schools were created -- outside independent measures taken by individuals and companies such as the New Play Society in Toronto and the Montreal Repertory Company. The profession remained a precarious one for actors and prospects for a nationwide professional theatre featuring the production of plays by Canadian writers remained slim. Indeed, as the Royal Commission on the Arts, Letters and Humanities (referred to hereafter as the Massey/Levésque Commission) was to report, the "great heritage" of dramatic literature of the world was:

largely unknown to the people of Canada for whom the theatre, where it maintains a precarious existence, is restricted to sporadic visits in four or five cities by companies beyond our borders, to the laudable but overworked and ill-supported efforts of our few repertory theatres, and to the amateur companies which have done remarkable work against remarkable odds.

(Royal Commission 193)

This state of affairs was not completely the result of universal indifference on the part of Canadians. Various writers, critics and men of letters had been decrying the state of theatre in Canada from as far back as (at least) Confederation. Thomas D'Arcy McGee was among the earliest social commentators to raise the cry for a Canadian literary culture:

"Every country, every nationality, every people, must create and foster a National Literature, if it is their wish to preserve a distinct individuality from other nations" (McGee 21). His reasons were clearly political and would have sounded very contemporary to the increasingly nationalistic population of post-war Canada:

The popular mind must be trained and educated according to the physical appearances and social condition of the country; and the people who are so

unfortunate as to possess no fountain from which they can procure the elixir of their existence, will soon disappear from the face of the earth, or become merged in some more numerous or more powerful neighbour. (McGee 22)

No one had any doubts as to who this powerful neighbour might be.

Denis Salter, in his article on the agitation for a National Theatre, has abundantly illustrated the numerous calls by Canadian nationalists for a National Theatre from McGee to the creation of the Canada Council and beyond. All of them were "alarmed when they examined the theatre. With few exceptions, most of it was imported from Britain or the United States; they looked in vain to theatre for a reflection of something even nominally Canadian" (Salter 75). In Québec, plays mounted in French (and there were very few) were all subject to "continental French standards" (Hébert 29).¹ Yet these repeated calls for almost a hundred years seemed, at first glance, to be as far from realization in 1946 as they were in 1867. Despite this, the Massey/Levésque Commission found that there was "undoubtedly in Canada a widespread interest in the theatre. We have mentioned earlier the astonishing number of amateur dramatic societies and even indifferent plays presented by visiting companies of no great distinction from abroad have been sold out weeks in advance" (*Royal Commission* 194-5). This was seen by the commission as part of a "prevailing hunger existing throughout the country for a fuller measure of what the writer, the artist and the musician could give" (*Royal Commission* 9). The Massey/Levésque Commission reached the conclusion that not only were the performing arts important to Canada's political cultural and social agenda but that their primary difficulty was financial and that what was needed was government intervention through a council for the arts.

But in the years from 1945 to 1958 all this was hardly to be imagined. As late as 1956, “The Canadian government had not yet made a single move or appropriated a solitary copper for the support of literature and the arts in Canada” (Creighton 248) and the reasons for this were as much social as they were political:

The fact was that the Canadians of the 1950's had not yet been taught to believe that the state was the great dispenser of social and cultural goodies and that unless the state designed and financed a literary or artistic project, its failure was virtually inevitable. Artists and writers had always been very much on their own in Canada. They had had to be. (Creighton 249)

What little financial support theatre had received was in the form of limited private patronage and there was precious little of that.

Yet, there were a number of factors that began to change the theatrical landscape in Canada in the fifteen years after the Second World War and before the creation of the Canada Council. There were an increasing number of theatre professionals who had received either professional training or practical experience abroad during the war. In addition, a number of British professionals had emigrated to Canada at the end of the war because of economic conditions in Europe. There were other factors as well: foreign touring, which had been the dominant professional theatre in Canada since the nineteenth century had been declining through the twenties and thirties and was slow in recovering after the war. In fact, “[t]he process towards theatrical independence was, ironically, accelerated by the rise of alternative forms of entertainment in Canada -- film and radio -- which caused theatre

attendance to decrease, making tours by American and British companies financially hazardous” (Benson and Conolly 44). In addition to financial problems, the new force of radio, particularly CBC drama, had come to take the place of theatre for much of the public (Stuart, *History* 77). In the vacuum created by the disappearance of foreign tours there was an open space for a Canadian theatre to develop to serve those people who wished to attend. Also, the availability of a tiny core of trained theatre people, began to improve some aspects of the theatrical situation by providing expertise and instruction. Add to this the post-war economic affluence and the theatrical situation in Canada from 1945 on was one of enormously increasing potential; the question was, in what direction would it develop?

The Little Theatre Movement

Amateur theatre in Canada had its beginnings in university drama societies as early as 1875, with the Garrick Club of Hamilton, and in various dramatic 'societies' (*Oxford* 302) and “*cercles*” (Nardocchio 14) across the country. In addition, at Rideau Hall, there were private theatricals, overseen and participated in, by Lord and Lady Dufferin from 1873 to 1878 and these were continued in modified forms by succeeding Governors General until 1904 (*Oxford* 466-7). Georges Gauvreau established a competition for one-act plays in French that lasted a number of years (Nardocchio 15). Various amateur groups took part in gatherings such as Governor General Earl Grey's Musical and Dramatic Competitions from 1907 to 1911 (*Oxford* 302). All these were essentially ‘upper-class’ social groups inspired by a general love for theatre (Lord Dufferin was the great grandson of Sheridan) but also by a need for an excellent excuse to socialize. Indeed, it appears that ‘socially-unacceptable’

groups were arbitrarily cut from the competitions (Lee 67). The residue of this attitude would later have a major impact on the character of the Dominion Drama Festival.

Astonishingly enough, the first competition was won by a Canadian play, *The Release of Alan Danvers*, which has since disappeared from the public record (Lee 69). After 1911, dramatic competitions disappeared until the creation of the Dominion Drama Festival. Their place was taken by the enormous spread of Little Theatres throughout Canada.

Little Theatre in Canada, as elsewhere, was inspired by the successes of the European Little Theatre of the 1880s; by theatres such as the Théâtre Libre, the Freie Bühne, the Independent Theatre Club and the Moscow Art Theatre (*Oxford* 303) and reached its peak in the 1920s. One of the earliest and more influential of these groups was the Arts and Letters Club of Toronto, founded in 1908 as a luncheon club, which was led by, or associated with, important figures such as Roy Mitchell (from 1910 until 1916). Mitchell went on to become the first director of Hart House theatre in 1919 which became the flagship of the Little Theatre movement and produced an international repertoire with occasional productions of plays by Canadian playwrights such as Merrill Denison, Mazo de la Roche, Fred Jacob, Marjorie Pickthall and Duncan Campbell Scott (*Oxford* 304). Merrill Denison became a major force at Hart House and is (along with Herman Voaden) considered by some to be the major mover in Canada's Little Theatre movement, at least in Ontario. Regardless of personnel, the theatre facility of Hart House (a gift of the Massey Foundation) was a dominant presence. Lavishly equipped, even by later standards, with, among other things, the third largest lighting switchboard in North America, Hart House was the finest Little Theatre building in Canada, and possibly North America (Benson and Conolly 46). Hart House became the model of what 'bricks and

mortar' could do to inspire theatrical activity and it would remain a major focus of Canadian theatre until after the Second World War.

Toronto was by no means the only place with a strong Little Theatre movement.²

The Little Theatre spread everywhere across the country and was often more successful in smaller communities (like Sarnia) than it was in the larger centres. It achieved its greatest momentum after the first World War and into the twenties. In general, "the Little theatre succeeded in filling the vacuum caused by the gradual collapse of mainstream touring in the 1920s and in meeting the mass-audience challenge of cinema and radio broadcasting" (*Oxford* 305). On the other hand, "[n]on-professional theatre became so powerful in the country . . . that many observers of its rise believe it blocked the evolution of the professional system" (Lee 77). Both statements testify to Little Theatre's enormous popularity.

Initially, Little Theatre's philosophy and purpose was artistic and its greatest interest was in "plays deemed non-commercial, such as those by Pirandello, Synge, Maeterlinck, Rice, and Yeats" (Gygli 38), however, as Eugene Benson and L. W. Conolly point out: "in the 1930s that sense of mission began to fade, as the Little Theatre movement sought to become socially acceptable and (within the modest bounds of amateur theatre) commercially successful" (Benson and Conolly 51). A major reason for this decline had to do with the social aspects of theatre; the Little Theatres tended to be restricted to middle and upper class members and so did their audiences. In *Love and Whisky*, Betty Lee puts her finger on the attitudinal problem that is a recurrent factor in Canadian theatre:

Canadians who went to the theatre tended not to consider drama as a serious art-form, possibly because of the long-standing belief . . . that anything

connected with the *professional* stage -- even superior fare -- was in questionable taste. . . . Performances of suitable plays by ladies and gentlemen who were not hell-bent on commercial gain were tolerated and even encouraged -- provided the group had background. (Lee 64-5)

The widening gap between the initial aims of the Little Theatre movement -- the production of "art theatre" -- and the drive for social and, later, commercial success, robbed the Little Theatre movement of much of its drive.

Quality varied widely among the Little Theatres, but some, like Hart House, Sarnia Little Theatre and the Montreal Repertory Company had excellent critical reputations. Budgets were extremely limited, despite wealthy patrons such as the Massey and Allan families. One budget sheet of Hart House's production of *Tattercoats*, Dec. 26-31, 1941, has survived and will serve as an example. The total expenses on the production were \$468.97 including a fee for the star, professional actor Josephine Barrington. \$27.57 was spent on publicity, \$12.00 on scenery and \$5.00 for "pressing the curtains." The total income from the box office was \$174.20 and the rest was made up by patrons; including one Don Bishop who donated \$0.83 -- probably to balance the books (Barrington).

Balancing early war-time austerity against the fact that Hart House was generally better financed than most Little Theatres, this seems to be an average balance sheet and shows the modest scale of these productions. The focus of Little Theatre, particularly in its later years, was on the activities of rehearsal and performance and the concomitant social activities that accompanied them.

None of this is meant to 'be-little' the Little Theatre movement. The economic climate of the time, the depression and the total lack of Government funding at any level

before 1948, to a large extent enforced austerity. With the exception of the Saskatchewan Arts Board, formed by an Order in Council in 1948 and the Alberta government's Drama Division (began in 1955) (Stuart, *History* 123-5), it is clear that “[b]efore the Canada Council was created in 1957 theatre had to survive without the benefits of government support. As an amateur activity it could and did; professional companies, however, were much more difficult to sustain” (Benson and Conolly 68). One exception to this statement was Gratien Gélinas’ revue, *Les Fridolinades*, which began on the Montréal radio station CKAC in 1937 and moved to the stage in 1938 where it was tremendously successful until 1946 (Weiss 9). Otherwise the stage was in the hands of the Little Theatres.

Certainly Canada's Little Theatres served a vital purpose: “[b]ecause of their non-professional status, these ‘dramateurs’ were able to survive the economic devastation of the 1930s and to provide the continuity that allowed Canada to bridge the gap between the imported commercial entertainments of the ‘road’ and the post-Second World War appearance of a native professional theatre” (*Oxford* 305). However they also established a model of the theatre in Canada as restricted to the socially acceptable upper classes featuring a repertoire that recapitulated their own interests.

The Dominion Drama Festival

The growth of Little Theatres across the country, each one operating in isolation, led to an attempt to link up Canada's theatrical activity under the aegis of the Dominion Drama Festival; an effort that would further increase the social prestige of theatre and produce a ‘national’ movement. Because of its slow demise (becoming final in 1978) and because of its lingering and not totally unjustified reputation as an association addicted as

much to “white ties and tails” (Benson and Conolly 52) as to theatre, the Dominion Drama Festival has often been forgotten or dismissed as a major force towards a Canadian professional theatre. This is, perhaps, as understandable as it is unfair. The DDF began as an organization totally 'colonial' in structure and in nature and spent much of its history struggling unsuccessfully to emerge from that colonialism. It helped, in many ways, to perpetuate the concept that Canadian theatre was simply the production of European (and occasionally American) plays by Canadian amateurs of a ‘certain’ social class untainted by professionalism, commercialism, bad taste or new ideas. It conceived of theatre as an adjunct to the world view of the vice-regal and upper middle classes, still tied to a vision of Europe (especially Britain) as the ultimate arbiter of taste. It maintained that vision not only through its repertoire but through its awards and through its vice-regal receptions and white-tie-and-tails social whirl. Only in its latter years, in the 1960s, did it begin to perceive the need to change its vision and image -- and by then it was too late.

On the other hand -- and a very large hand it was -- the Dominion Drama Festival managed a number of monumental achievements. As the focus and cornerstone for the Little Theatre movement and amateur theatre in general, it managed to sustain and impose some sort of national awareness and coherence on these groups through the Depression and after the Second World War. Also, “it helped train the leading professionals of today's theatre” (Benson and Connolly 53) and, as long time participant and (critical) supporter Robertson Davies put it, “[t]hough the DDF never succeeded in bringing a Canadian drama into being, it kept the whole country aware of what was being done in world theatre” (quoted in Lee xi). Perhaps even that is too harsh, or modest, since the DDF did manage to

foster and encourage some talented Canadian playwrights such as John Coulter and Davies himself (Benson and Connolly 53). In his forward to Betty Lee's irreplaceable history of the Dominion Drama Festival, *Love and Whisky: The Story of the Dominion Drama Festival*,

Robertson Davies puts the case for DDF in its strongest light:

it never lost sight of its desire to keep the art of the theatre alive in a country where it was greatly threatened, and in the end to bring about a better theatre, in the hands of professional artists, in which the amateurs would either have to relinquish their amateur status, or go back to seats among the audience, this is what it achieved. The foundation of our modern professional theatre rests on many stones, but the largest and the strongest is the achievement of the Dominion Drama festival. (Lee x)

Few people will argue strongly with this statement and even the DDF's strongest critics agree that it was "our first (and, indeed, only) real national theatre." (Salter 85, see also Benson and Connolly 52)

The importance of the Dominion Drama Festival here, is that it illustrates by both its strengths and weaknesses prevalent attitudes about Canadian theatre that would have an enormous impact on the early years of the Canada Council. The world of Canadian theatre was a small one, particularly in the first half of the century; certain prominent players in the DDF were also crucial at later stages: both Vincent Massey and Robertson Davies were prominent in the Dominion Drama Festival as well as in the Massey/Levésque Commission. Even more importantly, the DDF is a prime example of the reasons why Canadian plays (and playwrights) were accorded little part in what was, in fact, Canada's national theatre. What follows, then, is a brief history of the Dominion Drama Festival to illustrate the status

of the Canadian play within the practices of the DDF and also to show how the DDF presaged in its own way the fate of Canadian playwrights in the early days of the Canada Council.

When Lord Bessborough was informed that he was to be the next Governor General of Canada he was depressed to be informed that there was “no theatre” in Canada. Bessborough was a (‘gentleman’) politician, a wealthy manufacturer of margarine, a soldier, but above all he was a theatre enthusiast with the best-equipped private playhouse in Britain (Lee 83). He was surprised and pleased to discover, when he arrived in Canada in 1931, a thriving Little Theatre movement from coast to coast. The idea for the Dominion Drama Festival or, at least “doing something for amateur dramatics” was Bessborough's own, although Vincent Massey was one of the first people that he consulted. Much of the early, but still detailed, planning was also Bessborough's own (Lee 86-7) and in a speech made in Ottawa and Toronto, he proclaimed some decidedly far-ranging objectives: “I should like to see as a normal part of our life in this country, dramatic performances taking place of plays by Canadian authors with music by Canadian composers, with scenic decorations and costumes by Canadian artists, performed by Canadian players.” (quoted in Lee 88) The actual organizational work was turned over to Massey who shared many of the Governor General's ideas and motives. Massey began by setting up a superstructure of both general and working committees that would, in Lee's words, “throw successive wrenches into the machinery of the DDF for the next four decades” (Lee 93) by institutionalizing the restrictive upper class nature of the organization and setting the groundwork for its social side.

The founding meeting of the DDF was held on Oct. 29, 1932 amidst august company³ in the Ballroom of Rideau Hall and “from its very beginning, the Dominion Drama Festival stressed the importance of order, the right thing and protocol” (Lee 94). The basic idea was to hold regional, and then national, competitions among “established amateur dramatic societies” in order to develop and encourage a “national drama” and “consequently original Canadian plays will be encouraged,” but, beyond the competitions, “how this would be achieved was not made clear” (Lee 96). The subject of repertoire was not dealt with directly although a marking system put into effect for the first competitions effectively screened out several of the earliest entries from Canadian playwrights. For example, in the first year (in the Toronto regional), a production of Herman Voaden's non-realistic play *Rocks* was ruled out of competition because it did not fit the marking system (Lee 121). This is part of an important, recurring pattern. Along with the struggling semi- and professional theatres of the 50s (see below), movements, groups and organizations like the Little Theatre movement, the Dominion Drama Festival, the Canadian Conference for the Arts, the Massey/Levésque Commission and even the Canada Council made broad, impressive statements about encouraging Canadian drama. The sad fact is that these statements were either ingenuous or the organization in question was unable to institute a practice that would make the statement a reality.

From the beginning hopes were high, both for the success of the festival and for its loftier aims of encouraging Canadian theatre and plays -- even though, as Vincent Massey claimed, there were only twelve to fifteen produced Canadian plays to draw on (Lee 99). After only one year critics began to see the DDF as “a foundation stone . . . above which we might erect a glorious edifice of drama, a National Theatre? Not, perhaps, a centralized

plant with its difficulties of maintenance and management but, rather, a brotherhood of effort assisted, guided and encouraged by some parent body.” (critic E. G. Sterndale Bennett in Lee 120) However it soon became apparent that Canadian plays would comprise an embarrassingly small percentage of the entries in the competitions and the DDF realized that “more had to be done to convince Canadians that the new organization was committed to encouraging a truly national drama. It was planned to offer a cash prize of one hundred dollars out of slim DDF funds to the author of the best Canadian play in any of the regional festivals” (Lee 122-3) and in 1936 Harley Granville-Barker awarded the Bessborough trophy to *Twenty-five Cents* by W. Eric Harvey of Sarnia (Lee 223).

From 1933 until its interruption in 1939 by the war, the Dominion Drama Festival enjoyed (at least in its own terms of reference) a successful and highly visible career but it was clear that it was, by and large, the success of the elite. As early as the second festival, the national competition “exuded the somewhat cozy atmosphere of an elite club” (Lee 125) and there was an emphasis on the social whirl and excessive patronizing of adjudicators from the very beginning (Lee 112). When, during the Second World War, the DDF abandoned the festivals, it was speculated by some members that this was due to financial problems, “this speculation smacked somewhat of heresy, of course, because it was surely unthinkable that such middle-class problems as deficit and possible bankruptcy could ever be associated with an organization loaded with Class” (Lee 183).

The Dominion Drama Festival's financial problems were endemic because of its dependence on private patronage and the Festival was slow, even after the Second World War, to move to resolve them. Spurred on by a 1950 internal report, called the Band Report, the DDF began to move slowly from “its long-standing dependence on private

patronage” to a “growing determination to think commercial” (Lee 191). In a move that, oddly, anticipated the actions of cultural organizations of the 1980s, the Dominion Drama Festival negotiated the financial backing of Calvert Distillers Inc. and, when that was withdrawn, the Canadian Association of Broadcasters. This was a logical step from the patronage of the wealthy individual to the patronage of wealthy companies (Calvert was owned by Seagram's) and wealthy organizations. The Festival also appealed to government -- by way of the Massey/Levésque Commission -- for further funding. In a brief to the commission written by supporter Robertson Davies, it was grandly stated: “I cannot think of any other country in the world where a comparable effort [Dominion Drama Festival] would be so persistently snubbed by the Government. Even on the lowest level, its publicity value to the country is enormous. The libel that Canada hates the arts is more strongly supported by the resolute slighting of the DDF than in any other single matter”: (quoted in Lee 190). Although government support of the DDF grew too slowly to save the Festival, by 1961 the Canada Council was underwriting traveling grants and adjudication expenses (Lee 205) as well as sponsoring various awards.

The area of encouraging Canadian plays and Canadian playwrights was always a locus of controversy within the DDF despite (or, because of) its self-avowed objectives. Even in the area of Canadian adjudicators, the festival was slow to overcome its Eurocentrism and although Canadian adjudicators had been “talked about” as early as the 1930s they were not considered qualified to judge the regional competitions until 1960 and to judge the final (with one exception) until 1965 (Lee 242-3). Obviously, this could lead to bias in judgment, a prioritizing of European works over Canadian ones in the allocation of advancement to the finals and in the awarding of prizes. Without a reasonable chance to

advance, theatre groups were reluctant even to enter the regional competition (*Royal Commission* 195) so that when Canadian adjudicators finally began to work the regionals, they found that the bias against home-grown works had already set in. One such adjudicator, David Gardner, found himself castigating the participants in the Newfoundland regionals of 1961: "I talked about the insular attitude, the choice of repertoire which was entirely British repertory. That I would never have known I was anywhere near to the North American continent" (Lee 246). The very structure of the DDF, based on European adjudication and focusing on 'production values,' was a formidable obstacle to the choice of Canadian works for entry into the Festival competitions.

From 1933 until 1937 only 5 groups performing Canadian plays were invited to the final⁴ (6 if one includes John Coulter's *The House in the Quiet Glen* as Canadian) and from 1947 until 1967 only 5 more were invited: a rapidly declining percentage from a disappointingly low starting point. This was in spite of the fact that Samuel French Inc., with the resolute backing of employee Mona Coxwell, had initiated the Canadian Playwright Series with considerable success among amateur groups in the United States and Britain. But the series met with no success in Canada despite the awards offered for Canadian plays. Coxwell's assessment of the situation was that an insufficient number of Canadians wanted Canadian drama, however Lee attributes the problem to the amateur groups themselves who remained attached to "the colonial tradition." Although the Festival executive occasionally discussed the idea of an all-Canadian festival, motions to that effect were "never carried or even seconded" (Lee 291).

Yet, despite their own woeful lack of leadership in this area, the executive of the Dominion Drama Festival certainly recognized the problem. They were aware from the

beginning, as Lee indicates, that the encouragement of Canadian plays might lead to a “national drama” culminating in a “national theatre.” But they were also aware of the powerful resistance on the part of member groups to choosing *any* plays that were not well known from a London or New York production. Such a choice, it was believed, might hinder the individual groups chance of winning an award (Lee 288). The festival undertook a number of half-hearted steps to address the situation, including, at a later date, persuading the Canada Council to offer awards of up to \$1000 to encourage Canadian plays and playwrights (Lee 267). Finally, given the failure of these steps and the embarrassing decline in the number of Canadian plays entered from 1947 on, it was decided in 1960 (with considerable fear for the outcome) to have an all Canadian Festival in the Centennial year of 1967 and the regions “reluctantly” agreed (Lee 294-5).

The regions responded with the question of ‘where were the plays?’ The Festival, using a grant from the Ontario Council for the Arts researched and published a list of plays (with a synopsis for each play) and published it in two volumes for the use of the regional amateur groups (Lee 295). The results were fascinating for they showed how much Canadian drama there was (despite Massey's account) and how poorly it had fared in production and publishing up until 1964:

the titles of some 680 full-length plays have been found of which some 180 have been published. This means that the vast bulk of Canadian plays, more than 500, remain in manuscript form. Some of the published plays are now out of print but copies may exist in public or university libraries. Of the remainder, it was impossible in many cases to locate the author, and in other cases the author did not submit his plays for inclusion. (Milne i)

These results may have been moderately helpful to the regional groups but they could hardly have been encouraging. Notwithstanding, six full-length Canadian plays were chosen for presentation at the all-Canadian national festival in 1967 in St. John's and, contrary to expectations, they were all "sold out a month in advance" (Lee 296). Clearly, a lot of Canadians (in Newfoundland at least) wanted Canadian drama. Again, this is part of a pattern: when Canadian plays were finally (often grudgingly) chosen for production, audiences -- often new audiences -- were prepared to attend in large numbers.⁵

By the end of the 1960's, then, the Dominion Drama Festival had at last begun to act upon its earlier stated commitment to promote Canadian drama, but by then it was too late to justify the Festival. Professional theatre had already established itself in a number of companies performing Canadian plays on a regular basis and in only five years Toronto Free Theatre would be running a professional repertoire entirely of Canadian works. Other theatres would quickly join in, swept along by the new wave of Canadian nationalism. The Dominion Drama Festival, which in its proclaimed mandate had seemed so far ahead of the time, had never really caught up and for some critics had never really been sincere in its aims. In an article (which we will return to later) on the Canadian search for a National Theatre, Denis Salter states that the attitude of people like Bessborough and Massey towards Canadian theatre and nationalism was a highly ambivalent one, seeing both as a vehicle for a kind of "Jewel in the Crown" Canadian Imperialism of the type that was popular at the turn of the century and in the pre-World War One era (and was so exquisitely mocked throughout Sarah Jeannette Duncan's novel, *The Imperialist*). This ambivalence was clearly, for Salter, reflected "in their attitudes towards the founding of a repertoire of Canadian plays" and 'accordingly, throughout its influential history, the DDF, at least until

its reorganization as Theatre Canada in 1970, tended to privilege an international repertoire, with strong emphasis on the modern masterpieces of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. New Canadian plays got comparatively less attention” (Salter 86). Certainly the fact that the Dominion Drama Festival, run and participated in by all “the familiar faces (invariably WASP)” who owned the “right clothes, knew the right people” (Lee 250) suggested that the DDF, despite its own efforts “was merely a front for socialites out to have a good time” (Lee 253). While in the area of amateur theatre The Dominion Drama Festival remained an enormous influence right up until the early 1970s⁶ and trained, by the Festival's own estimate at least 400 people who went on to careers in the professional theatre (Lee 281), its influence on Canadian plays and playwrights is, at best ambivalent: ““Oh sure, they gave awards and patted local playwrights on the back,’ complains writer John Palmer. ‘But they also condemned everything that was really new. They weren't encouraging fresh Canadian drama. They were encouraging people to copy English or American plays. The DDF and its adjudicators always reflected colonial attitudes toward the theatre”” (Lee 295).

These colonial attitudes -- particularly regarding repertoire and new Canadian plays -- not only remained in the ascendancy at the Dominion Drama Festival until its demise, but were also very much at the forefront of the Massey/Levésque Commission and its subsequent report. They situate amateur theatre and the DDF within the sphere of the upper middle class bias for high culture and, in the Canadian context, that bias directs itself almost exclusively towards British and European theatre. Amateur theatre (particularly the Dominion Drama Festival) bequeathed to Canadian theatre much that was admirable, but it

also passed along a cultural bias that was to remain endemic in Canadian theatre for decades.

Professional Theatre

Professional theatre has a long history in Canada prior to 1946, but almost exclusively in the form of touring British and American companies (Gygli 1). There were a few touring Canadian companies such as the various Marks Brothers Companies and a group led by Albert Tavernier but on the whole it was the large touring American and British companies that dominated. The result of this lack of 'indigenous' professional theatre was the loss to Canada of such acting talents as Matheson Lang, Julia Aurthur, Margaret Anglin, Henry Miller, Walter Huston, Marie Dressler, Mary Pickford, Beatrice Lillie, Walter Pidgeon, Raymond Massey, and many more (Sperdakos 69) The advent of film, the depression (and then the war) all severely crippled foreign touring in Canada and although touring "gathers momentum again in the period of post-war prosperity, and productions from abroad are, of course, still seen in Canada --particularly American musicals . . . such productions are now the exception rather than the rule" (Benson and Conolly 31-2).

To a certain extent this gap was partially created and partially filled by the new media of radio and (later) television in the form of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. But as far as employment for actors and especially writers was concerned, early radio was -- with a few exceptions such as Lorne Greene and John Drainie -- a poor replacement for live theatre because of the difference in expertise between theatre and radio, because of the paucity of Canadian actors in the 20s and 30s because CBC radio often chose to

employ its talent from elsewhere (*Royal Commission* 32). CBC television, on the other hand, was a major employer of Canadian talent because it arrived at a later time when conditions had changed, and when the existence of a number of Canadian semi-professional and professional companies made Canadian actors available. The Massey/Levésque Commission observed “a general sense of the value of the work done by the C.B.C. in encouraging the efforts of Canadian writers, composers and performers in literature, music and drama. The individual is enabled to do the work for which he is suited, and to do it in his own community where he can probably make his most effective contribution. Much creative talent is thus developed which otherwise would be lost” (*Royal Commission* 32). In some areas of the country during the 1940s, like Vancouver, the CBC was almost the only source of work for a Canadian actor, and in Montréal “the C.B.C. has created a renaissance of dramatic art in Canada” (*Royal Commission* 194). Other than these potential sources of employment, the Canadian theatrical community faced very slim prospects in the immediate post-war years.

The *Massey/Levésque Report* referred to the Canadian theatrical scene in the 1940s somewhat cryptically as “not at all one of unrelieved gloom” and cited “active theatre companies which have been able, consistently or periodically, to maintain professional levels of production and to preserve at least a limited public taste for the living theatre” (*Royal Commission* 194). The guarded nature of this statement is intended to conceal the fact that of the few theatrical companies that existed at the time in Montréal, Vancouver, Toronto, Ottawa and elsewhere, it is difficult to define clearly which were amateur and which were professional or even to set criteria of how that definition could be

made. The situation is well described by Keith Garebian in his biography of actor William Hutt:

In 1950, the bridge between amateur theatre and professional was rickety at best. In Canada, it was not feasible to turn a theatre vocation into a fulfilling professional career. . . . The box-office rarely heard the jingle of success, and a company never knew from week to week just how long a particular season would last. The era's feverishness did not extend to the theatre, where every new venture seemed to have a first act but no second. (Garebian 75)

Among those borderline companies where professional work might be obtained, were: the John Holden Players (1934), the Brae Manor Theatre in Knowlton, Québec (1936), the Peterborough Summer Theatre, the Garden Centre Theatre at Vineland, the Niagara Barn Theatre and the Red Barn (still in existence) at Jackson Point, a summer company at Gravenhurst and another in the Muskokas -- both run by the Davis brothers.

Better known was the Canadian Repertory Theatre Society in Ottawa which came into existence out of the Stage Society of Ottawa (a Little Theatre group) on September 9, 1949 and ran a series of hectic seasons (34 plays in 1949-50) until it closed in March 1956 (Mew 93). Unlike many of the professional and semi-professional companies of the era (as we shall see), the Canadian Repertory Theatre Society had little interest in Canadian plays although it did premier a few Canadian plays such as *Dirty Work at the Crossroads* (one premiere of a Canadian play in a season of 34) and on January 9, 1951, Robertson Davies' *At My Heart's Core* (Mew 132, 147). Slightly (or more consistently) professional were companies such as Arthur Sutherland's International Players (1948-1952), based in Kingston (Barrington) and the Everyman Theatre Company, founded in 1946 by Sydney

Risk in Vancouver and closed by the police for immorality in the middle of a performance of *Tobacco Road* in 1953 (Benson and Conolly 68).

The Niagara Falls Summer Theatre (which began at the Princess Theatre on June 11, 1950) was almost entirely professional and brought Canadian actors like William Hutt, Hume Cronyn, Charmion King, Josephine Barrington and Christopher Plummer into working contact with such American performers such as Sylvia Sidney, Lillian and Dorothy Gish, Edward Everett Horton, Billie Burke, Franchot Tone, Jessica Tandy, Maureen Stapleton, Eli Wallach, and Sarah Churchill (Garebian 76-7). Despite the high level of talent, the financial situation of this theatre was unsteady and some Canadian actors (William Hutt among them) occasionally had to take salary cuts.⁷

Of much greater significance in the development of professional theatre in Canada were Les Compagnons de St-Laurent created in 1937 by Father Emile Legault working out of the College St-Laurent in Montréal. Perennial winners at the DDF national festivals, the company evolved from amateur status until it became, arguably, the best trained, most professional company in Canada. It specialized in religious drama at first but in the 1940s the classics were added to its repertoire along with some contemporary material: from Shakespeare and Molière to Musset, Anouilh, Obey, Giradoux, Claudel, T. S. Eliot and Cocteau (Weiss 17). In addition, before it disbanded in 1952, Les Compagnons had trained a host of actors that would end up as the nucleus for Québec professional theatre in the future.⁸ On the other hand, Les Compagnons did little to promote the production of Canadian plays in French. In thirteen years the company “produced only four French-Canadian plays, and only one of these – *Maluron* by Félix Leclerc – was not a religious work” (Weiss 18).

Also operating in Québec was the Montreal Repertory Company whose semi-professional status (Garebian 75) allowed it to pay certain actors for their work and yet still compete for the DDF. The Montreal Repertory Theatre had been founded by Martha Allan (with the support of Margaret Anglin and Sir Barry Jackson) in 1930 as the Montreal Theatre Guild. Working as a bilingual company MRT performed in Victoria Hall, Union Street Playhouse and McGill's Moyse Hall – wherever it could find space. The MRT won a large number of QDF awards, including the Sir Barry Jackson award in 1938, and continued to produce during the war years, during which (1942) it acquired a small permanent theatre on Guy St. seating about 200, however the theatre burnt in 1952. In the 1950's the company focused on the classics (including a yearly Shakespeare production) and successful plays from Broadway. MRT's standards of production remained high under directors Roberta Beatty, Pierre Dagenais and Charles Rittenhouse and designer Herbert Whittaker and the company turned professional in 1956 but was forced by debts to close in 1961. In the course of its career, MRT had helped to develop the careers of actors such as Gratien Gélinas, Yvette Brind'Amour, Denise Pelletier, Eleanor Stuart, Robert Goodier, Christopher Plummer, Richard Easto, Amelia Hall, John Colicos, Eric Donkin and William Shatner (*Oxford* 345-6).

Three professional companies that sprang up in Toronto in the 1940's and 1950s were of considerable importance to the development of English-Canadian plays. The first of these was The New Play Society which was begun by Dora Mavor Moore out of her own amateur group, the Village Players, on August 28, 1946 (Sperdakos 149). Whereas some critics (see Gygli 44) have credited Dora Moore's group as "the first indigenous professional Canadian theatre company" this is, as we have seen, not so. However there

was, at the time of its creation, no other English professional theatre company in the country (Sperdakos 11). The company faced extraordinary challenges in simply maintaining its existence and often was unable to pay its actors more than a pittance; in many ways the history of the New Play Society is the history of early Canadian professional theatre in microcosm.

In the first place there was the matter of audience development. As Mavor Moore (Dora Moore's son and collaborator) recounts in his autobiography, "Torontonians had long since formed a theatre-going habit: visiting imported productions at large roadhouses such as the Royal Alexandra. The existing audience, we now realized, would not easily be diverted from that habit" (Moore, *Reinventing* 164). This was achieved through extreme hard labour and a lot of arm twisting, gradually building an audience base by word of mouth and critical success; but the audience was, indeed, out there.

In the second place there was the crucial dilemma of facilities. The NPS -- as it was usually referred to -- was entirely financed on \$2,000 worth of war bonds belonging to Dora Moore and of that amount, \$975 had to go towards the production costs of the first 3 plays (Sperdakos 152). The remaining amount was spent on renovating the only feasible facilities available, the Museum Theatre in The Royal Ontario Museum. The stage there was only 20', 9" wide and 21' deep with a proscenium arch elevation of 15'. In addition, "[t]here were no wings, and in order to create them the NPS had to hang curtain legs parallel to the side walls at about two feet from the wall" (Sperdakos 154). This tiny box would have to suffice for everything from drawing room melodrama to historical pageant and resembles in many ways the archetypal stage described by Roberston Davies' alter-ego Marchbanks:

What is the Canadian Playhouse, Fishhorn? Nine times out of ten it is a school hall smelling of chalk and kids and decorated in the early concrete style. The stage is a half raised room at one end and I mean room. If you step into the wings suddenly you will fracture your nose against the wall. The lighting is designed to warm the stage but not to illuminate it. Write your plays, Fishhorn, for such stages . . . and don't have more than three characters on stage at one time or the weakest of them is sure to be nudged into the audience. (quoted in Kilbourn 168)

Despite all these difficulties (and many more, some personal) the NPS managed to survive, in one form or another, until 1956 with no public support until the very last stages of its existence.

Among many remarkable things concerning this remarkable company is its record of producing Canadian plays, far more salutary than that of most Canadian regional theatres even today. This was not by accident, or whim; it was part of the repertory philosophy of the NPS. For the Moores, the basic repertoire (at the beginning) was to be “one British, one American, one European, one classical revival, one foreign-language presentation, and one ‘free-choice.’ From the beginning, it was hoped that the free-choice could often be a Canadian play” (Sperdakos 154). In fact, Dora Moore often told her company that “[t]here can be no Canadian theatre without Canadian plays” (Harron 87). The NPS began cautiously with *The Man in the Blue Moon* opening on May 1, 1947 (Sperdakos 167) and as a result of its success, and their own desire to produce Canadian works, the New Play Society exceeded its own repertoire plan and produced, between September 1949 and May 1950, five original Canadian plays: *Who's Who* by Mavor Moore, *The Inheritance* by Harry

Boyle, *Narrow Passage* by Andrew Allan, *Riel* by John Coulter, and *Going Home* by Morley Callaghan (Sperdakos 185). Although number counts differ (see New 182-3) it is clear that the NPS produced, out of seventy plays, at least eleven by Canadians (Sperdakos 13).

The most famous and longest-lived of these productions was the annual *Spring Thaw* review which actually outlasted the NPS, but in terms of the development of Canadian playwrights, the most important may have been the premiere of John Coulter's *Riel* since it initiated in modern Canadian theatre the focus on historical topics. An even more telling NPS landmark was the premiere of Morley Callaghan's play *To Tell the Truth* the run of which was so successful that it was transferred to Toronto's Royal Alexandra, thus making it the first all-Canadian production ever at that prestigious roadhouse for foreign tours (Sperdakos 13 and Harron 107).

In general, although there were of course exceptions, the Canadian plays did quite well at the box office; indeed *Spring Thaw* carried the NPS, financially, throughout much of its existence. Critical response was positive as well and although individual productions might be savaged, critics were pleased to see a professional company undertaking the premieres of Canadian plays. Newspaper theatre critic Nathan Cohen declared that the Toronto public was "anxious to give [Canadian] playwrights a chance" and that they were "ready to support Canadian drama" (Moore, *Reinventing* 153). Herbert Whittaker perceptively applauded that "[t]his is a notable service the New Play Society is contributing: a chance for our playwrights to judge their own work as a play can only be judged -- on the stage" (quoted in Sperdakos 191). In fact, no other unsubsidized professional theatre

company has a better track record in the production of new Canadian plays (Benson and Conolly 69).⁹

Like the other Canadian professional companies the NPS was constantly on the edge of bankruptcy, particularly since it was unable to carry any sizable deficit. By the time of the season of 1953-4 it was also experiencing competition from the new Toronto companies: the Jupiter and the Crest theatres. Not only was it losing audience but also actors to the newcomers (Sperdakos 206). Various schemes and formats were tried including the Director's Stage Series in order to stay alive and NPS received its first and only subsidy: a grant of \$7,500 from the new Canada Council (Sperdakos 228) but the end was inevitable. Lack of funds, lack of adequate space (performing, production and rehearsal) and the exhaustion of the company who had worked Herculean hours between other jobs for, at times, almost no money made the end a foregone conclusion. As Mavor Moore later commented, "[o]ur performing arts were already subsidized -- not by the government but by actors, singers, dancers, writers, musicians, and technicians" (Moore, *Reinventing* 180) and that kind of subsidy always leads, eventually, to exhaustion, departure and collapse. Yet, for all its shoe-string infrastructure and background in established European theatre outlook, the New Play Society had graphically illustrated several things: there was an artistic drive in the country on the part of professionals to produce Canadian works and the audiences would not only go to those productions without any previous experience of what Canadian theatre was, but would go to them in such numbers as to make the productions not only financially viable but, often, the economic mainstay of the theatre company.

In September, 1951, a group of Canadian theatre artists met in the living room of John Drainie, arguably the most prominent Canadian actor of the time, to discuss the

formation of a new professional theatre company. The group included actors Lorne Greene and Paul Kligman and playwrights Len Peterson and George Robertson. Two other members (Glenn Frankfurter and Edna Slatter) were added for their administrative talents and the 'non-profit' Jupiter Theatre was created. The board decided that it would "share artistic decisions and administrative tasks" but that it would take no salary as board members, although the artists would be paid. The board also concluded that "its goal was threefold: to promote Canadian plays, to bring plays of high calibre from abroad for the first time and to build a theatre of quality, using the best actors, directors, artists and technicians available" (Drainie 151). The Jupiter Theatre established itself (like the NPS) in the "woefully inadequate" Museum Theatre of the ROM because it was "still the only available theatrical space in the city" (Drainie 152) and embarked on several ambitious seasons using (among others) prominent radio actors such as Drainie, Greene, Kligman and Christopher Plummer (who certainly got around).

Even before the first season was launched, however, the board changed its philosophy of repertoire and moved to justify its change:

The board's original plan, to concentrate on Canadian plays, had to be altered almost immediately when they discovered that there just weren't enough good Canadian works to fill out even their first half-season. As my father [John Drainie] said at Jupiter's first press conference, 'Jupiter doesn't intend to produce plays just because they are by Canadians. Every play, Canadian or foreign, must meet a certain high standard, and we try to judge every play on the same basis . . . We feel that's the only way Canadian playwrighting will reach a level comparable with the world's best -- and

we're confident that if the writers know their plays will be produced, that day isn't too far away.' (Drainie 152-3)

Despite this rhetorical backpedaling, the Jupiter did manage to produce one Canadian play in its first, four-play season: Lister Sinclair's *Socrates*.¹⁰ To the surprise of everyone, most probably including the Jupiter, *Socrates* was not only a critical success, but word of mouth was so good that it is estimated that a thousand people were turned away from the box office during the latter part of the run; "and the Jupiter board was delighted. They had proved to themselves that an unknown Canadian work of high quality, given a polished professional production, could be as much of a draw as an imported hit show" (Drainie 160). This event encouraged the Jupiter Theatre to 'conscript' author and radio writer Ted Allan to write his first play for their second season which was produced under the title *The Money-Makers* and to program for the same season *Blue is for Mourning* by Toronto critic Nathan Cohen. Cohen's play (which would have been a failure in any circumstance) was a financial disaster for Jupiter in part, because "after his merciless criticism of others, the entire community of Toronto actors, writers and directors were lying in wait for it" (Drainie 162).

The Money-Makers, however, was just that, and in the program, Allan justified John Drainie's earlier quoted, press-conference statements: "I am pleased that a Canadian can now write a play and know that an excellent professional group is ready, capable and willing to produce it, and has already created an audience to receive it" (Drainie 161). Cramped (like the NPS) by the ROM theatre space, and unable to make a deal to rent the empty Crest Theatre, the Jupiter Theatre attempted to utilize two other venues: The Royal Alexandra Theatre and the Ryerson Polytechnical Institute (Drainie 164). The Royal

Alexandra experiment was a failure simply because they were unable to fill the huge house but at Ryerson, their fourth Canadian play (Lister Sinclair's *The Blood is Strong*) was another critical and financial hit. The other three plays at both theatre spaces had lost money and at the end of the season Jupiter was looking at an accumulated deficit of \$10,000.

Unable to acquire a suitable theatre, with no government subsidies available, and cut off from private support because of its left-of-centre political stance, the Jupiter closed down and the board members themselves paid off the debt at a rate of \$100 a month each (Drainie 165).

In retrospect, it would seem that the Jupiter Theatre was doomed from the beginning. Its board of artists had only limited business, advertising and administrative experience. By denying itself any connection with prominent establishment figures it cut itself off from appealing for personal patronage or society fund-raising. By choosing 'avant-garde' material, it challenged an untrained audience used to the popular, touring fare of the Royal Alexandra. By proclaiming itself the champion of Canadian playwrights it took a risk so great that it backed off from it itself. And yet, there is an obvious lesson from the Jupiter experience: aside from Nathan Cohen's play, the Canadian pieces produced by the Jupiter were successes, particularly at the box office. The history of The Jupiter Theatre (like that of the New Play Society) shows that Canadian plays -- new and untried -- did appeal to audiences and could be financial successes, if they received the full production values of the rest of the repertoire. In fact, they appeared to be even more likely to succeed than the imported repertoire. This continued to be a lesson that had to be learned again and again.

During the two years that the Jupiter was running, another professional theatre company opened its doors in Toronto: the Crest Theatre. From January 5, 1954 until April

30, 1966 the Crest Theatre ran at the 822 seat Crest theatre on Mt. Pleasant Road in Toronto (Benson and Conolly 91) -- the location that the Jupiter Theatre had tried and failed to acquire -- a series of crowded, mixed seasons in repertory. It was created by the Davis brothers, Murray and Donald, from a thriving summer theatre into (at first) a public liability company -- a dangerous undertaking since it meant that all debts had to be met (H. Whittaker, "Recollections" 14). These are among the few facts about the Crest that everyone can agree on, and it became, particularly in its closing, among the most controversial theatres in Canadian history. To this day, or at least until 1975, many of the principals involved in the demise of the Crest refused to discuss the issue for publication (Stuart, "Crest" 8) As a result, many contemporary critics omit the Crest from any discussion of Canadian theatre in the 50s and 60s (see "Chronological" 11) while other critics are moved to excess in support of a theatre that they say "single-handed[ly] . . . had showed that continuous production of home-grown theatre was possible in a town which had traditionally stood as a stopover for outside attractions since the old stock companies vanished" while the NPS and Jupiter are downplayed as "worthy" and "high-minded, but sporadic" in their "professional presentations" (H. Whittaker, "Recollections" 12). Without in any way impugning Herbert Whittaker's excellent critical judgment, it should be remembered that he had directed at the Crest (as well as at the Jupiter) while his opposite number, Nathan Cohen was a forceful opponent of the company. Whatever side one stands on, it is clear that the Crest, after 1954 rapidly became the "only important live theatre in Toronto with a commercially appealing mix of classics, revue, mysteries and modern mainstream drama from London and New York," with high professional standards (Drainie 275).

The pre-production brochure of the company clearly outlined its self-vision. It proclaimed as its objectives: 1) to provide Toronto with theatre comparable to that of British repertory companies; 2) to provide work opportunities for Canadian artists, technicians and playwrights; 3) to do this, without appealing for donations, as a public limited liability company, and 4) to operate as a business and pay dividends (“Chronological” 17). It is hard to miss the similarities between objective #2 and the philosophy of the Jupiter Theatre as quoted above and, indeed, the general similarity in philosophy among the Crest, Jupiter and the NPS. All three felt (at least in a general way) a commitment, and a need to state that commitment, to Canadian artists and playwrights. And all three found, despite varying difficulties, success when they lived up to those commitments.

The first season of the Crest, opening with *Richard of Bordeaux* by Gordon Daviot, contained no Canadian plays but the amount of Canadian material quickly increased and in 1955 three new Canadian works were presented: *A Jig for the Gypsy* and *Hunting Stuart* by Robertson Davies and *The Gift of the Serpent* by Stanley Mann. The final total reached sixteen Canadian plays sporadically produced over the life of the Crest. It is important to remember here, as with the Jupiter and the NPS, that this was, in the words of Herbert Whittaker, “a highly creditable list of new plays by Canadian writers” since it was done “at a time when the concept of a Canadian dramatist was far less acceptable than it is now, and without a subsidy” (H. Whittaker, “Recollections” 13).¹¹ Equally important is the fact that these presentations of new Canadian plays received the same high performance and production values that the English and American works received (H. Whittaker, “Recollections” 14). This is important because, at a later date, theatres would often produce

Canadian plays as “workshops” or “second stage” presentations with poor production values and then wonder why the public was less than enthusiastic. Any objective evaluation must conclude that the Crest Theatre “had amply fulfilled its stated intention of ‘providing opportunities for the development of Canadian artists, directors, playwrights, designers and technicians’” (Benson and Conolly 91). Of course, after 1957 the Crest began to receive grants from the Canada Council and therefore that portion of its Canadian output must (and will) be re-evaluated in the light of that change.

The remaining professional companies of this period need to be discussed here only in brief. Most honorable mention should be made of the Cercle Molière which (although a non-professional French-language company and therefore outside of the purview of this thesis) has operated without hiatus for over seventy-two years and has produced a considerable number of Canadian plays in French since 1961. The Stratford Festival, as a Festival Theatre, is not considered to be part of the Canadian Regional System and has been copiously written about in, and therefore need not be considered here.¹² It need only be mentioned in this context that while Stratford certainly put Canadian theatre as a producing institution ‘on the map’ and helped begin a process of legitimizing and popularizing theatre in Canada, it did very little, and that only after prodigious pressure, towards producing Canadian drama. On the positive side, seventy-six of the eighty actors in the inaugural season were Canadian and were drawn from existing companies -- both amateur and professional -- mostly from Montréal and Toronto, although the British actors carried the major roles (Guthrie, “First” 29).¹³ These Canadian actors then returned to their respective companies in the winter, bringing with them a wealth of experience (Garebian 90). There were, however, then and later, complaints that some prominent Canadian actors (like John

Drainie) were snubbed by the Festival because they were ‘stars’ in Canada (Drainie 172). Whatever the truth of the matter, the early years of Stratford were occupied with survival and establishing itself as a viable and reputable Festival of the works of Shakespeare. Only later, after Canada Council grants began to flow in, did it concern itself (under public pressure) with what it owed to Canadian dramatists.

Of a similar nature is the history of the Canadian Players (1954-1959), which began as an independent offshoot of the Stratford Festival but quickly became one of the first heavily subsidized companies of the Canada Council. Because Stratford’s first two seasons were short enough to offer only limited employment to the actors, a number of them, under the direction of Douglas Campbell, decided in September 1954 to form a touring company. With the financial support of Lady Eaton, actors William Hutt, William Needles, Roland Hewgill, Jack Hutt, John Gardiner, Bruno Gerussi, and Ann Casson joined Campbell in a bid to bring “top standard theatre to Canadian audiences” using Canadian actors in order to “prove to the outside world . . . that Canada could produce good theatre” (Garebian 109). The tours were arduous, and in the second year the company ran into severe financial difficulties owing to its own inexperience in the management of touring (Garebian 114). Given the origin of the company and its leader, it is not surprising to discover that it did not stage any Canadian plays in its five years, although it was heavily under-written by the Canada Council in the last few. But any further analysis of the Canadian Players is best pursued in the context of the Canada Council itself, for whom the company became an important symbol of professional theatre touring the regions.

In Québec, despite the persistent gloom of the Duplessis era, signs of energetic growth began to reveal themselves. The process was begun by the manifesto *Refus global*,

issued, in 1948, by Paul-Emile Borduas and a group of painters and writers including playwright Claude Gauvreau (*Les Oranges sont vertes*), denouncing “clerical obscuritanism” and political and social “narrow-mindedness” (Nardocchio 22). This document constituted “a call to liberation – political and social – but especially of thought” (Weiss 19) and set in motion within the artistic community the process which later became known as the Quiet Revolution. Beyond the problems outlined in the *Refus global*, theatre in Québec – particularly French theatre – faced another problem. Adrien Gruslin has argued persuasively that the tradition of non-government patronage of theatre (meagerly) present in English-Canada was almost absent in Québec. “Au Québec”, he states in part, “on peut avancer l’hypothèse que cet apport privé demeure inférieur à celui de l’ensemble du Canada. Il suffit de constater l’absence du système anglais des “foundations” pour accréditer cette hypothèse. Et du côté francophone, outre à titre purement nominal . . . ce système n’existe pas.” As a result, much French theatre in Québec was forced to wait for the era of government subsidies (Gruslin 15).

Despite this, however, a start was made. In 1954 the Québec government created the Conservatoire d’art dramatique, with campuses in Montréal and Québec. The Rideau Vert re-opened in 1956 and in 1958 Jeannine Beaubien opened La Poudrière on Ile Ste-Hélène which performed plays in German, French, Spanish and English. L’Egrégore began production in 1959 until it closed in 1968 (Nardocchio 27-8). In 1957 the Montréal Arts Council began subsidizing local groups like Théâtre-Club and Le Théâtre Rideau Vert. In 1958 the Canada Council grants began and the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde was a major recipient – well on its way to becoming one of the French-language regional theatres in Montréal (Nardocchio 28).

During this period, as in English Canada, many Québec playwrights earned their living in the 1950s writing for radio (such as Gérard Martin, Charlotte Savary, André Groulx, Clément Lockquell, Anne Hébert, Yves Thériault and Marcel Dubé) and television (Jacques Languirand, Françoise Loranger, Robert Choquette and Marcel Dubé) (Nardocchio 30). Of particular note was Gratien Gélinas, who not only opened the era of modern Québec theatre with his play *Tit-Coq* (1948),¹⁴ but also, in 1958, “founded and became the first director of the Comédie-Canadienne . . . whose main purpose would be, Gélinas declared, the promotion and encouragement of Canadian plays and playwrights. Gélinas kept his word until the theatre closed in 1970” (Nardocchio 37). Also prominent at this time were Jacques Languirand (*Les Insolites*, 1956,¹⁵ *Les Grands Départs*, 1957, *Le Gibet*, 1958, *Les Violons de l’automne*, 1961 and *Klondyke*, 1965)¹⁶ and Marcel Dubé: (*Zone*, 1953, *Chambre à louer*, 1955, *Le Barrage*, 1955, *Le Temps des lilacs*, 1958 and *Un Simple Soldat*, 1958).¹⁷ Despite these individual successes, however, the repertoire of the early professional theatre in Québec was largely European in origin. In 1959-9, for example, of the 39 plays presented in Québec, only 4 were indigenous: two by Dubé (*le Temps des lilacs* and *Un simple soldat*) and two by Leclec (*Sonnez les Matines* and *Geneviève*) (LeBlanc 223). This pattern would be maintained, as we shall see, by the prominent regional theatres sustained by the Canada Council all across the country.

This, then, is a brief overview of Canadian theatre before the creation of the Canada Council. Essentially it breaks down into two distinct types: amateur and (semi) professional. What these two streams shared in common was a precarious financial state, less pronounced in the amateur area since its needs were smaller and because later, as a national organization under the Dominion Drama Festival, it could draw to some extent on private and corporate

patronage. Their common economic difficulties brought them together to agitate and lobby for some form of government subsidy and, ultimately, the Canada Council. Their differences, however, were marked and presented important choices for the future.

The amateur groups were largely composed by middle and upper middle class members who favored, for various reasons, a repertoire principally composed of successful plays from the British, European (and some American) theatre. Their character and interests -- their "habitus" in Bourdieu's terminology¹⁸ -- inclined them towards material that was unchallenging to (even supportive of) their own class and, in particular, reflected a continuing colonial attitude. The Ottawa Drama League actually had a mandate to maintain "a strong bond between the art and life of Canada and the drama and traditions of the British Isles" (quoted in Tippett 8). Tippett points out that "most private cultural organizations were content to remain exclusive enclaves complacently encouraging traditional British culture . . . They were the preservers and keepers of the established and familiar, and very much content to be so" (Tippett 9). Individual Little Theatres (especially at Hart House) were prepared to undertake some limited experimentation in, for example, the works of Herman Voaden, but even there "training became synonymous with British standards" (Plant 8) But as a group, they tended to regard the theatre as an art form that preserved the best traditions of the British roots of Canadian culture and they were reluctant -- especially within the Dominion Drama Festival -- to break from those roots. These attitudes became institutionalized within the structure of the DDF (particularly in the choice of adjudicators and the awarding of prizes) to such an extent that even when they wished to break free from them, they were unable.

The professional theatres, small and financially harassed as they were and continually plagued by venue difficulties had much shorter life-spans and made extraordinary demands (in money and work-load) on their artists. And yet they attempted to live up to the rhetoric of their philosophies. Although they too leaned heavily on foreign plays as the basis of their repertoire, the professional theatres made an extraordinary and unpredicted discovery. Even within an audience group, trained by long experience that there was no Canadian drama, they were able successfully to produce Canadian plays for appreciative audiences. Even more, they discovered to their surprise, that audiences -- and particularly those audiences who were new to theatre -- were more likely to frequent Canadian plays than other works. As a result, where the quality was reasonably good, it was often the Canadian material that carried the financial weight of the company, rather than traditional material. This was an important lesson and some theatre artists, like Malcolm Black, Joy Coghill, Ken Kramer, Tom Hendry, Mavor Moore and Leon Major, attempted to transpose this knowledge to the early stages of the new Canadian professional theatre under the Canada Council, often against great opposition.

In the meantime, however, it was the traditions, philosophies and tastes of the amateur organizations that were to predominate in the stages of development that led up to the creation of the Canada Council since they had greater access to political power. In addition, they were able to forge an alliance with a newly dominant mood of Canadian nationalism that began to sweep the country in the post-war era. This may seem like a paradox, given the amateur theatre's distancing of itself (despite lip-service) from Canadian works. But Canadian nationalism in the 50s and 60s was itself paradoxical and often led to curious and interesting re-alignments of positions. This alliance between the high culture

approach of amateur Canadian theatre and the new wave of nationalism must be examined in some detail to reveal how it impacted upon the Massey/Levésque Commission and its creation of the Canada Council.

Endnotes to Chapter One

¹ There was a brief flurry of professional theatre in Montréal from 1902 until 1914 with three companies: the Théâtre des Variétés, the Théâtre National and the Théâtre des Nouveautés. After the first world war, their audience was lost to the new cinema (Weiss 7-8). Even the Monument National began showing films between the acts in 1904 and by 1909 it was presenting sketches between films (Nardocchio 14-5).

² The following is only a partial list of some of the most important Little Theatre groups in Canada: The Sandwich Little Theatre - 1938, Le Cercle Molière (St. Boniface Man.) - 1925 (which survived them all to move to professional status starting in 1968), the Winnipeg Little Theatre - 1921 (which in 1958 merged with Theatre 77 to form the Manitoba Theatre Centre), the Regina Little Theatre - 1926, the Saskatoon Little Theatre - 1922, the Calgary Little theatre - 1924, the Green Room Club (Calgary) - 1929, Workshop 14 (Calgary) - 1944 (which later became part of Theatre Calgary), the Playgoers of Lethbridge - 1923 (Stuart, *History* 78-133), the Ottawa Drama League - 1915, The Vancouver Little Theatre - 1921, the Community Players of Winnipeg - 1921, the Montreal Repertory Theatre - 1930, the Halifax Theatre Arts Guild - 1931, the Sarnia Little Theatre - 1927 (run by Herman Voaden) (Benson and Conolly 49), the Saint John Theatre Guild - 1931, the Fredericton Theatre Guild - 1931, Montréal's Trinity Players - 1911, London Little Theatre - 1934 (which went on to become the Grand Theatre), the Vancouver Little Theatre Association - 1921, the Victoria Theatre Guild - 1930 (*Oxford* 306-8) and the Saint John Community Theatre Guild - 1932 (Blaggrave 107).

³ Among the founding members attending the first meeting of the Dominion Drama Festival were: Lord and Lady Bessborough, Lady Tupper of Winnipeg, D. Park Jamieson (lawyer

from Sarnia), Caroline Crerar and Arthur Brain from Hamilton, Catherine Brickendon from London, Ont., Martha Allan (daughter of Sir Montague) from Montréal, Vincent Massey (Chairman), Col. Henry Osborne (President), Rupert Davies of Kingston, Dorothy White of the Ottawa Drama League, M. Justice Surveyer of Montréal, the Rt. Hon. Sir Robert Borden, president, Montréal financiers Sir Charles Gordon and Beaudry Leman, (Treasurers), and the Hon. Athanase David (Lee 94-7).

⁴ Some English-Canadian plays invited to the finals:

1933 - Mazo de la Roche's *Low Life* and Jim Barber's *Spite Fence* by Lillian Thomas *

1934 - Merrill Denison's *Brothers in Arms* and Martha Allan's *All on a Summer's Day* *

1936 - W. Eric Harris' *Twenty-five Cents* **

1937 - John Coulter's *The House in the Quiet Glen* **

1949 - William Digby's *Over the Boiler Room* and Robertson Davies' *Fortune My Foe*

1956 - Patricia Joudry's *Teach Me How to Cry* **

1960 - James Reaney's *The Kildeer* **

1966 - John Burgess' *A Stranger Unto My Brethren*

* indicates that the author was also the director of the piece and ** indicates that the show won an award -- invariably best Canadian play. (Lee 289, 290, 295) It should also be noted that Québec writers like Jacques Languirand and Marcel Dubé enjoyed great success at the finals.

⁵ The English-Canadian plays in the 1967 Nationals were: Lister Sinclair's *The Blood is Strong*, Donald Harron's *The Broken Jug*, Martin Hunter's *Out Flew the Web and Floated Wide*, Tom Cahill's *Tomorrow Will be Sunday*, and Peter Wison's *Gilliam* (Lee 296).

⁶ As of 1972 it still served, by Lee's estimates, 500 Little Theatre groups, 10 amateur children's theatre groups, 200 college drama groups, 120 university drama groups, 100 fraternal drama groups, uncountable church drama groups with 31,000 active members and a yearly audience of 2,790,00 per year (Lee 303).

⁷ For example: "The box-office take [at Niagara] was not spectacular, and for the first (and last) time in his career Hutt agreed to take a cut in salary (from \$40 to \$20 a week) in order for the season to survive" (Garebian 79).

⁸ Among other alumnae were Lionel Viileneuve, Charlotte Boisjoli, Gilles Pelletier, Robert Prévost, Jean-Pierre Masson, Georges Groulx, Hélène Loiselle, Jean Coutu, Jean Duceppe, Jean Gascon, Jean-Louis Roux, Guy Hoffman, Jacques Létourneau, Guy Provost and Florent Forget (Nardocchio 23).

⁹ This is doubly surprising in view of Dora Moore's background and education. Brought up in provincial, anglophile, Victorian Toronto by an "archetypal middle-class Victorian couple" (Sperdakos 24) and educated at Clapham Modern High School in London and Bromley High School in Kent (Sperdakos 27) she would have seemed an unlikely supporter of Canadian drama over British theatre.

¹⁰ The other three (demanding and risky) plays were Bertolt Brecht's *Galileo*, Dalton Trumbo's *The Biggest Thief in Town* and Jean-Paul Sartre's *Crime of Passion* (Drainie 153).

¹¹ The total list (according to Whittaker) is as follows: *A Jig for the Gypsy* (1955) Robertson Davies, *The Gift of the Serpent* (1955) Stanley Mann, *Hunting Stuart* (1955) Robertson Davies, *Zone* (1956) Marcel Dubé, *Every Bed is Narrow* (1956) Mary Jukes,

Bright Sun at Midnight (1957) John Gray, *The Ottawa Man* (1957) Mavor Moore, *Double Image* (1957) Ted Allan and Roger MacDougall, *This is Our First Affair: The Crest Review* (1959), *Ride a Pink Horse* (1959) John Gray, *Spring Thaw* (1960 and 1961), *Honour Thy Father* (1960) Michael Jacot, *Simon Says Get Married* (1961) Bernard Slade, *Mr. Scrooge* (1963), Richard Morris, Dolores Claman and Ted Wood, *Evelyn* (1964) Alan Manings, Milton Carman and Alex Barris, *Emmanuel Xoc* (1965) John Gray (H. Whittaker, "Recollections" 13).

¹² Some of the books and articles on the history of the Stratford Festival are: Guthrie, Tyrone, Robertson Davies, and Grant MacDonald. *Renown at Stratford: A Record of the Shakespearean Festival in Canada*. Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Co., 1953. Guthrie, Tyrone, Robertson Davies, and Grant MacDonald. *Twice Have the Trumpets Sounded: A Record of the Stratford Shakespearean Festival in Canada*. Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Co., 1954. Davies, Robertson, Tyrone Guthrie, Boyd Neil, and Tanya Moiseiwitsch. *Thrice the Brinded Cat Hath Mew'd: A Record of the Stratford Shakespearean Festival in Canada 1955*. Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Co., 1955. Pettigrew, John and Jamie Portman. *Stratford – The First Thirty Years*. Vol. 1 (1953-1967). Toronto: Macmillan, 1985. Patterson Tom and Allan Gould. *First Stage: The Making of the Stratford Festival*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987. Davies, Robertson. *Thirty Years at Stratford: A Lecture Given by Robertson Davies for the Stratford Shakespearean Festival*. Aug. 29, 1982. Stratford: Stratford Festival, 1982.

¹³ These artists included Eleanor Stuart (voice-teacher), Robert Goodier, George Alexander and Richard Easton from the Montreal Repertory Theatre, Amelia Hall, Douglas Rain, and

Betty Leighton from the Canadian Repertory Company in Ottawa and Donald Harron, Lloyd Bochner and William Needles from the Toronto New Play Society (Garebian 90).

¹⁴ *Tit-Coq* received more than two hundred performances at the Monument National and the Gesù theatre. In translation it played to full houses in Montréal and Toronto in 1950 although it subsequently flopped in the U.S. (Nardocchio 34). *Bousille et les justes* (Comédie-Canadienne, 1959) was also a success in both languages (Nardocchio 35). Gélinas was funded by the Canada Council from 1959 on.

¹⁵ Which won regional and national awards at the DDF in 1955.

¹⁶ Languirand won the Governor General's award in 1963 (Nardocchio 37-8). *Man, Inc.* (in English) opened the first season of the St Lawrence Centre to critical failure (see below).

¹⁷ *Zone* won first prize at the DDF nationals in 1953. *Chambre à louer* won the regional DDF prize in 1955 and *Le Barrage* was produced at Théâtre-Club in the same year. Both *Le Temps des lilacs* (Théâtre du Nouveau Monde) and *Un Simple Soldat* (Comédie-Canadienne) were produced in 1958 and drew large crowds. Dubé was a prolific writer in the 1950s and 1960s for the stage, television and radio and was made a member of the Royal Society of Canada in 1962. He also won the Prix David in 1973. (Nardocchio 41)

¹⁸ Bourdieu defined "habitus" in a number of slightly different ways depending on the text. For the purpose of this thesis the following definition will serve: "systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming

at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them” (Bourdieu 53).

**Chapter Two. Nationalism, High Culture and Theatre: The Massey/Levésque
Commission**

Nationalism

From the end of the Second World War, one of the most powerful political and cultural forces in Canada has been a rising nationalism which has played a major role in shaping the origins of the Canadian regional theatre system, primarily by its influence on the creation and workings of the *Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences 1949-1951* (herein referred to as the Massey/Levésque Commission) which successfully advocated the founding of the Canada Council. Nationalism is always a powerful and unpredictable force but what must be examined here is its specific effects on cultural forces in Canada and how, in its various formulations, it directly affected theatre in its structures and repertoire. It is also important to see how the force of nationalism has been *used* to achieve certain cultural ends -- not always successfully. But the process is somewhat complex and a brief history is necessary.

The difficulty, of course, is to define nationalism in its Canadian context during the 50s, 60s and 70s. Clearly, as Peter Russell points out, it "has meant and now means so many different things to so many different people" (Russell ix). In many ways it was an inchoate emotional response, sometime expressing itself as pro-(or anti) British, often as anti-American, and sometimes as simply pro-Canadian. In the area of arts and culture (including theatre) all three manifestations -- and various blends of them -- were apparent and exercised power in different ways at different times. As is common in post- (or nearly post-) colonial nations, the driving force behind nationalism is a search for liberation from colonial status and a desire for (self) confirmation of mature nationhood, politically and culturally.

Politically, nationalism has been slow to achieve its goals. It must be remembered

that despite almost eighty-five years of Confederation, despite Canada's separate declaration of war in 1939, and despite an enormous contribution to the allied cause (out of all proportion to numbers), Canada's position as an independent nation in 1945 was fraught with ambiguities. Influential Canadian critic E. K. Brown pointed out in 1943 that "most Canadians continue to be culturally colonial, that they set their great good place somewhere beyond their own borders" and that "Canada has no distinct flag. . . . The relations between Canadian Provinces and the federal government are subject to review in London; and the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, also in London, is our highest court" (Brown 14 and 16-17). Until the war, the term 'Canadian' had not even been used in Canadian passports and the Canadian citizenship bill of 1946, although it made "Canadian citizenship primary and basic" stated that: "a Canadian citizen is a British subject"(Creighton 129). Clearly, Canadians had a long way to go to shake off the colonial fetters and critics like Brown were intensely aware of the implications of this for the Canadian arts.

Despite the slow pace of the government in moving beyond a colonial posture, the process among the Canadian public was a constant (albeit, often unconscious) one (see McNaught 68). Nationalism in Canada tended to express itself as a combination of 'pro-British' and 'anti-American' sentiment, and rarely, until the 1950s was it simply 'pro-Canadian': "when they have become self-consciously nationalistic, English-speaking intellectuals have often forcefully rejected American culture. In some instances they have preferred to look to Britain as a model" (Schwartz 49). Both stances (anti-American and pro-British) have had a profound effect on Canadian nationalism and cultural policies. Even Mackenzie King adopted his pro-British stance partly because he believed that the long-range foreign policy of the United States was eventually to absorb Canada (Creighton 138).

Like other colonial settler-nations, the debate and the struggle over national identity and independence, often focused itself on outside forces and influences, seeing Britain as a bulwark against American economic, political and cultural aggression, and delaying the process of decolonization until the need to establish a separate identity from Britain was seen (Boehmer 213).

In the field of culture, Canadian nationalism had a much more profound effect at an earlier date. Contrary to popular opinion, nationalism is not a new phenomenon in Canada and it has from the first been tied to the desire for a distinctively Canadian cultural expression: the search for 'nation' went together, intrinsically, with a search for a literature in 19th and early 20th century criticism (Strunk 70). This was commonly expressed in the form of a trope (or series of related tropes) presenting Canada as the child of the British empire. In W. D. Lighthall's Preface to *Songs of the Great Dominion* (1889) Canada is described in family terms as the "Eldest Daughter of the Empire . . . the full-grown of the family, -- the one first come of age and gone into life as a nation" (quoted in Watt 240). Elsewhere, "Canada was frequently portrayed as a young woman coming into age, loyal to her mother and wary of her 'cousin Jonathan'. The terms may have shifted since that time but the fundamental trope that equates national 'growth' with a maturation from dependent infancy to autonomous adulthood is still very much part of the rhetoric of Canadian nationhood" (Filewood 6). As late as 1953, Tyrone Guthrie, first artistic director of the Stratford Festival (and imported from Great Britain for that purpose), employs similar imagery in an article published in *Mayfair Magazine*:

It [Canada] is like an enormous young boy, perhaps the handsomest and strongest young boy ever created. He is probably destined to be the head of

the family. He can cut down vast forests with one hand, while with the other he ploughs a million acres. But so far he has hardly spoken. His brothers and sisters eye with admiration, but with a little apprehension, his development, because so far his words have been few and mostly uttered in a feeble, shy little voice, grotesquely at odds with his gigantic and formidable stature.

(quoted in Pettigrew and Portman 15)

Vincent Massey was, himself, fond of the family metaphor and besides referring to the “mother country” he stated that Canada “now and then” behaved with “childish assertiveness” towards Great Britain (Massey, *On* 8).

This kind of shared Canadian-British iconography was well developed by the 50s and has profound implications for the Canadian attitude towards its own culture. The underlying meaning is, of course, clear: while Canada may have (almost) gained mature status politically and economically, culturally he/she is still mute and needful of vocal tutoring from the mother country. While this attitude may seem naive and insulting today it was enormously prevalent in the early post-war era and helps to explain why many Canadians -- despite their nationalism -- felt that the only hope, culturally, for Canada was in looking to Britain as a cultural model (see Schwartz 49). Britain would teach Canada the secrets of art and culture which would grant us cultural legitimacy as a nation.¹

The popular appeal of nationalism, and specifically a fear of continental domination by the United States, was used in the 30s by the Canadian Radio League (led by Brooke Claxton, among others) to argue successfully for public ownership of radio broadcasting. Although their goal was, ostensibly, improved broadcasting, they “discovered” that nationalism was an extremely useful public relations tool. By using phrases such as

“Canadian radio for Canadians” and “The state or the United States” they aroused a powerful public interest and support (Peers 254). The first president of the radio league, Graham Spry, explained their motives:

The first of these driving motives was the national motive, and it was predominant. The second motive was the free use of broadcasting by all sections of opinion. The positive aspect of the national motive was the use of broadcasting for the development of Canadian national unity, and the negative aspect was the apprehension of American influences upon Canadian nationality, particularly as it concerned public opinion. (quoted in Peers 254)

In this particular example we can see how the political power of nationalist sentiment can be used for political capital in the area of culture. This was to repeat itself in the context of the Massey/Levésque Commission.

As Canada matured, especially in the course of the Second World War, and Canadians began to become aware of their own potential in the international arena, nationalism began to grow in strength but change in direction. The need for Britain as political elder began to decline. This process began to accelerate in the post-war years, in large part because of the decline of Britain as a world power and the breakup of the British empire (Morton 116). Politically, the Liberal government's stand on the 1957 Suez crisis was the first overt manifestation of this and although the Conservatives' rise to power signaled a return to the pro-British stance it soon became clear that Diefenbaker's concept of the Commonwealth as a powerful, British-led force destined to protect Canada from the United States was a “figment of the imagination.” The idea that “Canada might stand on its own as an independent North American state did not seem to occur to the Prime Minister”

(Granatstein, *Canada* 55). Diefenbaker's (and many Canadians') "deep gut feelings for the British connection and the Commonwealth had somehow begun to seem anachronistic in only an eye-blink of time" (Granatstein, *Canada* 61). It was soon replaced by a general feeling of "growing self-assertion and national self-consciousness" (Boehmer 213). This process, left to play itself out, might have led to a growing confidence in Canadian cultural independence although the cultural elite of the country still would look to Britain as a cultural role model.

On the other hand, anti-Americanism (always a factor in Canadian politics) was on the rise in the 60s and 70s (for a complete discussion on Canadian anti-Americanism see Granatstein, *Yankee*). This was due, largely, to the investment door held open by the Liberal governments of the post-war years that allowed American business to eventually control a staggering portion of the Canadian economy. The political switch in focus from Britain to the United States is directly mirrored in economics: foreign investment in Canada in 1914 was 72% British and 23% American; in 1952 it was 77% American and 18% British (Granatstein, *Twentieth* 197). In fact, says Donald Creighton, "The brutal truth of the volume and extent of American investment in Canada would have shocked anyone who made the slightest attempt to get at the facts" (Creighton 259).

A veritable onslaught of books were written by cultural, economic and political nationalists in an attempt to turn back the tide. Among the most prominent (because he held enormous power within the Liberal party) was Walter Gordon's *A Choice for Canada: Independence or Colonial Status*, which saw Canada returning to colonial status within the new American empire and warned that the loss of economic self-sufficiency, particularly in the field of natural resources, would equal the selling of Canada's birthright "for a mess of

pottage -- even though the pottage may be rich and tempting” (Gordon xii). Another factor fuelling anti-Americanism (and for some, a more powerful one because of its moral dimension) was the Vietnam war (Hurtig 98). By the early 1970s Canadian nationalism had reached its pinnacle and public opinion polls were showing 60% support for nationalism and against any further U.S. investment in Canada (Hurtig 109). This form of nationalism was, however, in no way monolithic: it included the New Democratic Party's ‘waffle’ movement alongside Bay Street's Gordon; cultural nationalists like Margaret Atwood alongside cultural mandarins like Vincent Massey.² But while Canadian nationalism's exact make-up was often unclear or even opaque, its power and ubiquity were extremely evident. Even the American Ambassador to Canada as early as 1958 was reporting back that “Canadians had become extraordinarily sensitive because of their history and ‘their position of inferiority in power in relation to us. The last year has seen the development of a strident, almost truculent nationalism” (Granatstein, *Canada* 101).

In no area was the threat of American dominance more clearly seen and feared than the field of ‘culture.’ American magazines were dominating the Canadian marketplace, American radio stations were capturing the Canadian market by cross-border broadcasting, American television was overwhelmingly popular and American (or Broadway) theatre seemed the model for the continental future. These “massive American intrusions in cultural areas” (Granatstein, *Twentieth* 309) caused enormous concern to all Canadians, vocal nationalists or not and seemed to set the stage for the loss of Canadian identity (still undefined) into a continental American state based solely on a market economy of unrestrained license and hucksterism. Many, like George Grant, felt that the battle was over and that the defeat of Diefenbaker's Conservatives (disillusioned in their own faith in Britain

as a bulwark against the United States) spelled the end of Canada as a distinct cultural entity, although clearly what they lamented was the end of Canada as a British cultural colony. Still, there were grounds for great concern and the majority of Canadians shared it; if Canada was losing her independence economically (and much was done to resist that) then, perhaps, independence could be strengthened culturally by looking once again to British models. And British artists were more than ready to oblige.

In a letter from Tyrone Guthrie to Alec Guinness in September 1952, discussing plans for the Stratford Festival, Guthrie deftly described the Canadian dilemma:

Canada is likely in a surprisingly few years to be the richest and most powerful country in the world. There is a great sentimental urge in Canada to be influenced by Britain. There is a great practical urge to be influenced by the USA . . . almost every common sense argument based on geography and economics drives Canada and the USA into one another's arms. If we (the British) are as tactless, as stupid, and as apathetic about this as we look like being, it's just going to be George III and the Boston Tea Party and Co. all over again -- with disastrous results all around. (Patterson 94)

While Canadians may have looked to the U.S. for economic plenty and mass culture, they still (largely) held Britain up as the model for “official high culture” and Guthrie both reflected Britain's paternalistic attitude as well as becoming an icon of the “cultural overlord” sought by those of pro-British sentiment in Canada (Knelman 7). For a brief period in time, Canadian nationalism was in syncopation with pro-British sentiments in the area of culture and supporters of elite culture could, and did, take advantage of it. Because theatre was in the foreground as a public art British theatre artists, such as Guthrie, became

hot commodities as the future for Canadian theatre and British theatrical culture -- high culture -- became even more strongly the model to be acquired and emulated.

Culture

The complexities of Canadian nationalism as it impacted on the arts and theatre might be profitably viewed for a moment in the context of Herbert Gans' subdivisions of culture especially since these subdivisions will also play a part in audience analysis at a later stage. In his book *Popular Culture and High Culture*, Gans describes three levels of culture that directly affect theatre and the various nationalist attitudes towards it at the time. The first sub-division of culture is high culture which includes all of the plastic and performing arts that are considered 'classics.' The people who interest themselves in higher culture "are almost all highly educated people of upper and upper-middle class status, employed mainly in academic and professional occupations" (Gans 76). The second sub-division is that of upper-middle class culture made up of "professionals, executives and managers and their wives who have attended the 'better' colleges and universities" who "want culture and want to be cultured, but prefer a culture that is substantive, unconcerned with innovation in form, and uninterested in making issues of method and form a part of culture" (Gans 81-2). The third sub-division, "numerically, . . . America's dominant taste culture and public today", is lower-middle culture (Gans 84). This group, "although it still dislikes abstract art and although it continues to reject most high culture and much of upper-middle class culture, now accepts 'culture' and is already participating in cultural institutions which are seeking a large audience and are willing to make the needed changes in fare" (Gans 85). In addition, "[t]he lower-middle public provides the major audience for today's mass media; it is the

group for which these media program most of their content” (Gans 86).³

In the 50s and 60s it was members of the higher culture and upper-middle class culture who attended the performing arts in Canada, in both the amateur and professional streams, and also provided the impetus for an indigenous Canadian theatre. They did so because of their adherence to the values that theatre represented to them (particularly in its ties to British high culture) and they could do so because their social and economic positions enabled them to exert power to that end both in public and in private. The connection between higher and middle-class culture and nationalism (in the context of theatre) has been cogently elucidated by Paul Litt and I will simply outline his arguments here. The astonishing growth of the American mass media, and its potential abuse for political means, was perceived by the Canadian cultural elite as a threat to liberal-humanist values and democratic political doctrines. As a result, “cultural nationalism and high standards in culture were increasingly defined in opposition to the American culture that spilled over the forty-ninth parallel, to the point that the two became confused in the minds of liberal humanists” (Litt, “Massey” 25). This defensive, or anti-American reaction combined with the more general nationalism of Canadians who felt that Canada had ‘come of age’ in every way except culturally and suggested that the time was ripe to take that last step to true national status as an equal with the older nations. High culture became, therefore, an indication of a fully realized nation and a defense against perceived American dominance (Litt, “Massey” 25-6).

There were other elements in the mix, of course. The still strong legacy of United Empire Loyalist's contributed both its preference for all things British and its “deep apprehension of American republicanism as rapacious and expansionist” (Filewood 5). Also,

members of wealthy families still regularly were sent to England for some part of their education or 'finishing.' The cultural bias among the wealthy and powerful leaned always to the British model; indeed, if the United States was a vulgar, mass media and economic threat, where else could it lean. As nationalism spread this urge was translated from an admiration of all things British to a desire for all things Canadian; but fashioned and developed on the British model.

Theatre was often seen as being at the nexus of these forces. As a canonical model, Shakespeare and the English stage in general held sway over any other possible exemplum of theatre as high culture and art in a particularly public way. As a defensive position, theatre was an example of the dangers of American imperialism since "theatre was perhaps one of the first economic sectors of Canadian society to have been penetrated deeply by American capital, and consequently it was one of the first sectors to resist that penetration" (Filewood 4). Historically, the touring circuits of Canada had been largely controlled by American booking agencies who were antithetical to any development of Canadian drama and intent (it seemed) on spreading American values to Canada; theatre, for them, was "a business proposition" rather than art (Filewood 5). All of these elements played their part in what Filewood has called the "process of nationalizing cultural industries to legitimize an ostensibly decolonized vision of the state" (Filewood 7).

The *rapprochement* or alliance between nationalism and high culture expresses itself in a number of ways -- including anti-Americanism. I would like to examine it briefly in two ways that had a direct impact on Canadian theatre. First, we will look at the movement for a National Theatre for Canada that demonstrates the unrealistic agitation to install a British or European model for a national theatre in a country totally unsuited to such a model.

Second, it might be profitable to view the role of Vincent Massey in some detail since he not only exemplified the conjunction of Canadian nationalism and high culture but also played such a major role in applying these two forces towards the creation of a Canadian theatre structure throughout the Massey/Levésque Commission.

The larger issues of the need for an indigenous Canadian theatre establishment often coalesced around the discussion of a Canadian national theatre (See Salter and Filewood for a full discussion of this topic). It was widely felt that such an organism (in whatever form) would serve a variety of cultural and social purposes in a highly visible manner. Public pressure for such an establishment began in the nineteenth century (Salter 71) and continued even after the regional theatre system was firmly in place. Among other things, it was largely responsible for the National Arts Centre with its long record of financial woes. The national theatre was envisaged both as a centre-piece of the arts and as a proof that Canada had reached cultural maturity. It had various models at various times; including the Comédie-Française, various continental European theatres (Salter 77), New York, and the proposed National Theatre of Great Britain after the Second World War. Although the various suggested models differed from each other, there appeared to be some kind of a consensus on their general make-up: a theatre that would be state supported and therefore financially independent in order to free it from the 'vulgarity' of the market-place, with an 'international' repertoire based on the classics, predominantly English and European. As an established theatre producing works of excellent quality it could also commission new (presumably Canadian) works and it would train theatre artists and technicians in order that the theatre arts might spread throughout the country (Salter 77).

The concept of a "national theatre" seems to have originated with Matthew Arnold

in 1880 (Granville-Barker ix) and arguments for such an institution in Canada were forcibly made by visiting artists from Britain (like Martin-Harvey and Granville-Barker) as well as by “academics like Aurthur L. Phelps and W. S. Milne; by playwrights like John Hoare, Fred Jacob, John Coulter, and Herman Voaden; by critics, of course, like Charlesworth and Sandwell; and, most importantly, by Vincent Massey” (Salter 79). They were all convinced that such a theatre would serve not only to establish Canadian culture as an independent fact but would also encourage theatre (and the other arts) across the country, thereby helping to unify Canada, somewhat like the national railway (Salter 85). They also believed that the establishment of a Canadian national theatre, with a repertoire of English and European ‘classics’ would “resist American hegemony (with its equation of republicanism and mass taste) by providing an exemplary alternative” (Filewood 7).

These were lofty political and cultural goals, but they brought with them a series of unsolved problems, not the least of which was government disinclination to fund such an enterprise: a crucial factor since no other source of capital seemed available. Geography, too, was inimicable to the scheme since Canada's population was (and is) stretched out on a thin ribbon along the American border with no central “city which is to Canada as Paris is to France or as London is to England or as New York is to the eastern half of the United States” (Macrae 140). Any national theatre based on the suggested European models was entirely impractical in Canada. This was dealt with by suggesting that the national theatre was more than just a building; it was, rather, an idea; a concept that could be shared by theatres across the country (Benson and Conolly 63), or more concretely, that it should, in fact, *be* a number of theatres built across the country, exchanging productions and building unity in a diversity homogenized by exchange (Salter 81). As Salter points out, this idea

(put forward by John Hoare in 1911) is prophetic -- in many ways -- of the present regional system.

Unfortunately, the campaign for a national theatre had a much deeper, underlying problem, in many ways anti-theatrical to some of its own projected goals and purposes. Its proposals for repertoire invariably betrayed the same kind of cultural bias, for the same kind of motives as discussed above. Although proponents often insisted that the encouragement of the writing of Canadian plays was one of its goals (see Benson and Conolly 63, Salter 81 and 85-6) they almost universally supported a repertoire of British and European works. This reasoning was based on certain fundamental assumptions. Firstly, they assumed from the outset "that culture and nationalism were inseparable issues" and that they were thus not only attempting to construct a framework on which a Canadian professional theatre could be built but they were also "preoccupied . . . with the discourse of cultural and political authority, as they attempted to transpose it to a readily identifiable Canadian context . . . by adapting and somewhat refining an essentially imported model" (Salter 79).⁴ Secondly, they assumed that theatre was (and must be) the hegemony of higher culture and that it "need only to appeal to an educated minority to fulfill its purpose" (Filewood 7) both in terms of developing Canadian culture and acting as a barrier against American mass culture. These two assumptions were felt to be mutually supportive since the concept of theatre as "a form of high culture" derived largely from the British model (Salter 77). Thus, an alliance of nationalism and high culture was formed early on in the pursuit of a national theatre and was to continue as a strong rhetorical force in seeking state subsidies for the theatre in general.

This model, taken as a whole, was entirely workable if the problem of geography

could be solved. It was, however, entirely dependent on an elite theatre that was solely state-supported; one that need take no account of audience and economics. Without state support, the model would be an unmitigated economic disaster since the audience base of high culture (although individually wealthy) was not broad enough to support even one theatre, much less several, except by direct and exclusive patronage; which could be undertaken at any time without government intervention.

The idea, then, bluntly put, was to express and further Canadian national aspirations in the cultural field by creating a state-supported theatre for an elite minority interested in high culture, with a British/European model including repertory, thereby shutting out the American commercial interests and influence. And, just as bluntly, the result would be contrary to proclamations of nationalist motivations since, “by deciding to annex themselves to so-called world culture, Canadians would in fact be ignoring the cultivation of their own repertoire, an act of self-effacement at odds with the professed ideals of cultural nationalism” (Salter 80-1). By ‘pre-canonizing’ for the Canadian theatre a European repertoire because it appealed to the cultural bias and tastes of proponents of high culture in Canada, the door was (essentially) being shut to Canadian playwrights who could not hope, as beginners, to compete with Shakespeare, Shaw, Galsworthy, Hauptman, Strindberg, Ibsen and Zola (Salter 80).⁵ In addition, as Salter points out, the importation of the European repertory, “actually legitimated an international, rather than a national, repertoire and in this way subverted the very premise on which the European repertory ideal was based; direct, possibly even controversial, engagement with the social, cultural, and political needs of specific communities” (Salter 82). Rather than encouraging the production of Canadian plays dealing with the social issues of Canada, the European repertory would

maintain its hegemony, ironically legitimized by nationalism. Despite its clear ties to Canadian nationalism, the concept of a national theatre, with all its assumptions of cultural bias towards high culture, would have a negative effect on English-Canadian theatre and drama, all the more significant because of its powerful impact on the Massey/Levésque Commission, and the regional system to follow.

One man who seemed embody all of these attributes and attitudes was Vincent Massey and he was placed by birth, interest and politics at the center of the cultural battlefield. That Massey was an anglophile was unquestionable. What is often forgotten is that Massey's anglophilia was a chosen stance (his ancestry was American and not British) a fact which he freely admitted: "I have never felt away from home in England. This cannot be explained by heredity" (Massey, *What's* 10). He constantly reminded Canadians that though they were North Americans, they should look to England for their legacy (Massey, *What's* 11). He felt deeply that Canadians "should be" great lovers of England (Massey, *What's* 12) and that "Canadianism was built on the foundation of British civilization (modified to include francophone Canada)" (Filewood 8). He felt no unease in stating that "The Crown-in-Parliament is the supreme symbol of our nationhood . . . and our greatest defence against absorption into a continental state" (quoted in Hardin 4). In short, "as Claude Bissell has exhaustively demonstrated, Massey's nationalism was formed on the basis of a profound cultural allegiance to Great Britain: his deep loyalty to the monarchy and friendship with King George VI (who inducted him as a Companion of Honour in 1946), his close affiliations with Oxford, his service as High Commissioner to Britain, and his term as Governor General of Canada . . . all attest to his abiding faith in British culture" (Filewood 7). He was unquestionably the prototypical "Imperial Canadian" of the mid-

century.

None of this prevented him from being a Canadian nationalist, in fact it was part of the Massey family tradition. As early as January 1896, the family firm produced one of a series of magazines (called *Massey's Magazine*) which espoused the cause of literary nationalism (Bissell, *Young* 17). Massey was, however, embarrassed by what he called "prickly nationalism" (Massey, *What's* 22): obvious and demonstrative nationalism that was merely show. He believed, rather, "in something rather abstract and ineffable, what he called a 'characteristic feeling, manner or style' which would emerge . . . from an 'automatic and inherent' form of Canadianism. Nationalism, then, was all right, as long as it was not merely an exercise in patriotism, and as long as it stimulated 'the creation of beauty in every form'" (Salter 84). Because of this, and because of the public role he chose to assume -- as a prominent member of the Liberal party, and various 'vice-regal' appointments -- Massey's particular brand of nationalism was almost exclusively expressed in the fields of culture.

Even prior to his appointment to the Royal Commission, Massey's role in Canadian theatre was immense; indeed it was partly responsible for that appointment. Through the Massey Foundation he had created Hart House Theatre which was the dominant figure in the formative years of the Dominion Drama Festival. Whatever criticism has been brought to bear against Massey in recent years, it is clear that he publicly espoused the cause of Canadian playwrights and did so from a position of practical knowledge. Even Salter has stated that "at one level, [he] seems to have thought desirable -- a national repertoire of Canadian-made plays on Canadian topics in a Canadian idiom and presented in a recognizably Canadian style" and that "it was his fervently expressed hope that there would eventually be a substantial body of proven plays (Canadian classics, in other words) to

which artistic directors would automatically turn when planning their upcoming seasons” (Salter 82). Alan Filewood has agreed that Massey “applauded attempts to create a national dramatic repertoire” (Filewood 8).

But more important than this, he had an insider's (albeit only a gifted amateur's) knowledge of how theatre actually worked. As an actor, director, business manager and patron Massey had actively promoted the works of Canadian playwrights and was one of their first anthologists. Long before the Royal Commission he had developed his own philosophy of patronage which was at odds with some of the tenets of the National Theatre movement. For instance, he did not favour fully subsidized theatre: “he wanted audience receipts to bear most of the costs, with the Massey Foundation entering only when careful planning and rigid accounting failed to achieve a balanced budget. The balanced budget required a middle-brow policy in the choice of plays and a firm hold on expenses” (Bissell, *Young* 175). In the end it would be Massey's vision of subsidization that would win out over the fully state-supported model.

Because of his practical knowledge of the theatre, he realized that playwrighting was not simply a matter of literary genius produced by chance, but a craft that could be learned given the right circumstances: “above all, Massey took a practical view towards the art of the theatre. He insisted that to learn their craft properly, playwrights had to work cheek by jowl with a director and a company of actors, and not in makeshift venues like community halls but in properly equipped purpose-built theatre buildings” (Salter 82). The job at hand, for Massey, was to create those theatres where the playwrights could work and the directors and companies for them to work with.

The problem with Massey (and essentially, the problem with the commission that

came to bear his name) was the conflict between the ideas born of practical experience, and the ideas inherent in Massey's position as a "cultural mandarin" (Salter 82). While his personal experience leaned towards theatres that were largely self-supporting (although requiring some patronage) and that produced more 'popular' works in order to acquire an audience, his cultural tastes, his class "habitus" in Bourdieu's terminology, propelled him to seek models of high culture in England. Massey, himself admitted that "[a]lthough New York, a great theatrical centre, is so near, it is to London that we have turned for experience, expertise, and training in the sphere of drama" (Massey, *What's* 198). This conflict would lie at the heart of the commission itself which Massey was selected to lead -- less as a man of the theatre, than as a "gifted amateur who personified the idea of high culture, . . . had educated taste, Liberal politics and a substantial fortune" (Filewood 7). Massey embodied all of the forces under discussion: his habitus of high culture (and the desire to protect it) allied with fervent nationalism (on the pro-British model) and a practical sense of the theatre that made him aware that a fully state-supported national theatre that served only the interests of the elite would be doomed to failure in Canada. He was to bring these three forces to his work as chair of the commission that bears his name.⁶

Background to the Commission

On April 7, 1949, the Committee of the Privy Council of the Liberal Government of Louis St. Laurent advised the establishment of the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences. The idea for the commission has been claimed by (and attributed to) a number of different individuals, depending on the tale and the teller. Claude Bissell records evidence that indicates that it was suggested by Jack

Pickersgill (Bissell, *Imperial* 194) and (separately) Brooke Claxton after a proposal for an arts commission had been ignored at the National Liberal Convention in 1948 (Bissell, *Imperial* 196). In fact, the idea came from Claxton who discussed it with Pickersgill who passed it on to Lester Pearson (Pickersgill 139). Pressure had been growing on the government since the 1930's (following the impetus of the 1929 Aird report and the creation of the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission -- later the CBC -- in 1932) and had intensified during the war. Following a conference in June 1941 (sponsored, ironically, by the Carnegie Foundation) the Federation of Canadian Artists was formed and in 1944 a larger federation of sixteen bodies concerned with the arts was cobbled together in order to present a unified brief to the House of Commons committee dealing with 'reconstruction and re-establishment' in what has come to be known as the "march on Ottawa" (Bissell, *Imperial* 199). The committee ignored the federation but it had gained wide publicity and the substance of the brief was published by Elizabeth Wyn Wood as an article called "For the Arts in Canada,"⁷ and the momentum began to build. (see W. Whittaker 63 and 77 also Moore, *Reinventing* 127) On Dec. 5, 1945, the Canadian Arts Council was created out of the *ad hoc* federation to continue the pressure. The Council, with playwright Herman Voaden as President, paid for a Gallup poll asking three basic questions:

1. Do you think that the cultural services -- music, art and drama -- are sufficiently available to the people of Canada as a whole?
2. Do you think the Government should undertake the distribution of these services to all Canadians?
3. If you think so, do you think this should be undertaken by the provincial or the federal governments? (W. Whittaker 12-3)

The overwhelmingly positive results of the poll (especially to the second question) astonished everyone, including the normally imperturbable Gallup people, who wrote to the Canadian Arts Council: "The trouble is that we can't find anybody who disapproves of this idea [government support for the arts]. In other words, it doesn't seem to be an issue and is one of those propositions to which everyone would agree" (W. Whittaker 12-3). It remained only for the government to choose to act in a way that corresponded to the attitude of the Canadian public. As in so many cases where governments are requested to finance new initiatives, it chose to study the case by use of a Royal Commission.

Once the decision had been grudgingly reached at the ministerial level to proceed with the commission the next step was the choice of the appropriate person to head it up. Again, there are various 'origin myths' attributing the choice of Vincent Massey to Lester Pearson or to Brooke Claxton -- both Massey protégés -- (Bissell, *Imperial* 194 and 196) but the choice was hardly a difficult one.⁸ There was no-one else more qualified for the job in Canada (Massey was at the time Chancellor of the University of Toronto) and Massey's "career had made him either a patron or an informal critic of every institution and activity that would come under scrutiny" (Bissell, *Imperial* 197). At first Massey was somewhat skeptical of the idea since Prime Minister St. Laurent seemed so lacking in enthusiasm for the idea even when proposing it in Parliament,⁹ but he soon discovered that there was strong support for the commission within the cabinet, particularly among the newer members like Claxton (Bissell, *Imperial* 195). On April 8, 1949 Massey was named head of the commission and rarely in a royal commission has chair and chore come so neatly together (Bissell, *Imperial* 236).

The scope of the commission was extra-ordinarily wide, encompassing a survey of

Canadian culture (including everything from fine arts to publishing and the media); the state of scholarship in the arts, sciences and humanities; Canadian universities (in itself a hot topic at the time and a central controversy of federal-provincial powers)¹⁰ and the role that Canada should play in UNESCO. While all of these issues were mammoth and well worth examining, it is clear that the over-riding goal of the commission was concerned with some form of national identity. The Order in Council creating the commission states, in part, “[t]hat it is in the national interest to give encouragement to institutions which express national feeling” (*Royal Commission* xi) and throughout the report it is that ‘national interest’ which is addressed. Within that context, the commissioners’ roles were divided up and Massey, historian Hilda Neatby and sociologist Father Georges-Henri Levesque “would concentrate on the nature of a possible arts council and the state of the major cultural institutions” (Bissell, *Imperial* 209).¹¹ Robertson Davies was engaged, within this grouping, to write the commission’s report on theatre (Pettigrew 15).

Massey's two great concerns from the beginning of the Royal Commission were totally in keeping with his own beliefs as outlined above. First, he saw the need to divest the commission of the popular image (however accurate it might have been) of himself as a wealthy aesthete attempting either to persuade the government to fund high culture for the wealthy, or, paternalistically talking down to Canadians about their inadequate cultural development. Massey directed the press to avoid the use of the term ‘culture’ and he made every effort to avoid any suggestion that the commission was a “high brow conspiracy to direct support to cultural activities of interest only to a minority” (Bissell, *Imperial* 214). So that there would be no mistake, this message was re-iterated in the opening pages of the report itself:

At the outset of the inquiry we were asked whether it was our purpose to try to 'educate' the public in literature, music and the arts in the sense of declaring what was good for them to see or hear. We answered that nothing was further from our minds than the thought of suggesting standards in taste from the cultural stratosphere. . . . Our hope was that there will be a widening opportunity for the Canadian public to enjoy works of genuine merit in all fields, but this must be a matter of their own free choice. (*Royal Commission 5*)

The word 'culture' with its connotations (at the time) concerning 'breeding,' moral tone and the esoteria of art was assiduously avoided by Massey and by the commission and the report attempts (usually successfully) to strike an objective and democratic tone.

Massey's second major effort was to focus the commission's inquiries and discussions on a single, central question that was of great concern to him personally; one that also reflected some of issues being raised by the newly nascent nationalism of the time; and one that addressed the commission's mandate of dealing with the "national interest." That question entered the minutes of the third (organizational) meeting of the commissioners:

Could Canadian culture survive as an entity in view of the increasingly strong influences tending to unify the culture of North America?: It was the view of the Commission that at the present time Canadian national feeling is stronger than it has been in the past, but also that the pressures upon Canadian life from abroad were also stronger. (quoted in Bissell, *Imperial* 218)

Clearly the 'pressure from abroad' referred to American mass media and culture that were already being perceived by Canadian nationalists as the prime enemy of Canadian sovereignty. The focus on this particular question in the context of the issues that the commission was to deal with -- particularly in the field of the arts -- was to colour the entire commission report (for good or ill) and to lend urgency to its recommendations and ammunition to its nationalist supporters. Although the question of the American threat was to have its greatest impact (within the work of the commission) on the area of the media, it is reflected in the sections of the report that deal with theatre and had long-range consequences in that field.

The Commission: Nationalism and Culture

Any analysis of the Massey/Levésque Commission's inquiry into the state theatre in Canada at the time requires a two-tiered approach. Before looking at the details of the commission's examination of theatre and its recommendations in that area, it is necessary to understand the underlying philosophy and goals of the commission and to see how they affected the way the commission looked at the state of the theatrical arts in Canada and the recommendations that it made. As we shall see, the commission's fusion of the cultural elite and Canadian cultural nationalism allowed it to pack both its analysis and recommendations with urgency and political implications clear to any government cognizant of the nationalist constituency. They were able, thereby, to remove themselves from the position of being *solely* a cultural elite, paternalistically telling the mass of Canadians, 'what was good for them,' and, instead, present themselves as part of the popular nationalist movement desirous of preserving Canadian national interests in the area of culture. This fusion of nationalism

and culture also permitted the Massey/Levésque Commission to be objective regarding both the ‘nuts and bolts’ problems of theatre in Canada and the steps to be taken to create a future professional establishment of that theatre.

In its introductory pages, the Royal Commission’s *Report* recognized the debt that Canadian arts and culture owed to American foundations: \$7,346,188 from the Carnegie Corporation since 1911 and \$11,817,707 from the Rockefeller Foundation since 1914, are cited as examples. In a carefully worded phrase, it acknowledged that “many institutions in Canada essential to the equipment of a modern nation could not have been established or maintained without money provided from the United States” (*Royal Commission* 13). This implied, of course, that should Canada chose to view itself as a ‘modern nation’ it had better start establishing and maintaining these institutions itself. Moreover, though it may be granted “that most of these American donations are good in themselves, it does not follow that they have always been good for Canadians” (*Royal Commission* 14). The report also admitted that Canadians benefited from “vast importations of what might be familiarly called the American cultural output. We import newspapers, periodicals, books, maps and endless educational equipment. We also import artistic talent, either personally in the traveling artist or company, or on the screen, in recordings and over the air” (*Royal Commission* 14). And to further sink the ironic barb, the commission baldly stated that “in consideration of American generosity in educating her citizens Canada ‘sells down south’ as many as 2,500 professional men and women in a year” (*Royal Commission* 14). The invocation of the spectre of slavery puts an end to the report's ironic tribute to American cultural aid to Canada.

Why are these satiric barbs placed in the report? It was, of course, necessary in any

real analysis of the state of Canadian culture to admit to the aid and presence of the American forces mentioned; indeed, when the report moves on to each area of consideration in detail, the American presence is an on-going concern. But the report uses them ironically as a springboard to call attention in general to what it perceived as the most important threat to Canadian identity: American mass culture. In the same breath (and in the same sentence) it discusses the “influences from across the border” as being “friendly” and yet so “pervasive” that “we have not even the advantages of what soldiers used to call defence in depth” (*Royal Commission* 13). With this military metaphor the commission stakes its claim to a nationalist cultural position that defines America as the (‘friendly’) enemy in the battle for a national culture in precisely the ways that we have discussed earlier.

American mass media is the enemy particularly where the performing arts are concerned. The influence of American popular culture is identified in all its pervasiveness: from the electronic media -- “it may be noted in passing that our national radio which carries the Sunday symphony from New York also carries the soap-opera” (*Royal Commission* 17) -- to publishing -- “Canadian magazines with much difficulty have achieved a circulation of nearly forty-two millions a year as against an American circulation in Canada of over eighty-six millions” (*Royal Commission* 17). While the commission is not prepared to say that all American mass culture is actually evil, it forcefully states that “a vast and disproportionate amount of material coming from a single alien source may stifle rather than stimulate our own creative effort; and, passively accepted without any standard of comparison, this may weaken critical faculties” (*Royal Commission* 18). The ‘single alien source’ referred to here is, of course, the United States.¹²

Most analysts of the Royal Commission's *Report* have drawn attention to its anti-American bias and its emphasis on the fear of "cultural annexation" by the United States. America is the enemy not solely because of its power but also because American culture and commercialization are seen as synonymous (Staines 34). Nowhere, for instance, does the report concern itself with American culture in the sense of Hawthorne, Melville, Faulkner, Hemmingway, Fitzgerald, Ives, Copeland, Dickinson, Frost or O'Neill. America is mythologized into a contemporary Goliath of the mass media against which Canada plays the David role. Some of this mythologizing is, in fact, based on a fear of the new technologies and deep sense of nostalgia. Pages 19-21 of the report (introducing the section: "The Mass Media") are an eloquent invocation of the pre-mass-media past in Canada that graphically illustrates this. But there is more going on here than nostalgia and a fear of the future; a state of urgency is being developed both in response to actual conditions and as a strategy to foreground its goals.

The *Report* has recently come under a great deal of scrutiny and criticism as it begins to loom larger and larger as a type of cultural Genesis myth. On the whole critics have focused on the negative:

In their portrayals the Massey commissioners become a bunch of stuffy college dons trying to force a good dollop of 'culchah' down the throat of a gagging Johnny Canuck. They criticize the commission for patronizing the common man, failing to appreciate the virtues of modern mass democracy, and promoting an aristocratic high culture. In this view the Massey Commission represented a reactionary elitism geared towards preserving the establishment culture and values of a bygone day in a new era of cultural

pluralism. There is some truth to all of these characterizations, but none of them rests on a close historical analysis of the Massey Commission and its times. (Litt, *Muses* 6)

In fact, the Massey/Levésque Commission had an agenda that was political, cultural and philosophical. Politically it sought to find ways to protect English Canada's cultural and political sovereignty since French Canada was seen as being more naturally insulated at the time by the barrier of language (Buffie 21). Culturally, it attempted to find ways to promote Canadian cultural development and preserve those historical aspects of Canadian culture that made Canada different. Philosophically, it retained its shared 'habitus' and tastes distinguishing high culture as the best possible defence of liberal-humanist democracy in Canada; with the ideas of Matthew Arnold never too far in the background (Litt, "Massey" 24). Strategically, it tried to stamp on its goals an amalgamation of cultural and nationalist objectives that would, in the views of the commissioners, illustrate the urgency of the situation. However real the potential domination of American mass culture was, it was certainly a valuable nationalist weapon in the hands of the commission.

Of course the commission was made up of and represented an elite. The driving forces behind the creation of the commission (like Brooke Claxton) were all "leading figures in universities, national voluntary associations, and government" as well as representatives from broadcasting and federal institutions (Litt, *Muses* 4). The members of the commission themselves were, for the most part, drawn from these same ranks and were all long-time members of national voluntary associations (Litt, *Muses* 20). The commission's attempts, in order to reach a wider audience, to eradicate from their report much that reflected their elite status was never wholly successful.¹³ Those who presented briefs to the commission were

largely from the same type of background.¹⁴ Few individual artists, or individuals of any kind, made presentations to the commission; rather, it was members of what we would call today the cultural lobby: “At the core of the cultural lobby was an elite of well-educated, principled, and like-minded leaders who wielded influence across the nation” (Litt, *Muses* 54). These leaders represented a wide range of voluntary and professional organizations whose interest in cultural matters was finally given a public forum by the commission. As a combined constituency they were able to place cultural issues, for once, on the forefront of the national agenda and make them, as Litt says, “something of a national crusade” (Litt, *Muses* 55).

Crucial to the Massey/Levésque Commission's goals are the very issues that we have been examining: their understanding of culture, their use of the forces of nationalism(s), and their attempt to cobble together an alliance of culture (in their terms) and nationalism. Litt has attempted to define the Massey/Levésque Commission's attitude towards culture as follows:

for the culture lobby, high culture encompassed the refined cultural tradition of the artistic, intellectual, and social elite in Western civilization. It was distinguishable from popular and mass culture by its greater degree of analysis of the human condition and by its emphasis upon quality, as determined by the exacting criteria of a discerning audience, rather than by accessibility or mass appeal. Thus an appreciation of high culture required some familiarity with the history and standards of the genre. (Litt, *Muses* 84)

The commission's avoidance of excessive reference to the elitism of high culture stemmed from its awareness that the average Canadian viewed these terms with distrust; as

something paternalistic and undemocratic that they would resist having imposed on them by the 'highbrows.' But this was not at all the viewpoint of the commissioners; they viewed high culture as something that offered knowledge and insight to anyone willing to make the effort to acquire it. All that was needed was access and a certain amount of education to be able to enjoy, appreciate and profit from it. They even went so far as to believe it to be indispensable in a liberal democratic society. (see Litt *Muses* 84-5, also Buffie 4 and 9)

The commission distinguished between popular culture and mass culture in a way that carried political and social implications: popular culture, as in folklore, customs and pastimes, was valued but mass culture, in the form of the media of print, radio, film and television, was despised and feared. The mass media appealed to lowest common denominator and was easily manipulated to form and alter public opinion -- a great danger in a mass democracy (Litt, *Muses* 85). The commission saw, as its underlying goal, the need to make high culture available to the mass of Canadians so that, if they chose, they could make use of it in order not only to improve and edify themselves, but also to become politically better citizens. At the same time, they sought to protect Canadian popular culture from American mass culture which they saw as foreign, market driven and voracious in its consumption of all other forms of culture.¹⁵

By locating the enemy to all forms of Canadian culture in the U. S. the commission allied itself with the forces of Canadian nationalism. Litt chooses to see this as a conscious effort in order to build a larger political constituency for its cultural aims, but, although it was certainly a strategy, the alliance was already pre-formed in the minds of many, including Massey himself. Astute political move or natural assumption, the alliance is certainly there in the report and both sides of the equation gained from it. The nationalists gained from

their association with high culture a respectability and a sense of a specific objective: the defense of Canadian high culture against American mass culture. The liberal humanist elite gained what it needed the most: popular support. But these gains were not simply ones of mutual, political self-interest; both groups sincerely believed that the establishment of high culture in Canada would increase “public enlightenment through the cultural improvement of individuals. Nationalism offered the perfect vehicle for taking high culture to the people. Facing a common enemy and recognizing the advantages of mutual support, liberal humanism and nationalism joined together to popularize high culture as the best available means of developing a Canadian culture” (Litt, *Muses* 108).¹⁶ And, in fact, on what other ground -- political or moral -- could these two natural allies have met, “how else could nationalism have expressed itself in Canada in the 1950s except in terms of conserving those traditions and cultural values which historically distinguished itself from the United States” (Buffie 56)?

That the alliance was fruitful is unquestionable, given the popularity and the impact of the report, however it was not without its inherent flaws:

Their [the commissioners] desire to popularize high culture was a generous impulse in that they wished to confer upon others the benefits that they enjoyed, but their idea of what was good for others was entirely defined by the cultural limitations of their elitist point of view. Their enterprise continually bumped up against that fact that high culture was not very amenable to popularization. (Litt, *Muses* 252)

Not everyone in Canada would, as Buffie points out, given the opportunity, run out and read *Jane Eyre*, nor would they all run out to see a play by Shakespeare. While the cultural

elite and the cultural nationalist might agree in principle, they certainly would not agree on repertoire and the commission had a tendency to avoid this point of contention. Either they were guilty of universalizing their own class experience (Buffie 29) and were, therefore, unable to perceive this fundamental difference in appetite or they chose to believe the 'strains' between elitism and high culture on the one hand and nationalism and popular culture on the other hand (Litt, *Muses* 111) would disappear with time. Perhaps they hoped that once Canada's culture had begun, under government patronage, to grow, either the differences in taste would lessen or there would be room for both in a broader cultural flowering. Whatever their view was, the result was the setting up of two different sets of expectations. The cultural elite looked forward to an established living theatre that provided the best in cosmopolitan (principally British) theatre while the nationalists expected a theatre that would devote itself to the development of Canadian culture through the birth of Canadian drama. These two expectations could comfortably live side by side through the report, since they both required the establishment of a Canadian theatre system. Once that system was in place, they would result in a radical split between the cultural elite and the cultural nationalists concerning the repertoire that would be performed in that theatre system.

The State of the Art

Now we can turn to the specific analysis of the state of Canadian theatre as performed by the commission. Of the 462 briefs that they received, 23 concerned the theatre (W. Whittaker 111) and many contained recommendations that became part of the commission's own recommendations. In addition to carefully listening to and making use of

the briefs submitted, the commission also hired playwright Robertson Davies to prepare a special report on theatre for its use. That special report (although in parts mildly contradictory of some of the commissions findings) will be considered here as part of the report, since it fleshes out, and in many ways, justifies the commission's findings and recommendations.¹⁷ In fact only a small portion of the commission's main report directly concerns theatre and but some of the sections on broadcasting have an impact on it and others illustrate how radio (and television) both serve as models for the theatre and illustrate the ideology of the commission in its dealing with the performing arts in general. So we turn first to the section on broadcasting.

Broadcasting, and the CBC specifically, was acknowledged to have done far more in terms of employment for Canadian actors, producers (of drama) and playwrights than any existing theatre structure, much less individual theatre company. It was found to have provided employment that enabled professional actors and writers to work in a discipline at least adjacent to their own and to do it in their "own community where [they] can probably make [their] most effective contribution. Much creative talent is thus developed which otherwise would be lost" (*Royal Commission* 32). The commission did not realize (or did not acknowledge in the report) that acting for radio and television was (and is) considerably different from acting for the stage, but they were certainly aware that theatre in Canada would have been in an even worse state had this broadcasting work not been available, since the few professionals would have either left the country or have been forced into other work and thus lost their skills. Various briefs made it evident to the commission, however, that this was merely a stop-gap measure and that, unfortunately, the CBC was more likely to provide "livings to executives, technicians, actors, announcers, and producers -- none of

whom are primary creators of art -- and pays very poorly the writers whose works often reach vast bodies of listeners, and on whose ideas and creative skill a whole elaborate production may be built" (*Royal Commission* 32-3). Also, Davies points out, writing for radio can have a "baneful influence" on playwrights, since radio drama is, "an enfeebled echo of the real thing" and pointed the author in the direction of smallness and excessive subtlety that is often useless on the stage and can harm the stage writing abilities of even "the most potentially brilliant" (Davies, "Theatre" 388).

But this was certainly preferable to the role played by private radio stations where writers and performers were almost totally unutilized (*Royal Commission* 32). The statistics in this area were scandalous. In fact, the report (aside from a few specific criticisms) was generally enthusiastic about public broadcasting and harshly critical of private radio. The CBC had maintained its high standards of programming as well as its high proportion of Canadian content.¹⁸ Private radio had succumbed to temptation of American content, with its concomitant advertising and commercialism and the commission was not shy of expressing its distaste.¹⁹

One problem that the commission dealt with seemed to apply equally to both theatre and broadcasting and that was the issue of regionalism. Canada had at that time a population of about eight and a quarter million (46% of the total) living in fifteen cities with populations of over 100,000 each spread across the country -- all but three within 150 miles of the U.S. border and easily within the range of American radio and television (W. Whittaker 22). This presented enormous logistical and financial problems for any attempt to either compete on a large scale with American broadcasters, tour any form of performing arts productions or to establish a Canadian theatre that would be open to all.²⁰ Geography,

plainly, was one of the great obstacles to developing a Canadian theatrical structure. Even broadcasting which (in some ways) should be beyond geography had encountered difficulties, largely to do with the expense of duplicating its efforts in so many centres. The commission pointed out that "at the time the Federal Government assumed control and ownership of radio it was the avowed policy to present programmes which would be fairly representative of all provinces. This was continued only for a year or two" (*Royal Commission 33*) and further that the CBC, "designed to unify a sparsely populated country, has perhaps with justice been accused of centralizing its efforts in one or two large centres where production is easy" (*Royal Commission 38*).

The positive aspects of regionalism, in its variety of differences and the rights of each region were not lost on the commission and it succinctly stated the dialectic: "[i]n Canada all national gatherings for whatever purpose are costly in time and money; yet our regionalism makes them doubly necessary" (*Royal Commission 12*). Canadian regionalism, with its variety of cultural impulses must be capitalized upon and its difficulties recognized and overcome. Each region, naturally, looked for one or more performing arts companies in their metropolis; even if there was not enough audience base to support it and each region resisted the centralized pull of a 'national theatre' concept. It was clear to the commission that the idea of a National Theatre -- as a central complex -- was unlikely to be feasible and that other means would have to be found, particularly in the area of the performing arts, to deal with the problem of regionalism.

Having acknowledged the geographical problems common to all the performing arts the commission turned to the specific problems of theatre. These problems were laid out in the brief presented by Dr. Skinner, Honorary Director of the Dominion Drama Festival,

wherein he listed the lack of employment opportunities in theatre in Canada, the consequent loss of talent to the United States and England, the lack of theatre buildings across the country for resident and touring companies and the lack of professional companies of 'national stature' (W. Whittaker 116). The commission acknowledged the difficulties but chose to take a position of modest optimism, stating, in part, that, "in spite, however, of these many difficulties and obstacles the picture of drama in Canada is not at all one of unrelieved gloom. There still remain in Montréal, Toronto, Ottawa and Vancouver active theatre companies which have been able, consistently or periodically, to maintain professional levels of production and to preserve at least a limited public taste for the living theatre" (*Royal Commission* 194). Clearly, the commission was attempting to acknowledge the contributions of existing professional companies and amateur associations while at the same time calling attention to the state of "unrelieved gloom" stated as a negative. The detailed analysis of theatre was brief because theatre's status, within the overall mandate of the commission, was meagre.

The commission expressed its full appreciation of the role that the Dominion Drama Festival had played in sustaining the work of amateur theatre throughout a period of professional decline. "Nothing in Canada," says the report, "has done so much for the amateur theatre as the Dominion Drama Festivals." However, as in all the other areas of theatre, the good work of the DDF had been crippled by financial burdens and "recurring and increasing deficits (now borne by private donations)" made it impossible for the Festival to be fully effective at its current task, much less extend its efforts (*Royal Commission* 195). Davies' special report was much more critical, not of the DDF (of which he was an active participant and supporter) but of the government: "I cannot think of any other country in

the world where a comparable effort would be so persistently snubbed by the Government. Even on the lowest level, its publicity value to the country is enormous. The libel that Canada hates the arts is more strongly supported by the resolute official slighting of the Dominion Drama Festival than in any other single matter" (Davies, "Theatre" 376). This slighting was not in the area of pageantry -- as we have already seen, the Festival was conducted as a vice-regal affair -- but in financial support.

Money, in fact, was the root issue for many of the representations to the commission: money for facilities, money for training, money for touring, money for a National Theatre and money for the Dominion Drama Festival. How could even self-supporting amateur groups fund themselves to send their productions over great distances to compete at the Festival. The fact was that "many local dramatic societies are now reluctant to enter the Festival since if they win their regional festival they cannot attend the national competition" (*Royal Commission* 195). The commission's conclusion was simple: "[I]t seems to us that the time is now opportune for the provision in Canada of the modest help from federal sources which will permit these activities of the drama in Canada to find their logical outcome and their fulfillment" (*Royal Commission* 200).

With even greater financial implications was the sad state of theatrical facilities in the country; the type of facilities that had impeded even the determined efforts of struggling professional groups like the New Play Society and the Jupiter and Crest theatres. Granting that Canada was "not deficient in theatrical talent," the report stated that it was generally agreed across the country that the lack of facilities for amateur and professional performance, for touring companies and for the training of Canada's theatrical talent as professionals was nearly non-existent. The result of this was that, "except in the few largest

centres, the professional theatre is moribund in Canada, and amateur companies are grievously handicapped, through lack of suitable or of any playhouses” (*Royal Commission* 193). The situation could have only one solution, the construction of new facilities or the recovery and appropriate renovation of old ones. This was obviously a critical concern for the commission and they made that clear: “We have been repeatedly informed that the theatre could be revived if only federal subsidies could be secured for the erection of suitable playhouses throughout Canada and for part of the traveling expenses of Canadian professional companies” (*Royal Commission* 197). Having made the crucial nature of the problem clear, the commission chose not to pursue the matter of facilities any further except in two areas. Firstly, they suggested that a national theatre (in whatever form it might be conceived) could scarcely go forward successfully without an “adequately equipped theatre which would include suitable studios for advanced instruction and experimentation in stagecraft, costuming, make-up, lighting, and other technical skills” (*Royal Commission* 198). Though the commission steadfastly refused to countenance a national theatre as a single theatre located anywhere (and “where?” was the question left unbegged) in the country, even a national theatre as a touring company would require “a base for their operations . . . and for performances” (*Royal Commission* 198).

Secondly, the commission chose to hand off the question of the vast financial outlay to municipal (and possibly provincial) levels of government within the context of a national touring theatre company: “It has also been suggested that many Canadian cities and towns now lacking an adequate playhouse would find it practicable and desirable to make suitable provision for the regular appearance of the national company of players” (*Royal Commission* 197). The reasons the commission chose to duck the issue of a national

campaign of theatre construction and renovation are fairly obvious. The enormous cost to the federal government would have been deemed unacceptable -- even irresponsible -- to the federal parties of the time and the commission also wished to avoid too much focus on the theatre as physical plant. As Davies put it: "the theatre is not first a thing of brick and mortar, but of players and playwrights" (Davies, "Theatre" 381). Facilities were a serious, even critical problem, but it was dangerous in an era of post-war reconstruction to suggest that buildings alone were the answer. If buildings alone were presented as the answer, the federal government might simply pass off the issue of Canadian theatre to the other levels of government and consider the matter closed.

As we have seen, the commission, and its deponents, held the view that many of the difficulties described could best be solved within the context of some form of national theatre. The term had become a loaded one and the commission struggled to find a limited and feasible application. The report saw no conceivable application of the term as a single, central structure housing a single, professional company of 'international' standards. Geography and regionalism were against it and the commission went further (particularly Davies) in seeing it as a potential political football; a target in every partisan battle over budget cuts (*Royal Commission* 199). The commission was firm that, in a single theatre format, there was nothing in their investigations to suggest that it could ever exist (*Royal Commission* 193). Indeed, solely in such a form it would be "a foolish extravagance" (*Royal Commission* 199). There was, however, just as unanimous opinion that in some form, a National Theatre should exist and, "there was wide agreement that it should be one of our cultural resources" (*Royal Commission* 194). In their view, and in that of those who made presentations to the commission, a National Theatre, "should consist not in an elaborate

structure built in Ottawa or elsewhere, but rather in a company or companies of players who would present the living drama in even the more remote communities of Canada and who would in addition give professional advice to local amateur dramatic societies . . .” (*Royal Commission* 197). This vision of a national theatre was to lead to the Canada Council's funding of The Canadian Players.

One of the attractive features of this form of a national theatre is that it would seem to offer at least a partial solution to another deficiency in the area of Canadian theatre of the time: training. Various briefs to the commission had pointed out the complete absence of training schools in Canada for the theatrical profession, in any of its aspects, artistic or technical (*Royal Commission* 198) and this was seen as another crucial problem. Any form of training beyond the purely elementary had to be undertaken abroad and the usual result was that the trained artist remained abroad. Establishing permanent companies of actors would be impossible without trained artists, designers, directors and technicians and so the training must be provided. One of the permanent advantages of a touring National Theatre (felt the commissioners) would be that the “members of the permanent company would also be available, in the theatre off-season, as directors of summer theatres or as instructors at summer schools of the theatre” and that the National Theatre's resident theatre should, and would, also be available as a training centre. In addition the commission (referring to the Dominion Drama Festival brief) hoped that “such a permanent company would also ‘encourage writing for the Canadian theatre and provide an opportunity for the presentation of Canadian plays’” (*Royal Commission* 198). Even Robertson Davies, though he expressed deep concern over any institutionalized National Theatre, hoped to see one develop along these lines. This form of a national theatre seemed to solve a number of problems at the

same time without involving a huge outlay of capital and the commission report comes out strongly in favour of it.

Where, then, in this dilemma and these potential solutions for it, did the *Report* see the place of the playwright? While acknowledging, again, the encouragement of a few writers by the CBC, the report admits that writing for the theatre is nearly as moribund as the professional theatre itself and shares the same root causes: the lack of facilities for theatre companies and the lack of training for the playwright. So bleak is the situation of the playwright that in the opinion of the commission it does not seem “rational to advocate the creation of suitable schools of dramatic art in Canada when present prospects for the employment in Canada of the graduates seem so unfavourable” (*Royal Commission* 196). The commission had the wisdom to recognize the central problem in the development of writing for the stage, one that makes it unlike most other forms of writing: it cannot exist in a vacuum. The playwright needs a practicing theatre company in order to practice her/his craft. As the commission put it, “it has been universally true that the play-writer must have a vigorous, living theatre for which to work; for this, radio drama is no substitute” (*Royal Commission* 196). Robertson Davies elaborated the details more fully: “it is a craft and . . . it must be learned. The best way to learn it is to write a play and see it through rehearsals and in performance. But as it costs quite a lot of money to give a play a production even in the amateur theatre, this cannot happen very often. The next best way is to see a lot of plays, and to learn from them. That can only be done where a theatre exists” (Davies, “Theatre” 389). There may, in fact, be creative potential playwrights out there, but until they have the opportunity to become knowledgeable in the theatre craft, they will only be potential (Davies, “Theatre” 387).

The conclusion was that the *theatre* must precede the *author* and that makes the creation of a Canadian theatre of prior importance to the facilitation of Canadian playwrights, or, rather, part of that facilitation. This conclusion seems, to anyone familiar with the theatre, reasonable and pragmatic, but it is only part of the equation; the missing component is the audience. The commissioners were not so foolish as to believe that theatre takes place without an audience; but who was that audience to be? The question was clearly related to all of the commissions earlier findings and was seen as part of the problem of the Canadian playwright. The commission noted there was little dramatic writing in Canada because of a “penury” of theatre companies, caused by a lack of theatre buildings, caused, in turn, by a lack of interest on the part of a public who were “addicted to cinema” because they had had no opportunity to see live theatre (*Royal Commission* 196). Cause and effect is graphically circular: the mass media in their popularity keep the mass audiences from the theatre, therefore the mass audiences have no knowledge of the theatre, and therefore they do not go to the theatre. Without audience demand, there are no theatres, and without theatres there are no professional companies and without professional companies there is no theatre so the public goes to the mass media. The commission clearly felt that putting in place a Canadian theatre of merit and allowing the average Canadian the opportunity to experience it would result in a much larger demand and enthusiasm for the theatre. This concept of ‘raising the masses’ is very much a theme that runs through the report and it goes to the heart of the matter. Elite audiences expect one kind of repertoire and mass audiences expect another: which audience would the Canadian playwright write for?

The preamble to the section of the report on Canadian theatre begins in the

following fashion:

The point need not be laboured; many of man's greatest artistic achievements, from Aeschylus to Bach and from Euripides to Wagner, have been cast in a dramatic mold. This great heritage is largely unknown to the people of Canada In Canada there is nothing comparable, whether in play-production or in writing for the theatre, to what is going on in other countries with which we should like to claim intellectual kinship and cultural equality. (*Royal Commission* 193)

If the gain in Canadian theatre is to be “man's greatest achievement” in dramatic form, then the hypothetical audience is, surely, the cultural elite. To give the commission credit, it was certainly their contention that the average Canadian could be educated (formally and informally) to appreciate the great classics of the theatre: “for it appears to me that Canadians are as responsive to first-rate work as any other people. A Canadian audience may sometimes be naive; . . . Sometimes we are a little provincial. But we are by no means stupid” (Davies, “Theatre” 371). What was needed, felt the commissioners, was *exposure* to the great works of the theatre and education in their enjoyment; above all an opportunity to experience the theatre, and then the people could judge for themselves. Surely, reasoned the commission, they would come to see and choose to stay.²¹ This assumption, that high culture in theatre would be chosen by the mass of Canadians if they were exposed to it, is part of the underlying philosophy of the report and is, I believe founded on a genuine belief on the part of the commissioners. It sustains the theatre section of the report and helps to justify its recommendations. However, it holds no intellectual place for Canadian playwrights, since they could hardly be expected to write ‘great classics’ as soon as the new

theatres opened. The theatre section of the report, and its underlying faith in the ‘universality’ (once experienced) of the great classics of the theatre seems to deal with the role of the Canadian playwright as a, somewhat uncomfortable, afterthought. And no real solutions are offered, as in other areas.

The final recommendation -- and the most concrete of the whole report -- was the creation of a Canada Council to provide financial support to the arts, letters and humanities:

We therefore recommend: *a. That a body be created to be known as the Canada Council for the Encouragement of the Arts, Letters, Humanities and Social Sciences to stimulate and to help voluntary organizations within these fields, to foster Canada's cultural relations abroad, to perform the functions of a national commission for UNESCO, and to devise and administer a system of scholarships as recommended in Chapter XXII.*
(*Royal Commission 377*)

The commission also recommended that music, drama and ballet be ‘encouraged’ “*by such means as the underwriting of tours, the commissioning of music for events of national importance, and the establishment of awards to young people of promise whose talents have been revealed in national festivals of music, drama or the ballet*” (*Royal Commission 381*). One can assume by this that the commissioning of plays is recommended, although it is not explicitly stated; one more indication of the ambiguous status accorded writers for the theatre.

These recommendations were made with certain important provisos:

1. That no artist should sit on the Canada Council *as an arts representative*, although they could sit as a “distinguished and public-spirited Canadian citizen” (*Royal Commission 377*).

2. That the Canada Council should not become “in any sense a department of government” (*Royal Commission* 377) although it would have to be responsible to the government for spending its money in a responsible way.

3. That while the commission's suggestions are often “definite and precise” (*Royal Commission* 379), the Canada Council should be able to define its own duties.

The commissioners were well-aware (especially from Robertson Davies' special study) of the dangers “inherent in attempting to establish and operate an agency for the advancement of national culture directly under government control” (*Royal Commission* 199) and were also trying to keep the Council out of the hands of the various arts lobby groups while giving the Council maximum leeway in conducting its business. The goal was to make every effort to preserve the projected Council from the “severely repressive” influence of “government patronage” (*Royal Commission* 199) by creating what we now refer to as ‘arms-length’ funding. What its ultimate success was in this area was to vary with time, but, clearly, the will was there.

The *Report* of the Massey/Levésque Commission was well received, almost universally, and sold surprisingly well -- although some critics were troubled by its strategy of anti-Americanism. It had silenced some critics who feared that it might lead to the surrender of Québec's cultural life to English Canada by hearing witnesses in French without translators and publishing the final report in both languages; neither of which was a translation of the other (W. Whittaker 132-3). It had also succeeded remarkably in its goal of uniting nationalist sentiments with the agenda of the cultural elite and forging a consensus on cultural planning for the future of Canadian theatre. In particular it had set a number of priorities in place for the future Canada Council to pursue. Firstly, it had moved

the concept of a National Theatre into a workable hypothesis by recommending a concentration on a touring company that would bring both theatre and theatre expertise and training to the different regions of the country, in hopes of fostering a wider theatrical base of professional companies rather than concentrating finances and talent in one, unreachable for most, institution. Secondly, it had foregrounded 'the best' as a principal of development: the best in the sense of advancing professionalism in the theatre and 'the best' in the sense of repertoire.

In effect, what was being recommended to Canadians was a theatre based on the British and European models; a theatre that would reproduce the type of expertise and repertoire available in England and Europe. It was the commission's firm belief that the average Canadian would, through opportunity and experience, learn to understand and enjoy this type of high culture and therefore reap the traditional humanist benefits from it. One of the triumphs of the commission was that rather than appearing undemocratic and elitist in proposing the model of high culture to Canadians, they had turned the accusation on its head and were suggesting that those who felt that the average Canadian had no desire for, or interest in high culture, were being undemocratic and elitist themselves.

In another sense, of course, this was a triumph of power. The champions of high culture had also succeeded in 'reproducing' their own tastes by sending Canadian theatre in this direction. The European model of the theatre, largely presenting the classics, was, whatever its usefulness in 'raising' the Canadian public, precisely the theatre that the commissioners would choose to attend themselves; that suited their own tastes. There is no doubt that they sincerely believed in the benefits they assumed would accrue to the Canadian public from this action -- their actions may have been entirely benevolent -- but, at

least unconsciously they had succeeded, at least at the level of recommendations, in imposing their vision of culture on the plans for Canadian theatre. One of the potential victims of this would be the playwright and the possible playwright, since they alone, did not fit neatly into the model. They were, despite all good intentions, going to have to fight their way into the new vision of Canadian theatre.

Endnotes to Chapter Two

¹ This is a common feature of nations emerging from colonial status. Strunk writes about emerging post-colonial nations: “The *raison d’être*, one suspects, is the desire for legitimacy (literature seen as entry ticket to the family of culturally ‘established’ nations) in conjunction with what Steiner refers to as ‘moral optimism’ based on the belief that such endeavors would cultivate human judgments that would counteract barbarism” (Strunk 68).

² For the clearest overview of the nationalism of the 60’s and 70s, see Morton, 117.

³ It must be remembered that ‘culture’ as a sociological (or anthropological) term is different from art. The mixing of genres for the purpose of discussion here is not intended to suggest that I am conflating the two. For a discussion of the Canadian ‘Arts Industry,’ see Woodcock 113-4.

⁴ As Salter points out, this preoccupation with transplanting British high culture to Canada and installing it as a model for Canadian theatre under the auspices of some form of national theatre helped, in the long run, “to weaken Canada's attempts to achieve cultural sovereignty. They were also managing to embed a set of reactionary cultural values which a number of Canadians found suspect, though a serious challenge to those values has only been mounted recently” (Salter 79). The result would be (and is) that the imported models of theatre (British and other) were set up as preferential production choices and that Canadian playwrights would be challenged to imitate them in order to be acceptable in the repertoire. As in the case of nineteenth century playwrights such as Mair, Heavysedge and Curzon, this could only lead to poor and imitative work, unlikely to be produced.

⁵ Salter has further suggested that the effects are long-term:

This bias towards English culture, combined with a faith in Shakespeare as a canonical writer, proved detrimental to the development of an indigenous Canadian theatre, no matter how broadly defined. Since no Canadian could ever emulate, let alone match, Shakespeare's achievement, generation after generation has had difficulty overcoming the 'anxiety of influence,' a condition which was only made worse by the establishment in 1953, of the Stratford Shakespearean Festival. (Salter 80)

⁶ George Woodcock has defended Massey against the charges of élitism as follows:

I have often heard it said that Vincent Massey was an elitist, and that the report was an elitist document. And so, if you think in such barren terms, it probably was. But in the cultural desert of Canada at that time a group of men and women was needed who could act the elitist role and decide what seemed to be good for the arts and suggest that what was good for the arts was good for the country. (Woodcock 51)

This is a wholly just defense, but somewhat misses the point. It was the decisions that were taken by Massey, the Commission and, later, the Canada Council that are at question here and their consequences. Therefore, it is reasonable to question the basis on which those decisions were taken. This in no way diminishes the crucial role that Massey played in the development of Canadian theatre.

⁷ Wood's article suggested (among other things) "establishing a state theatre, not in serious competition with commercial theatres and with the eventual aim to include a chain of such theatres spread across Canada." (quoted in W. Whittaker 65)

⁸ The idea, according to Pickersgill, came from Claxton. Both the idea for the commission and its chair originated in the fall of 1948 but no action could be taken since the three men involved were aware that Mackenzie King would have looked upon the idea as “ridiculous” (Pickersgill 139).

⁹ St. Laurent’s motives in agreeing to the commission appear to have been purely political and self-serving. Says Pickersgill:

I was not really surprised, however, that Claxton and Pearson were able to persuade him that such an inquiry would be in the public interest as well as being good politics. He was persuaded largely because the Commission was to deal with broadcasting and federal aid to the Universities and his sympathy for aid to the arts was, in the early stages, very limited. He once said to me he was not very enthusiastic about subsidizing ‘ballet dancing.’

(Pickersgill 139-40)

Because of this lack of enthusiasm St. Laurent quickly agreed to the completed report being printed and available for distribution before being submitted to the government. In that way he could say, when the report was tabled, that the government had not read it and was therefore uncommitted to any legislation based on it (Pickersgill 139-40).

¹⁰ The Duplessis government of Québec naturally came out in full cry against the commission primarily because of this part of its mandate which was seen as more overt federal meddling in the provincial jurisdiction of education. The badly under-funded universities were much more enthusiastic.

¹¹ The other members of the commission were: Arthur Surveyer, a Québec engineer and N.

A. M. Mackenzie, President of the University of British Columbia. George Woodcock notes that the choice of no artists or people closely connected with the arts was deliberate: “[t]he three academicians were not in disciplines that brought them directly into contact with the arts, and this appearance of disinterest was to give their final recommendations an added emphasis” (Woodcock 45). I rather believe the reason was more along the lines of Massey’s comment, that in Canada, ‘sober men don’t dance.’

¹² But the phrase could easily be used later to criticize the British model that was used so repeatedly in the early days of the regional system and at Stratford.

¹³ On the *Report’s* ‘high-browism’ see Lower, 118-9.

¹⁴ See Litt, *Muses*, 53-4.

¹⁵ It is an interesting aspect of the era that mass culture, in its technological manifestations, was seen as foreign to Canada but natural to the United States (Litt, *Muses* 104). As early as the 50’s social and cultural critics in the U. S. were warning Americans about the dangers of the ‘entertainment industry.’ The new, technological, market-driven, mass culture was (in its sheer size) ‘foreign’ everywhere.

¹⁶ Erna Buffie looks at the Massey/Levésque Commission from the point of view of Canadian philosophers and historians and comes up with a similar conclusion, although for different reasons. See Buffie, 4.

¹⁷ That special report was entitled “The Theatre” and was published separately in *Royal Commission Studies*. Davies wrote it, true to form, as a dialogue between Lovewit and Trueman and besides offering some trenchant criticisms of the state of theatre at the time, and some perceptive criticisms of the dangers of political intrusions into the art, also uses it

to grind a few of his own axes against amateur theatre practices.

¹⁸ “We are told in Vancouver, for example, that the Canadian actor would not find it possible to continue were it not for the C.B.C., and in Montreal that the C.B.C. has created a renaissance of dramatic art in Canada” (*Royal Commission* 194).

¹⁹ “In a special study prepared for us on French day-time serials it is reported that only one of the twelve serials reviewed was a satisfactory production. The others were guilty of melodramatic exaggeration, unreality, and an excessive use of commonplace and stereotyped forms” (*Royal Commission* 35).

²⁰ “‘It was with considerable amusement’, said a group from the Prairies, ‘that we read under the heading National Museum . . . that ‘It is centrally located and readily reached by bus and streetcar’ . . . We ask if we can be expected to take this statement seriously?’ The good-natured joke was preliminary to a helpful discussion of what such a national institution could do for the rest of Canada” (*Royal Commission* 12). This type of ‘joke’ would rapidly cease to be good-natured with rising regional unrest.

²¹ Not all aspects of the commission’s elitism is couched in such gentle paternalism. Davies castigated the Canadian public as uneducated in a knowledge of any but the most famous of the classics: “[b]ut we Canadians are an illiterate people in this respect, and we fear the unknown as only the ignorant and the intellectually lazy can fear it. This is a matter, my dear Trueman, in which our country desperately needs reform” (Davies, “Theatre” 373). But even Davies believed that theatre “is a truly popular art, and the people will support it when it is unmistakably of the first quality” (Davies, “Theatre” 392).

Chapter Three: The Founding of the Canada Council

Founding

On January 18, 1957, Prime Minister Louis Saint-Laurent rose in the House of Commons to move the resolution that would lead to the creation of the Canada Council.

The bill passed the House on February 15, the Senate on March 12 and became law on March 28, 1957.¹ The only opposition came from the Social Credit party who felt that the measure would “subvert religion and the family.” (Bothwell 153 and see also Granatstein, *Canada* 142) This action by the government was not surprising since the *Report* of the Massey/Levésque Commission had been extremely well received and widely publicized. Indeed, as Litt points out:

The Massey Report was hailed as a symbolic step forward in national development from the moment it hit the bookstores. Drawing on the popular saga of Canada's 'progress' from colony to nation, nationalists noted that just as political, military, and diplomatic autonomy had been earlier stage on the road to national independence, now the young nation, confident and optimistic following its wartime feats, was discovering its cultural identity.

The Massey Commission reflected a new stage of national development that would see a coarse, adolescent Canada mature into a civilized adult. (Litt, *Muses* 5)

The Massey/Levésque Commission had carried forward and increased the momentum of the cultural lobby and the time, it seemed, was entirely propitious to set in motion a new phase in the nation's development that would signal to the world that Canada was reaching full maturity in the educational and artistic fields.

Yet there were some disquieting concerns as well as to the government's political

commitment to entering the field of culture.² The *Report* of the Massey/Levésque Commission, the cornerstone of which was the recommendation to create the Canada Council, had been released in 1951 and in the six years since its release, “the Canadian government had not yet made a single move or appropriated a solitary copper for the support of literature and the arts in Canada” (Creighton 248). In fact, although the Massey/Levésque Commission is today regarded “as one of the most successful Royal Commissions in Canadian history” (Litt, “Massey” 23), two years after its release, “only 12 of the report’s 146 recommendations were implemented” (Litt, *Muses* 237) and none of these related to the matter of the Canada Council. A number of reasons have been given to explain the delay: reasons of political expediency (W. Whittaker 146), the fear of aggravating Québec,³ resistance to government involvement in “things cultural” on the part of Saint-Laurent and C. D Howe (Granatstein, *Canada* 140), the usual tendency of governments to allow Royal Commission recommendations to languish in government records (Woodcock 55) and the resistance to setting a precedent in politically loaded areas.⁴ The actual reason for the delay seems to have been a combination of the reluctance of Saint-Laurent to enter the cultural field and the even greater reluctance of the government to commit large sums of money to what many saw as a luxury for the rich -- a politically dangerous move.⁵ However it is clear that a number of well-placed and prominent Liberals (Maurice Lamontagne, Brooke Claxton, Jack Pickersgill, John Deutch) had strongly urged Saint-Laurent to go forward with the creation of the Council and their efforts were finally successful when the money, suddenly, became available.

In a manner of speaking, the creation of the Canada Council cost the government of Canada (and by that, I mean, the citizens of Canada) nothing at all. The fiscal year 1956-7

was a year of budget surplus and into the surplus fell, unexpectedly, the succession duties of two millionaires from the Maritimes: Izaak Walton Killam and Sir James Dunn. The total duties amounted to about \$100,000,000 and Treasury Board Secretary John Deutsch was concerned at the prospect that such a windfall would be “just piddle[d] away” on day to day expenses (Granatstein, *Canada* 140). Jack Pickersgill suggested to Deutsch, and then to Saint-Laurent, that the money should be used to endow the proposed Canada Council: \$50 million for capital grants for Universities and \$50 million as a working capital fund for the Council which would be expected to provide all grants from the investment interest on the \$50 million (Pickersgill 139). With the financial hurdle out of the way, Saint-Laurent and the cabinet finally agreed to go ahead with the bill.

Clearly there had been a cabinet battle over the creation of the Canada Council, the intensity of which is unknown. Certainly the Council was, in one sense, a switch in political direction, “simply because culture had been so patently an unwanted orphan before 1957. Culture was European, foreign, not Canadian, and the idea that the national government should offer funds to help opera singers or long-haired professors was virtually inconceivable” (Granatstein, *Canada* 139). It is possible to speculate on the nature of that dispute and to suggest that its outcome was victory on the part of those who saw the new forces of nationalism as politically positive and the establishment of the Canada Council as a bold response to the development of ‘state culture’ within the communist bloc, as well as an equally bold acceptance of the Massey/Levésque Commission's identification of American mass culture as the enemy and Canadian identity and culture as the battlefield (McPherson 329). It is also *very* possible to suggest that the outcome was a victory for those who saw the new council as an extension, under government direction, of the old tradition of

patronage of the arts by the wealthy. Since the funding for the Council was to come from the estates of two wealthy men, and was intended at the outset to be its sole source of income, the Council was really, at first, set up to distribute involuntary patronage from Killam and Dunn's estate. This was hardly the revolution that some have seen it as and the transfer of the *distribution* of that patronage to the state, simply ensured that the government could develop "a cultural policy that would enhance the national glory" if it chose to -- certainly the goal of Claxton, Deutsch and the others (Woodcock 55).⁶ Thus, the creation of the Council was the acquisition by the government of the system of patronage associated with high culture in order to use and control it. It appears, indeed, that the creation of the Canada Council might not have been taken (or might have been greatly delayed) without the sudden appearance of the tax windfall -- the Saint-Laurent government (aside from a few individuals) had little political will to commit the government to a citizen funded program of support for the arts. This does not negate what the Council actually achieved -- we must be careful to distinguish, here, between purpose of the Canada Council and its actual results -- but it does indicate that the Council retained, certainly in its inception, many of the attitudes towards culture and theatre that have been dealt with above. What makes this doubly apparent is that the men who strove for the creation of the Massey/Levésque Commission, with its alliance of culture and nationalism, are virtually the same men who fought for the Council in cabinet.

Composition

It is no accident that the name of Brooke Claxton has run like a refrain through these pages. Claxton's career-long connection with cultural lobbying and politics ensured

that he was always at the forefront of any moves in the areas where cultural activity and government interconnected.⁷ Claxton's private career was that of the vice-president and general manager for Canada of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company (Granatstein, *Canada* 144) following a successful political career. As a Liberal politician he served as Minister of Health and Welfare and also National Defense. In addition he was an ardent nationalist and cultural lobbyist in the area of broadcasting. As Litt points out, "with his background in national voluntary associations, his political connections, and his nationalism, Claxton embodied three factors that were critical to the creation of the Massey Commission" (Litt, *Muses* 11). He was also a Vincent Massey admirer and protégé; and so we have the interesting spectacle of Claxton suggesting Massey for the Royal Commission which recommends a Canada Council which ends up being headed by Claxton.

There is no doubt, however, that Claxton had the ability and energy. Everyone from Pickersgill to Claxton's own Director, Albert W. Trueman agreed on that. (see Pickersgill 139 and Trueman 144) Naturally they would, since Pickersgill suggested the appointments of both Claxton and Trueman. Claxton's approach in general seems to have been to allow Trueman and the staff to run things while he (Claxton) acted as spokesperson for the agency (Woodcock 58). The other important figures at the Canada Council in the early years were Father Georges-Henri Levesque (the most prominent social-scientist in Québec, who had served on the Massey/Levesque Commission), the second Chairman, Claude Bissell, and -- in the area of theatre -- Peter Dwyer.⁸

The structure of the Canada Council is bipartite: the Council itself and those employed or commissioned by it. The Council is government appointed, including the chair, director and associate director, and thus, its members are also removable by government. It

must account fiscally each year to Parliament and to the Auditor General and so, even though its status is 'arms length' in principal, it resembles in many ways a government agency in its structure and responsibilities (see Milligan, "Ambiguities" 68). From the very beginning politics was the most important criteria in appointing members of the Council: "Claxton in fact declared, 'Work on getting the Canada Council set up was worse than forming a cabinet; this is really the damnedest place for people to disagree whenever anyone suggests the name of someone for anything'" (Granatstein, *Canada* 145). The inevitable result of this is, of course, that the Canada Council members were less than perfectly competent to judge in the fields of arts and culture and as a consequence the Council, from inception, relied heavily on the judgment of its employed (as opposed to appointed) officers and upon hired judges in specific areas of the arts.⁹

The lack of arts expertise (and over-abundance of political and business expertise) on the part of the appointed members of the early Canada Council had three main results. Firstly, the establishment of policy -- based on the mandate issued by the government -- was *not* based on any real expertise in the arts and, because of the preponderance of businessmen on the Council, *was* based on a faulty economic understanding of the performing arts (including theatre) which, it was assumed, worked economically just like any other business (see Chapter Four). Secondly, the policy established, due to the Council's lack of experience, was intentionally *ad hoc* and therefore could be dominated by those who had *some* cultural experience and were looked to for an example. These people, like Claxton, had the same kind of high culture/nationalist bias that we have already examined and they perpetuated it in the Canada Council. The third result was that the Council backed away from dealing directly with individual artists, or even collectivities of

artists and preferred to deal through a system of anonymous judges. All three of these faults will be dealt with separately in the appropriate sections of the thesis starting with the first one here, as we look at the Canada Council's mandate and how it chose to interpret that mandate.

Mandate

The Act by which the Canada Council was created enjoined it to “foster and promote the study and enjoyment of, and the production of works in the arts, humanities and social sciences.” As Granatstein points out, this “was a sweeping task but one that was completely undefined, and how the Council was to proceed was left equally unclear” (Granatstein, *Canada* 143). Since the Council was to be a public body reporting to Parliament, it was necessary for the Council to formulate an overall policy and approach, with an accompanying set of guidelines. Because of its arms-length status, that policy and how it dictated the distribution of money was in the Council's own hands. This must have presented a singularly difficult situation for the members of the Council, aggravated by the need to start from scratch in building the Canadian performing arts (including theatre), the lack of precedent for a public body of this nature in Canada, and the lack of experience in the (performing) arts of the politically appointed members of the Canada Council. At the same time there was a need to establish consistency from the beginning so that the arts community would know what to expect and how to proceed in soliciting aid.¹⁰ The members of the Council (particularly Claxton) consulted with the British Arts Council, the Ford, Rockefeller and Carnegie Foundations, The Canadian Social Sciences Research Council of Canada and the Canada Foundation in a search for guidelines applicable to the

Council's situation in Canada (W. Whittaker 170 and Trueman 138).

Although we are concerned here with theatre, a number of general policy decisions that were reached had a direct impact on funding in that area. Some of these policies were structural: it was decided, for instance, to keep the secretariat small and insist that the Chairman and the whole Council vote on all awards of grants (McPherson 331) but that all grant requests would have to be presented to the Council by the Director after their evaluation by "colleagues and special committees" (Trueman 140). This ensured that the initial vetting of grant requests would be done by juries drawn anonymously from among artists and experts so that the Council could not impose its own standards of taste but rather let anonymous 'peer' juries of artist make the decisions about artistic merit (Milligan, "Ambiguities" 64). Although it led to considerable dispute over the years, there seemed to be no better mechanism available.¹¹ The system of peer juries, however, was totally inefficient when it came to judging larger institutions, such as theatre companies, where the bulk of the Council's money went. As Frank Milligan points out, performing arts organizations involved the work of many different types of artists and what needed to be judged was their combined and varied work as it was "assembled into programs and performances" (Milligan, "Ambiguities" 66). In fact, as time went on, the only people with the expertise to truly judge the efforts of a theatre company were the people running -- or who had run -- theatre companies and they were hardly likely to be objective since any decision would have a direct result on their own present, or future, budgets. Therefore, although the peer jury system is a locus of dispute in the working of the Canada Council, after a few disastrous applications (such as the Crest controversy) it tended to be dropped and decisions on groups and institutions were, largely, placed in the hands of the Chairman,

Director and (later) the Arts Supervisor (McPherson 332).

A second structural policy decision taken was to make no explanation to the individuals or groups whose grant applications were denied. This was taken at the suggestion of Alan Pifer (later president of the Carnegie Foundation).¹² Although the Council would give general reasons such as financial incapacity, or an overwhelming number of applications (both always true), it would not “in the case of refusal based on our judgment that the applicant, an individual or an institution, was second-rate or even third-rate in performance, was unpromising; was, in the case of an institution, badly run by inadequate personnel” give detailed reasons concerning the refusal. “Such explanations could only stimulate resentment, argument, and long and futile correspondence” (Trueman 138). This may have saved the Council time and effort but combined with anonymous juries it led to a situation where no-one was quite sure where the Council stood on artistic matters, a void that would most naturally be filled by the assumption that one could only be certain of success with the tried and true classics. Outside of that repertoire, in the larger sense, “there was . . . from the start, an uncertainty in the Council about its proper course, soon matched by an uneasiness among its clientele” (Milligan, “Ambiguities” 62).

Hugo McPherson, in “Gilding the Muses” has argued that the Canada Council's institutionalized “academy” status combined with its refusal to assume the judgmental requirements of an academy has seriously hampered its ability to assume a leadership role in the area of standards and tastes.¹³ His conclusion is only strengthened by the Council's refusal to explain their specific grounds for rejecting grant applications, however convenient and time-saving that might be for the Council and the lack of real expertise in the constituency of the early Canada Council's membership. McPherson's argument,

however, seems to assume a level playing field of objective judgment for “national standards,” whereas I would argue that into that void of leadership would naturally fall the bias (even on the part of the Council's members) towards the high culture of Britain and Europe inherited, in part, from the Massey/Levésque Commission. In practical terms: when in doubt -- and in this case, the doubt is institutionalized -- choose high culture as opposed to innovative Canadian material.

The larger and more crucial question remained: what would be the basis for the awarding of grants, or, who would get the money? Criteria of judgment were necessary, but what would they be? The question rapidly seems to have become a series of dichotomies that the early Council struggled with: nation/regional, ‘raise/spread,’ professional/amateur and quality/quantity. Though these groupings often over-lap and always impact on each other, it would be more profitable to examine them separately. It is important to keep in mind not only the decisions reached and their rationale, but also how the discourse of the debate developed. Since these criteria were not put into place all at once, but gradually over several years, we must look at the Canada Council's annual reports for its first three years of operations. The crucial years for this topic are 1957-58 and 1958-59, in which a partial outline of the Council's guidelines was published for its constituency.

Regionalism

The question of regional versus national was (then and now) as much a political as an artistic one and the Canada Council made no secret of the dilemma. In its first annual report (1958) it raised for public consideration some of its major concerns. One of these questions spoke directly to the issue of regionalism:

In considering its programme the Council had no precedent. Some of the questions which the Council had to keep before it were . . . To what extent should the Council disregard the geographic divisions of Canada? By linking its assistance to the best exponent in each field (as is done generally by the Arts Council of Great Britain), the inevitable result would be to concentrate the assistance given in the larger centres, particularly Montreal and Toronto.

(Annual Report 1958, 19)

The touring road show of the Massey/Levésque Commission, the best-selling *Report* and the establishment of the Canada Council had naturally created expectations across the country; expectations particularly among the cultural groups that had lobbied long and hard for the creation of the Council. Now, at last, it seemed that pay-back time was here. Each region felt that its major population centre was deserving of at least one performing arts company -- even though often the population base was far too small: "these and other problems directly connected with the wide distribution of major population centers, their regional pride and the relative isolation of such communities from the rest of the country were to lead to some of the major difficulties in the operation of a national organization to aid the arts" (W. Whittaker 24). Since the concept of a national theatre in a single location was (at the very least) on the back burner, resources would have to be spread across the country. And not only the regions lined up for grants; the Council was suddenly made aware (if it had not been previously) of the vast number of amateur theatre groups in Canada:

Applications have been received from many local theatre groups. These range from the few fully professional groups to those giving an annual school play. Many of them are very good. Hardly a town or a village is

without its dramatic organization. We are informed that there are three hundred of such groups of what may be called 'drama festival' calibre and thousands of others across the country. (*Annual Report 1958*, 15)

Since the members of the Council were political appointees, many (if not all) came from a region, or even city, on the list of applicants. As Milligan puts it, "members of the Council often became acutely aware of their local roots when it was a question of support for an Atlantic symphony orchestra, a Quebec opera company, a Manitoba ballet or an Alberta theatre" (Milligan, "Ambiguities" 66).

Clearly, any decision to choose regional and local over national in granting policy was going to prove a logistical nightmare. There was, however, strong support for making an attempt, as reported by the first Director A. W. Trueman:

There was a body of opinion outside the Council, and within the Council too, at first, that what we ought to do -- indeed, *had* to do -- was support 'grass-roots' endeavours. We should forget about the big organizations in the big cities -- . . . where it was presumed that wealth was at hand and most easily accessible. We should give our encouragement to beginnings, however humble, in the smaller towns and cities, and thus help to create the rich soil in which new and little plants could take root and flourish. In this way the Council would stimulate and support a national disposition to value and cultivate the arts: music, dance, ballet, theatre. The theory sounds good -- fundamental, genuinely philanthropic, and humane. In practice, however, it was impossible. (Trueman 142)

Based on the number of applications from small town choirs, orchestras, theatre groups etc.

there would never be enough money for them all, and to chose a few would be unfair to the rest, and Trueman concluded that spreading the money out among all the applicants would have little result beyond encouraging "hopeless mediocrity" (Trueman 142).

While logistics and finance had a large impact on the issue, so did the Council's vision of itself as a national organization -- needing to set 'national' standards. Since those organizations that met the Council's national standards (i.e. of professionalism) tended to be in the major population centres of central Canada (Toronto and Montréal) the Council's natural inclination would be to come down on the national side of the national/regional debate; and so it did (see W. Whittaker 232-4). The 1958 Annual Report spends a great deal of time justifying this decision on the grounds already discussed and steadfastly maintaining the policy that "local" organizations "should be sustained by local support" (*Annual Report* 1958, 15) and offering free advice as to how these organizations could improve their standards.¹⁴ This focus on "local" vs. "national" is somewhat ingenuous: by what set of criteria is Moose Jaw more "local" than Toronto? What is being masked by this rhetoric is a privileging of large (in terms of audience base and financial resources) over small.

The Council also held out hope that "there may be some theatrical organizations which because of some special quality or activity should receive assistance. In this connection the Council is making a special study of local theatre groups" (*Annual Report* 1958, 15). And, in fact, having enunciated its policy, the report acknowledges that in certain cases it *had* given support to some special cases: "In not a few places it has been gratifying to hear those responsible for local organizations say that in consequence of the Council's help and recognition local financial support has been increased and attendance enlarged"

(Annual Report 1958, 20).

It was somewhat less gratifying to hear vociferous complaints from those regions that had failed to benefit (or saw that they would fail to benefit in the future) from this policy. One Council member, N. A. M. MacKenzie (president of the University of British Columbia), ominously warned Trueman that ““a concentration of interest on Toronto and Central Canada’ was certain to discredit and destroy the Council” (Granatstein, *Canada* 147). MacKenzie was successful in altering the allocations to some extent and set a precedent for future attempts (some successful) to manipulate the Council politically. In general, however, the Council maintained its policy and urged the hundreds of local amateur groups to raise their own standards, prestige and money while holding out hopes of future studies, festivals, theatre schools and tours from professional groups that would give “local audiences additional opportunities to see (or hear) first class exhibitions or performances” (*Annual Report 1958, 25*).¹⁵

Given the level of expectations and the Council's announced policy it is not surprising that the result was negatively received in the regions outside central Canada. This represented the first serious rift in the alliance of high culture, the arts lobby and nationalism and had all the potential to be a dangerous one:

Regional identity in the arts had in the past been expressed through local amateur organizations. These organizations became increasingly disenchanted with the Canada Council as its policies became clear. Even tours by the professional companies were in some instances resented and interpreted as an attempt to woo their audience away from them. Gradually a more realistic policy of local and regional support for these organizations

was to become apparent and this would justify the Council in its policy of not using the major part of its limited resources in that way. (W. Whittaker 236)

In other words, as provincial and municipal governments began to involve themselves in arts funding they filled the vacuum of local and regional funding that the Canada Council had declined to enter and aided their regional performing arts companies to 'rise' to a level where they qualified for Canada Council intervention. As can be imagined this process led to some rather keen discontent on the part of those regional, local and amateur groups who had lobbied so hard for the Massey/Levésque Commission and the Canada Council.

“Raise” or “Spread”

The issue of “raise or spread” was, in many ways a re-statement of the national/regional question in other terms. It was also a re-statement of the Massey/Levésque Commission's privileging of “the best.” Should the Council focus its financial efforts in an endeavour to improve the quality of a few professional performing arts organizations or should it distribute its funds more widely among amateur and semi-professional performing arts organizations in order to “spread appreciation and participation in the arts . . . across the whole country” (W. Whittaker 232). The Council found this a particularly difficult question to resolve, says Whittaker, but surely all the same arguments presented themselves again and the decision was almost a foregone conclusion although the issue was still being raised as late as the 1960 *Annual Report*. Again, with certain exceptions,¹⁶ the Canada Council policy became one of raising the standards of existing professional performing arts organizations rather than spreading the wealth evenly (but thinly). Once again, the

consequences were damaging to local and regional groups' confidence in, and support of, the Council (see Milligan, "Ambiguities" 70). Like a number of other decisions taken by the Council at the time, this one also had unforeseen consequences later on: "This problem was aggravated as artistic activity increased and the demands upon the Council became greater. Consistent with its policy of supporting the already established professional organizations of quality, as the years have gone by the decision has had to be made to cut closer and closer to the top. With some exceptions, the established arts organizations have had the bulk of the money" (W. Whittaker 234).¹⁷

Excellence

Behind all of these policy decisions by the Canada Council lay one fundamental vision of its role: the Council saw its mission as one of supporting excellence. While exceptions would have to be made and political expediencies would have to be considered, the Council saw its role as that of raising the quality of the performing arts -- and thus theatre -- and thereby raising their profile, on a national and international level. Presumably this would not only benefit theatre, and the other performing arts, but would make visible, and justifiable, the work of the Canada Council itself. This is not to suggest that the decision to focus on excellence was self-justifying, but rather that theatre would reap long-term benefits from a high profile for both itself and its funding body. As second Chairman Claude Bissell put it: "We believe that our resources should go to the support of full-time professional artists and organizations that are likely to achieve some degree of national prominence and to efforts to create an audience for first-class performances" (quoted in Granatstein, *Canada* 147). This policy has been framed in a wide variety of ways by both

the Council and its critics. It has been seen as “recognition and promotion of ‘the best’,” (McPherson 331) as support for organizations which could ‘prove themselves’ (W. Whittaker 193) and generally as the promotion of “world standards” (*Annual Report* 1958, 25) and the choice of the professional over the amateur.

Given the situation/status of the theatre and the performing arts at the time (see Section One) it seems difficult to quarrel with the Council's policy choices at the time. As well, it must be remembered, the Council was in a situation without precedent in Canada; there were no models to chose from at home and the foreign models -- The Arts Council of Great Britain and major private foundations in the U. S. -- dealt with totally different theatre and performing arts' situations. As a result the Council felt that even as it was making policy decisions of such a magnitude for the performing arts in Canada, it was, in fact, ‘feeling its way along’ (W. Whittaker 189). As a means of hedging its bets, the Council stated in the first *Annual Report*, “that it is not practical to lay down hard and fast rules or ‘principles’” but that rather it was recording “some opinions which appear to be widely held” which it was considering but not advancing as “determined policy” (*Annual Report* 1958, 25).

Among these “opinions,” the ones that directly affected theatre were the following:

- (a) As a general rule the foundation should not initiate projects of its own, and it should not directly commission works or engage artists, but there may be exceptions. . . .
- (d) Substantial assistance should be given to the two or three leading organizations in the country having world standards to enable them to reach more people and to stimulate improvement in standards of performance and appreciation. . . .

- (g) The content of programmes or the choice of plays should not be dictated. Even the performance of Canadian works should not be an express condition of a grant, although the extent to which an organization has presented Canadian artists and works may be considered when an application for a grant or renewal is made.
- (h) Grants should ordinarily be made for one year. There should be no undertaking, express or implied, that a grant will be renewed. . . .
- (o) Many communities need new buildings or equipment for theatres, halls, and museums, but generally speaking there are local undertakings which can be best carried out with local support. (*Annual Report 1958*, 25-6)

In short, the Canada Council had decided on certain principles which, because of its inexperience, it would advance as “opinions” and operate upon, *ad hoc*, until experience showed whether these principles, rules or opinions were functional or not.

In the face of the totally new frontier of government funding for the arts this was a not unwise approach -- had the Council been a totally neutral body, operating in a political vacuum. But as we have seen, from the very beginning the Council carried with it a fairly specific vision (inherited from the Massey/Levésque Commission and its supporters) of what was proper and appropriate in the arts -- in other words high culture -- and the Council at no time operated in a political vacuum. Arms length or not, political forces were constantly impinging on its policies, as we have seen in the case of Mackenzie and will see in a number of other cases. In addition to this there is the ‘natural’ process of bureaucratization that any institution falls prey to once the first flush of enthusiasm has

begun to wear off against reality's sandpaper. It becomes rapidly clear that the initial, tentative 'opinions' of the first years fairly rapidly became the almost-written-in-stone principles of later years. This is not to suggest that the Canada Council is inflexible; in fact it has been quite innovative in certain areas (like the Art Bank). But in areas of general principle, many of the initial concepts discussed above became so firmly entrenched that they were almost impossible to change in later years, and despite the abundant evidence of their consequences, some of them are only changing now.

Of course, the Canada Council discussed a number of other more operational issues through the early years ('58-'60), such as: should the Council assume the regular operating costs of organizations (like ballet companies), which had theretofore been met by the community, and how was the money to be divided up within the arts (W. Whittaker 191). In the first fiscal year, 1957-58, the interest on the endowment fund was \$2,700,000.¹⁸ After administration costs of \$200,000 were deducted and the Council's UNESCO obligations were met, there remained \$2,432,000 for granting purposes. Of this, between \$1,000,000 and \$1,250,000 would be allocated (yearly) over the first few years for fellowships, scholarships and grants to individuals as well as being used for special projects and publication costs (the Canada Council ran two different periodicals of its own beside the *Annual Report*). This left, normally, about \$1,000,000 to be spent supporting arts organizations across the country (W. Whittaker 189). Today it seems to us almost ludicrously small but, at the time, in 1958 dollars and in contrast to absolutely nothing in previous years, it was considered *largesse*. Walter Whittaker, in his study of the Council's early years has concluded that while under the terms of the Canada Council Act, the Council was free to spend its money as it saw fit and could theoretically and practically alter

its funding pattern every year in any way it wished, "the tendency was . . . to hold the line upon the basis of the distribution decided in that first year" (W. Whittaker 190). This conservatism of funding patterns directly mirrors the conservatism of philosophy seen above. One of the myths of the Canada Council suggests that the Council came stumbling into being, rapidly improvising so that funds need not be held back while policy was hashed out and through a mixed process of trial and error, the Council gradually developed its policies for (at least) the 1960s. However, based on spending patterns and the *Annual Reports*, I would like to suggest that the opposite happened -- at least as far as theatre is concerned. The Canada Council set up its general principles and funding patterns very quickly, but then doggedly declined (sometimes under pressure) to alter them. This had more than its own impact since other funding bodies (either already in being, or coming into being in the early years) tended to follow the Canada Council's lead in where they gave their money. The impact of these decisions quickly became enormous.

Application

Even a casual glance through the Canada Council's Annual Reports would show how much of a priority theatre was, from the very beginning. The focus of nearly half of the early Reports deals with happenings in the theatre and, within the Arts area, theatre (including Opera and Ballet) receives the largest single block of organizational funding.¹⁹ Yet, beyond the general principles of funding outlined above, the Council, in the first years, did not have a fixed theatre policy which it endeavoured to implement. Rather, it shaped its policy according to the changing theatrical picture. There were certain overall objectives in the Council's planning of support

although these were in the nature of operating principles rather than a theatrical plan. The principle of touring professional companies, of supporting a high standard of established professional theater, creating a National Theater School, developing a regional theater pattern, and maintaining contact between writers and the theater so that a native drama could emerge; all these were principles which the Council optimistically wanted to be in operation. (W. Whittaker 323-4)

In fact even this is an over-optimistic appraisal, since the concept of some kind of a regional theatre system (see below), was not developed until after a conference sponsored by the Canadian Conference of the Arts was held in May of 1961.

The development of a “plan” for Canadian theatre seems to have been as *ad hoc* as other Council plans in the beginning and only coalesced as a reaction to developments in the field (such as the creation of the Manitoba Theatre Centre) and the suggestions of the 1961 conference. The Council did, in accordance with its general principles, focus on a number of key elements, not the least of which was the belief that ‘raising’ quality and investing in excellence were best served by concentrating its grants among the few professional companies in central Canada and emphasizing touring as a solution to the problem of regionalism. This served a double purpose since the touring companies were drawn from the professional theatres and therefore they both served the regions and developed the excellence of the companies themselves through practical experience. The Council also adopted from the *Report* of the Massey/Levésque Commission the need to train more professionals in the theatre and therefore moved early in the area of a National Theatre School (W. Whittaker 252).

Also in line with the *Report*, the Council expressed its nationalist awareness of the dangers of American popular culture pressing across the border from the south and expressed its concern that “almost anything done in Canada in the arts, humanities and social sciences is exposed to American comparisons if not direct American competition. We are exposed to the sound waves of American Broadcasts and the invasion of many of the best of American television programmes” (*Annual Report* 1958, 22). To counter this, the existing professional theatres had to be bolstered while the need of the regions must be met in two ways: in the short-term by extensive touring out of central Canada and a study of the possibilities of developing ‘local’ theatre in the regions sometime in the future, eliminating the need for that (expensive) touring. Other than that, as we have seen, the ‘local’ theatres must find a way to procure adequate facilities and ‘raise’ themselves to a professional level worthy of direct funding. It is clear that, in the discourse of the Council, ‘local’ was rapidly developing baggage as a pejorative term, meaning not only outside of central Canada, but also lower in quality and unprofessional in nature, requiring “touring to” by the quality professionals of Montréal and Toronto. Indeed, in the eyes of the first Annual Report, the bright spots in Canadian performing arts in general were:

The Stratford Shakespearean Festival, le Théâtre du Nouveau Monde, the National Ballet, the Montréal Festival, the Toronto, Montreal and *other* symphony orchestras and numerous other organizations, as well as the work of a number of gifted individuals of international reputation show that Canada has been accompanying its material growth by an increasing maturity in these other fields. There is also a large volume of *local* support by provinces, municipalities, corporations and individual donors and

workers. Hundreds of organizations are developing *good* programmes.

(*Annual Report* 1958, 21 my italics)

There is a clear distinction in discourse here between the professional, central Canadian *namable* organizations and the “other,” “local” organizations who are still “developing good programmes.” At one level, of course, this is understandable in terms of professional development, but at an initial stage of development it hardly seems a healthy attitude.

Lessons learned would soon change the ‘others,’ and ‘locals’ into *regionals*, reflecting a change in attitude.

Touring was set up within the first year (1958) using the existing company of Le Théâtre du Nouveau Monde on the French side and on the English side by the Canadian Players. Le Théâtre du Nouveau Monde had some of the best professional actors in Québec in its company but lacked a permanent home (W. Whittaker 248) and was, therefore, an excellent choice. The Canadian Players was led by Douglas Campbell and made up primarily from among the actors of the Stratford Festival. Since the costs of touring (even then) were high both companies toured with minimal sets, each actor in the small cast performing several roles, “reducing quantity not quality” (*Annual Report* 1958, 23). Even this presented a number of serious problems, not the least of which was a notable lack of experience in touring and financial management. Beyond this there was the larger problem of costs, even with Canada Council support. As the Council quickly recognized:

In Canada it is unfortunately true today that costs are so high that coverage by major attractions cannot ordinarily be self-supporting outside the big cities. While a first-class company might avoid loss or even make some money by playing a limited number of large centres at the right times with

reasonably popular performances, there is a general agreement that with costs as they are today this is almost out of the question even if only the eleven or twelve principal places across Canada are to be covered in a tour
(Annual Report 1958, 23).

Since the tours were meant as a service to 'local' communities and were therefore intended to reach into the outlying areas, they were soon to prove a serious financial burden, far beyond the budget and the managerial limits of the Canadian Players. For a number of years afterwards the Players' budget had to be augmented by the Council again and again; the Players themselves re-organized and combined with other groups until finally the project had to be abandoned -- perhaps having served its purpose. In addition, the tour pointed out (once again) the serious lack of infrastructure in Canadian theatre:

The Council has given considerable attention to the difficulties encountered by companies touring across Canada both because of the technical limitations sometimes to be met in theatres and auditoriums with shallow stages or inadequate lighting systems, and because of the difficulties which companies sometimes have in finding a suitable sponsoring organization.

(Annual Report 1959, 26)

It was obviously something of a chicken and egg conundrum: if the Council chose not to develop theatre regionally but rather to tour then it ran up against the inability to tour economically because of the lack of regional theatrical development and this became another factor that prompted the development of a regional theatre system. Yet the fact that the Canada Council chose to persist so long (and expensively) with the Canadian Players shows their absolute commitment to the concept of touring 'quality' over 'local'

development. We shall return to the phenomenon of the Canadian Players when we begin to look at repertoire in the early Council-sponsored Canadian theatre.

Another important area of the first years of the Council's applications of its policies is precisely that of finance and theatre economics. In its first Annual Report the Council stated:

Many countries have found it necessary to subsidize most forms of art for generations. More and more this is proving to be the case even in North America. In Canada it is unfortunately true today that costs are so high that coverage by major attractions cannot ordinarily be self-supporting outside the big cities. . . . This points to the desirability of there being in each major centre a community committee with representation from the principal groups in the locality and, even more important, with representative citizens willing and able to stir up local support. (*Annual Report* 1958, 23)

The role of this community committee in stirring up local support is presumably to help develop a larger audience for local performances as well as tours -- the context of the quote is that of touring -- in order that the local company or tour might eventually become self-financing. The Canada Council clearly believed (or, at the very least, hoped) that Canadian theatre could become self-supporting and, "that as an organization achieved stability it should rely less on the Council's aid" (W. Whittaker 244). The Council insisted that the grants it parceled out to theatres, "should be regarded as a transfusion helping the organization through a phase of its development, but should not become a permanent support of its existence" (W. Whittaker 337). For permanent financial stability, however, the theatre needed to look for its own box office and community -- the Council was

offering what would later be called 'seed money.' This was according to the perceived wisdom of the day: that while theatre was always financially risky, as time passed and managerial expertise grew theatre could become self-financing through its box office revenue, private patronage and a gentle assist from the Council to get it over the rough spots. As a result, as we shall see, the Council spent a great deal of time and energy prodding nascent and established theatre to balance their books -- and even more time, energy and money, rescuing them when they couldn't. Gradually the Council came to see that theatre economics was not in reality what their policies said it was.

Finally, and most importantly, it is necessary to establish here the early Council's policy towards the development and encouragement of Canadian plays. It must be remembered, however, that this policy was formulated in conjunction with the policies discussed above and cannot be separated from them -- indeed, it was most often in conflict with them. It is important, as well, to view this policy clearly as some critics (Susan Crean, for example) have claimed that the Canada Council abdicated its responsibility to both its mandate and the *Report* of the Massey/Levésque Commission by deleting all references to Canadian works from its guidelines (Crean 134). This is certainly untrue, as the Council devoted time in both the 1958 and 1959 Reports (more in 1959) to the topic. To be sure, the references to Canadian plays in 1958 were mostly the type of motherhood statement common in cultural documents up to that time, referring to the "paramount objective in the interest of our national well-being" to "increase the recognition, the prestige and the power conferred to . . . the creative worker. Upon them largely depend the quality of our people and the image we have of our country" (*Annual Report* 1958, 21). The Council was prepared to acknowledge that any investment in the creative process of the playwright -- the

nature of which is left unstated -- would be a risky business:

Perhaps the most fruitful investment that can be made is in people of talent whose early promise is recognized and who need and can profit from assistance that will free them to study and to work. There is no way of assuring success in every case; risks must be taken; we may not know the results for years; there will be many disappointments; and there is no mathematical scale whereby the product can be valued. But in the end what we are and what we do depend on the talent, the training, the opportunities and the work of people of promise. (*Annual Report* 1958, 21)

One other statement directly concerning Canadian playwrights appears in the 1958 Report, although its context is more general and concerns the repertoire of all performing arts institutions applying for grants: "The content of programmes or the choice of plays should not be dictated. Even the performance of Canadian works should not be an express condition of a grant, although the extent to which an organization has presented Canadian artists and works may be considered when an application for a grant or renewal is made" (*Annual Report* 1958, 21). This statement of policy, made from the very beginning of the Council's mandate (and formulated in a period of acknowledged *ad hoc* policy development) has been stubbornly adhered to until the present time of writing (although it was somewhat modified in the years following the Gaspé Manifesto), and would do more to drive a rift between the Council and Canadian playwrights (and their supporters) than any other statement the Council was to make. It was to lead to the Gaspé Manifesto (see below) and was a major contributor -- as we shall see -- to the movement of writers for the stage in Canada away from the Council supported regional system, and into the alternative theatre

of the 60s and 70s. The Council seems to have felt that by refusing to impose quotas for Canadian plays -- and, therefore, against foreign plays, including the classics (for that is what it amounts to) -- they were observing the principle of artistic freedom and leaving the nascent professional theatre of Canada room to grow and capture a wider audience. Of course, it also reflects the high culture bias that we have been tracing through this study by suggesting that a Canadian theatre can function, serve the public and grow more quickly, on a repertoire of non-Canadian plays. It presupposes that the potential audiences for Canadian theatre are not particularly interested in Canadian plays but, rather, in the foreign and classical repertoire. It leaves the way clear for individual theatres, who were to completely control the choice of repertoire, to decline to produce any Canadian plays, new or old, if they chose to do so without any penalty or reduction in funding.

This policy decision may also have been based on the assumption, common at the time, that the development of Canadian playwrights would take a long time and that Canadian theatre should be allowed to grow ahead of, and faster than, its writers. This assumption was only true in the narrow sense. There were already playwrights whose scripts were being successfully performed by the New Play Society, the Jupiter Theatre, the Crest and others -- although their numbers were not great. But a host of other potential professional playwrights were also available, writing with great effect and winning international awards for the CBC *Stage* series. As we shall see, the development of Council policy was to have a deleterious effect on any inclination that these writers might have to move over in any permanent sense to writing for the theatre.

In the Annual Report of 1959, the Canada Council began to outline the ways in which it intended to facilitate the development of playwrighting in Canada. One means it

chose to encourage creative writing for the theatre was to add to the already existing awards handed out by the Dominion Drama Festival. A series of awards, called the "The Canada Council Awards" were to be made available beginning in 1960. They would consist of an award to a group for the best production of a Canadian play of \$400; the playwright would take in the vast sum of \$100. These awards would be given in each of the eight zones of competition set up across Canada by the DDF. In addition the playwright of the play which won the Calvert Trophy for best full-length play by a Canadian would also receive \$500 from the Council (provided the play had never been presented for the DDF before; no play could win twice) (*Annual Report 1959*, 27). While well-intentioned, these awards would hardly begin to compensate a playwright for perhaps years of work and were clearly intended to encourage amateur writers and theatre groups rather than develop professional playwrights. Considering the Council's adamant insistence on professionalism elsewhere, the awards may have been simply a political gesture towards the Dominion Drama Festival, rather than a serious play development plan. Additionally, their potential for effectiveness must be judged against what we have already seen as a general resistance on the part of the constituent groups of the Dominion Drama Festival to entering Canadian plays into competition. The sweetening of the award pot seems a fairly futile gesture.

Much more concretely, the Canada Council announced in 1959 a policy of promoting Canadian plays through the use of grants. The direct grants to playwrights were a part of the individual granting process for creative work and were assigned based on peer group evaluation. Promoting playwrighting through direct grants is much less efficient than promoting creative writing in other areas because of the economic nature of theatre. In

brief, the act of writing a play achieves nothing in itself, since access to publication is based on a professional production of the play. Therefore the important step for the playwright is to get the play accepted for production by a professional company and that was an extremely difficult proposition. The production of any new play, by any theatre is a financial risk (see Chapter Four); in the early days of Canadian theatre it was perceived to be doubly so. Individual grants, while more effective in buying the playwright time to write than the DDF grants, was still a less than efficient way to promote Canadian drama.

Finally, the Canada Council introduced a program of grants designed to act as indirect commissions through professional companies in order to, “stimulate the creation of works of art and to ensure that the work produced is performed, shown or otherwise presented to the public by an organization capable of doing so with distinction” (*Annual Report* 1959, 20). This may have been done in recognition of the problem of direct granting just dealt with, although W. Whittaker believes that this route was chosen because “the Council did not want to become a target for too much controversy in an area rife with prejudice and emotional overtones” and because, “concerning the judgment of an artist's work, the Council determined to stay out of the critical arena. Money was therefore given to some existing arts organization of repute and it was allowed to commission a work from an artist of its own choosing. The details of the assignment and the selection of the artist are matters to be determined entirely by the organization itself” (W. Whittaker 241). Whatever the reasoning, the *Annual Report* for 1959 -- under the heading “A Policy For the Arts” -- states,

The grant is made to an organization in which the Council has confidence and which is devoted to the presentation of works of art. It carries with it,

therefore, a measure of prestige for the organization selected. The organization is then required to commission or choose a work of art and to pay the money provided (sometimes matching the grant with an equal amount from its own resources) to an artist or artists of its own choosing. . . . Finally, the organization is required to play, present or otherwise show the work of art created for it. (*Annual Report 1959*, 20)

Though this policy is enunciated as a general one concerning the performing arts, the Council was already applying it in the area of theatre. A grant of \$5,000 each was apportioned to Montréal's La Comédie Canadienne and to Toronto's Crest Theatre. The Crest was to use the money to commission John Gray to write *Ride a Pink Horse* (with music by Louis Applebaum) for production in May, 1959 (*Annual Report 1959*, 21-2). Here, finally, was a plan of promise since it recognized the basic theatrical need of putting playwright and theatre company together. The money was to be used to recompense the dramatists and also to cover some of the inherent extra costs of a new play: principally extended rehearsal time. The money was probably not sufficient to cover all the expenses, but that was a common factor with all Canada Council grants in the early years. The policy represents a first, realistic attempt to develop new Canadian plays for the developing Canadian theatre but had its own flaws since it relied entirely on the selected theatre to *want* to commission a play.

To sum up, then, the Canada Council launched, from the very beginning (and in practice by 1959) a policy that was intended to support the development of new Canadian plays for the Canadian theatre it was struggling to develop. But the steps that were taken in the form of awards for the Dominion Drama Festival and individual grants for writers were

clearly inadequate and the practice of indirect commissions shifted policy and practice in the development of Canadian plays out of the hands of the Canada Council and into the hands of the individual theatres where it was to remain. And these theatres could chose, if they wished, to produce no Canadian plays at all. It is surprising that the Council chose not to pursue other types of practices, given their stated commitment to Canadian plays. They could have, for instance, imposed a quota of Canadian material -- something playwrights were later to call for. They could have, quite legitimately, made play-development, in some form, part of the conditions of a grant to a theatre. They could have, at the very least, attached the commission grant to each theatre's subsidy forcing the theatres to actually decline the money. The fact that they did no more than they did indicates, on the level of practice, how low a priority the development of new Canadian plays was on the agenda of the Canada Council.²⁰

In addition to the significant gap, in the early years, between the Council's stated objective of fostering Canadian playwrights and the practices it put into place to accomplish this was another serious problem. It is clear that the Council was dreadfully naïve on a crucial factor in their planning -- the economics of how theatre actually worked. The preponderance of wealthy businessmen (most of them were men) on the Council would lead most people to believe that the one area of expertise that the Council was replete with was economics. Yet the Council was, especially in the early years, woefully unprepared to deal with the economics of theatre, and for good reasons. The field, in 1958, was totally unresearched and, even today, is radically different from the world of normal business in the market economy. Hence serious errors in judgment were made that were to set back the development of new Canadian plays in a serious way. At this juncture, therefore, it is

important to come to an understanding of how theatre economics works and how it applies to the playwright and the new play.

Endnotes for Chapter Three

¹ There was, predictably, considerable opposition from Québec on constitutional grounds (Bothwell 153).

² It must be remembered that the Massey/Levésque Commission and the Canada Council dealt with a much larger range of concerns than just the arts and Saint-Laurent was already committed to a great increase in funding to the Universities and UNESCO. The only thing truly new here was the recommendation to offer government patronage to the arts.

³ Since over one third of the members of the government came from Québec and that province's government viewed the Council as a constitutional violation of provincial prerogatives -- especially in the area of education -- this was not an unreasonable fear. However a number of Québec members spoke strongly for the Council including Mr. Gauthier, from Portneuf (see W. Whittaker 143-5 and 162-3).

⁴ There were, actually, two precedents already in place. The Saskatchewan Arts Board had been founded in 1948 and the Alberta government even had a Drama Division in 1955 (Stuart, *History* 121-5).

⁵ Brooke Claxton, the Council's most ardent proponent and first head, believed that the creation of the Council helped lead the Liberals to defeat in the 1957 election. Claxton saw the establishment of the Council (in retrospect, since he had urged it before the election) as premature, another measure that caused the electorate to view the Liberal government as arrogant, intrusive and overly centralizing (Granatstein, *Canada* 143).

⁶ Both Filewood and Anne Wilson have made this suggestion. Filewood looks backwards and sees the creation of the Council as the culmination of the turn-of-the-century dream of

Canadian imperialism (Filewood 8). Wilson looks forward to future problems the Council would have in evaluating and distributing grants: “[b]ut the fact that the council initially was funded by the death duties from the estates of two wealthy men indicates that there remained the age-old assumption that the support of the arts was the proper domain of the wealthy. The taxes of ordinary Canadians did not fund the arts” (Wilson 5). The fact is that this aspect of the Council is neither an ending or a beginning, but rather part of a continuum that stretches on past the purview of this thesis.

⁷ For Brooke Claxton’s political relationships with various lobby groups, see Granatstein, *Ottawa*, 13.

⁸ More precisely:

The members of the Canada Council, all appointed by order-in-council, numbered nineteen, of whom six were to serve for two years, six for three years and seven for four years. Included were some well-known academic figures -- Frances Leddy, N. A. M. Mackenzie, and W. A. Mackintosh; well-off businessmen -- Samuel Bronfman and E. P. Taylor; cultural figures -- Vida Peene and Sir Ernest MacMillan; and public figures -- Leonard Brockington and Georges Vanier. Four of the members were French Canadian and four were women. while only one -- Bronfman -- was of neither British nor French descent, and there was at least one representative from each province. In other words, the membership was balanced, in the Canadian tradition.” (Granatstein, *Canada* 144-145)

⁹ Granatstein describes the situation as follows:

Inevitably, in the first group of members, and especially in the subsequent ones, some were not particularly competent to judge questions concerning the arts or learning. They could hardly be, being appointed more for political than for scholarly or artistic reasons. As one author noted acidly, there were suggestions at one point that one member wanted to reduce the grant to the Stratford Shakespearean Festival ‘on the grounds of the immorality of its actors.’ . . . Even Claude Bissell, the chairman in succession to Claxton, wrote . . . to say how impressed he was by the council’s officers: . . . ‘this, I assure you, is no malarkey. Thank goodness we have this rock to fall back upon, since I can’t honestly say that the Council collectively is as wise and informed as it is handsome and amiable.’ (Granatstein, *Canada* 145)

¹⁰ For a discussion of the Council’s dilemma over its status, see Milligan, “Ambiguities” 68-9.

¹¹ “There was, it seemed, no escaping the conclusion offered by the Advisory Arts Panel in its 1978 report *The Future of the Canada Council*, . . . ‘that artists judging artists, though far from a perfect system, is the best there is’” (Milligan, “Ambiguities” 65).

¹² The Carnegie Foundation, or, for that matter, any other private system of patronage, has every right to decline to offer justification for rejecting a grant proposal. The Canada Council, however, is a public fund and has more responsibility to justify its actions to the public. Their initial refusal to do so may stem, in part, from the already mentioned fact that the Council was set up to distribute private patronage publicly. As long as that paradigm remained in the minds of its officials, it is easy to see how they sometimes felt it possible to

behave like a private foundation.

¹³ McPherson has convincingly argued that if the Council is to act as an Academy it needs to have its ranks filled with “fewer members who resemble the honorary ‘distinguished patrons’ of an English charity -- colonels, various kinds of presidents and chairmen, etc” and more professionals in the area of the arts, preferably “relatively youthful” ones that are “not encumbered by the kind of executive responsibilities which would make them merely titular members” (McPherson 337-8). McPherson adds that, “the Canada Council's adjudicators, in short, must have the same courage that characterizes French *Académiciens*: they must be ready to say plainly what the standard *is* as they know it, and to support their views when necessary, without benefit of brocaded cape and sword” (McPherson 341).

¹⁴ See *Annual Report* 1958, 24 for Trueman's complete statement on this issue.

¹⁵ Touring shows were supposed to help establish a ‘national’ constituency, but, W. Whittaker argues that they had the opposite effect, although they did stimulate “interest” (W. Whittaker 235).

¹⁶ First Director A. W. Trueman was certainly aware of the implications of the decision to ‘raise’ rather than ‘spread’ to the poorer regions of the country as he outlined in an interview with W. Whittaker, and suggests that the Council took some small steps to ameliorate the problem: “If the council had held to its judgment that an organization must prove itself before receiving aid, then ‘in the poorer provinces where not much is going on anyway, you are practically dooming these people not to get any assistance at all. So you say, lets not be too strict about this; let's build upon what we have, within reason” (W. Whittaker 193).

¹⁷ Keep in mind that this astute observation was made as early as 1963. As we shall see, one of the major ruptures in the 1970s between the Council and its theatre constituency stemmed from this very consequence.

¹⁸ The percentage of interest gained by the Council's investments was to grow in the next few years and soon it was regularly topping 8 percent; a very high rate of return for the time. Some of the business/political appointees of the Council may have not known very much about theatre, but they certainly knew their investments!

¹⁹ The following is the Canada Council budget for organizations in 1958:

Theatre, etc. includes Ballet and Opera	
Arts	
Music	230,200
Festivals	75,000
Arts Councils	20,000
Theatre, etc.	250,000
Other	64,100
Total	\$639,300
Humanities	67,000
Social Sciences	32,800

(Annual Report 1958, 13)

²⁰ It is often difficult, in retrospect, to doubt the sincerity of the early Canada Council's desire to encourage and develop Canadian drama. Even twenty years later, the original director A. W. Trueman still spoke of the creative potential of Canadians in idealistic terms

that would not have been out of place in the *Report* of the Massey/Levésque Commission
(see Trueman 153).

Chapter Four: The Economics of Theatre

Theatre Economy and the “Income Gap”

Until recently there have been very few economic studies of the performing arts and the studies done since the mid-1960s have often focused only on specific aspects of theatre economy -- most popularly, audience statistics (Vogel 270). Others have been politically motivated; designed to argue for a return to a free-market, pre-subsidisation era, (see Globerman), justifying government policies in the cultural field (see Applebaum/ Hébert), or attacking them (see Pasquill). Despite this, it is vitally important to come to some kind of an understanding of how the economics of theatre work since the economic practices of theatre have a direct effect upon subsidy patterns, strategic planning and the choice of repertoire. Although almost all economic studies cover the performing arts in general, I will be speaking here only of theatre, using those factors that apply to all performing arts equally with those that apply only to theatre. What these studies show is that theatre is a different economic world from other businesses -- a fact that often surprises the economists doing the research.

I use the term business intentionally since it is important, here, to view theatre as a business in order to understand its financial predicament. In this practice I follow the lead of Baumol and Bowen (1966), the seminal study in performing arts economics, rather than that of many later reports that see culture in general as *solely* a business. Although aspects of Baumol and Bowen's work have been questioned, enlarged upon and altered, the general features of their work (and its conclusions) remain unchallenged in any serious way. Their starting point was to examine theatre in the same fiscal light as any other

productive activity which provides services to the community; one which, in this respect, does not differ from the manufacture of electricity or the supply

of transportation or house-cleaning services. In each case labour and equipment are utilised to make available goods or services which may be purchased by the general public. In each case there is a technology whereby these inputs are transformed to a finished product. When the performing arts are viewed in this matter-of-fact manner, it will be seen that the tendency for costs to rise and for prices to lag behind is neither a matter of bad luck nor mismanagement. Rather, it is an inescapable result of the technology of live performance. (Baumol 162)

The fact is, that when theatre is viewed as a fiscal institution, “crisis is apparently a way of life” (Baumol 3). This is one of the many ironies of the economics of theatre since, even at time of Baumol and Bowen’s study, theatre in North America was in a period of rapid expansion:

The 1960's saw an enormous growth in audience attendance, concomitant with the building of arts centers and the renovation of decaying theaters and music halls in inner-city urban-renewal areas. This period was a time of rebirth and of an optimistic belief that the arts would flourish in all corners of the United States. This artistic expansion was supported by a generation of post-war babies, and a growing college-educated white middle class. In many cases, business and government collaborated and responded equally and in unison to the needs of downtown areas to revitalize their commercial centers, which included the arts centers. (Bensman 249)

Despite all this growth and exuberance the economic situation of theatre remained one of perpetual monetary crisis. How could this be so?

In many ways, the spread of theatre in the 1950s and early 60s relied heavily on the energies of individuals for whom remuneration played only a minor role; who derived from their creative involvement “more psychic than pecuniary income” (Vogel 257). Despite some notable financial successes (particularly on Broadway) the fact remained that on the whole, theatre simply did not pay its way; in the words of William Schuman, theatres are “in the business of losing money wisely” (Baumol 137). Here we must distinguish between commercial and what is generally referred to as ‘non-profit’ or, ‘not-for-profit’ theatre. Commercial theatre is normally a series of individual financial risks, that may or may not (more often not) pay off. While there are no concrete statistics to indicate aggregate totals of profit and loss, it is generally felt that loss is the bottom line -- although individual success can be wildly profitable.¹ The ‘non-profit,’ or non-commercial theatres which we are concerned with, must be looked at over a season rather than on a show-by-show basis and they are in a very precarious situation indeed, as Baumol points out:

The live performing arts . . . come within that sector of the economy where productivity cannot be increased at anything like the general rate. Costs, therefore, inevitably mount; revenues do not keep pace. Others have faced the fact that the live performing arts cannot expect to pay for themselves without subsidies, direct or indirect; it was one of the great merits of the Rockefeller Panel Report that it did not evade this issue --a fact the more striking since the panel was composed to so large extent of businessmen who have traditionally shown little patience with enterprises that could not show a profit. . . . It is not only that the live performing arts do not pay for themselves, but that, within the developing economic system, they will show

deficits of increasing size. (Baumol vii)

‘Why, then,’ asks the free-market economist, ‘shouldn't theatres be allowed to fail and fall within the forces of the open market place?’ If the performing arts are so important to society, why can they not sustain themselves financially through audience support? And if they can't, why should they be subsidised by tax dollars? It is not the purpose of this thesis to argue the merits of state support of the arts, since it is now an accomplished fact² but it is important to understand in some detail why theatre cannot pay its way since the reasons for this directly affect the way that Canada Council funding for regional theatres impinged on the creation of Canadian plays since theatre finance was not what the Council first envisioned. This is not surprising since the Council developed its policy at least six years before Baumol and Bowen was available and were therefore totally in the dark as to the economic realities of theatre.

What is the "Income Gap"

Near the conclusion of his paper for the Massey/Levésque Commission Robertson Davies indulged himself in some wide ranging speculation about the future of theatre in Canada. At one point (in an otherwise rather grim paper) he wrote: “[f]or the theatre is one of the arts which can maintain high standards and still pay its way; it is a truly popular art, and the people will support it when it is unmistakably of the first quality” (Davies, “Theatre” 392). Never were un-truer words written; except for certain unique moments in history (the London theatres of the last quarter of the 16th century, for example) theatre has either depended on some form of financial patronage (either state as in Pericles' Athens or

royal as in Restoration) to survive. The history of any long-running theatre -- like Drury Lane -- is a succession of bankruptcies inter-spaced by all-too-brief fortunes made (usually to be lost again). In fact, as a general rule, theatre has always been a bad financial investment in the long run.

The reason for this is something that Baumol and Bowen have christened as the "Income Gap." In their examination of 1950s and 60s American theatre they observed that "the gap between costs and box office receipts characteristically has increased from year to year. Sheer extrapolation would lead us to suspect that these pecuniary problems will continue to worsen." Moreover, "because of the economic structure of the performing arts, these financial pressures are here to stay, and there are fundamental reasons for expecting the income gap to widen steadily with the passage of time. An understanding of the basic economics of the live performing arts makes it clear that any other course of events is unlikely" (Baumol 161-2). The causes of the 'income gap' are varied, as we shall see, but all of them -- particularly "the productivity lag in the arts" (Vogel 263) -- are intrinsic parts of the economics of theatre and therefore, although they can be ameliorated, they cannot be eliminated.

Baumol and Bowen's predictions of widening income gaps have been proven to be accurate in virtually every (non-profit) performing arts institution in North America. In the U. S.:

Despite the rapid growth in the number of resident theaters [one American term for regional theatres], there is little evidence, so far, of durability. Most companies exist in a state of constant financial crisis. Of the forty theaters . . . none is able to meet its expenses from box-office receipts. . . . As the split

between income and expenditure widens, productions can be made to pay back their investments only by longer and longer runs. (Poggi 230)

Where Baumol and Bowen estimated the percentage growth of the income gap as from 6% to 8.3% per annum, doubling in 11 years, (Baumol 388) in some places it has grown more rapidly. Sam Book estimated that in 1973 only 65% of performing arts income in Ontario was raised through the box office³ while the rest came from government (28%) and private patronage (7%) (Book 19) and despite this assistance, "Of the 77 professional performing arts organizations in Ontario, all but one face perennial income gaps" (Book 27). While these types of estimates are notorious for wildly fluctuating evaluations it is generally conceded that at *a minimum* (again, in 1973) one quarter of all operating expenses for the performing arts in Canada was provided by federal, municipal and provincial funding bodies (Book 20) and some estimate place the amount as high as 45% (Crean 126) and 50% (McSkimming 21).

The constant income gaps and resulting perennial deficits have led to charges from critics of government funding for the arts that theatres indulge in bad management practices: failing to develop their audiences fully, wasting resources and over-spending their budgets. 'Why,' they ask, 'if theatres are a business, can they not thrive as other businesses do?' (see Globerman)⁴ The answer, as study after study in the U.S. and Canada has shown, is that it is simply not possible:

Income gaps, or differences between total annual expenditures and total annual earned revenues, occur in performing arts companies primarily because of technological and economic developments. Managements may be good, bad or indifferent, and artistic philosophies and aspirations may

enhance or detract from revenue raising potential, but the existence of ubiquitous income gaps across a broad spectrum of performing arts companies can be traced primarily to technological and economic factors beyond the arts company's control. (Book 21-22)

And, as Baumol and Bowen have shown, this has always been the case in theatre. Though they concentrate their study on American theatre of the 1950s and early 60s they also looked at what records remained of British theatre from 1773-1964, and discovered a similar pattern: "the annual rate of increase in costs per performance was nearly 60 per cent greater than that in prices, and the cost per performance over the whole period as a whole went up more than twice as much as the [ticket] price level" (Baumol 183). Brief examinations of Austrian, German, French and Italian theatres produced the same results (Baumol 361-4).⁵ Clearly, the problem is one of the nature of theatre itself and equally clearly, "[s]upport of the arts . . . requires long-term commitments, not stop-gap attempts to provide temporary stimuli" (Baumol 346). This was an unknown fact in the initial stages of funding groups like the Canada Council.

Costs

One half of the 'income gap' equation is the question of rising costs. Because theatre is highly labour-intensive it has always been extremely sensitive to increases in wages. With the technological revolutions of the twentieth century this problem has been exacerbated. As the manufacturing-driven economy has mechanised industry and multiplied efficiency with new techniques of mass production, the result has been a spectacular rise in wages throughout the industrialised west. Since industry can easily absorb this -- in fact,

thrives on it as it creates larger consumer markets -- both through economies of scale and technical innovation (and thus increased efficiency in production), it has been able to profit enormously. Theatre, however, is unable to follow either of these routes. As a labour-intensive enterprise there are very few technical innovations that will reduce the basic cost of producing a play; like other performing arts, the workers (actors, musicians, dancers) are not only the producers of the product, they are, in a sense, the product itself.⁶ Theatre, as a truly 'popular' art form, once had a mass market, but rapidly lost it to the newer 'moving pictures' and television. At the same time, because of the rise in wages in the general economy, theatre *must* at least attempt to match that rise, or be unable to pay a living wage and cease to exist.

One way to reduce costs (wages) in such a situation is to hire less skilled (even amateur) workers, a method that reduces the product to such a low level that it no longer appeals to the consumer since the performing arts is a highly skilled profession. Another, related, way is to rely on the good-will and dedication of the artists involved to accept a lesser remuneration. This is a common approach for smaller, newer companies who are attempting to move from amateur, or semi-professional status to professional status, using individuals attempting to start a career: "[b]ecause performers frequently are dedicated individuals who are willing to work under economic conditions which would be considered appalling in other activities" (Baumol 169). This, it must be noted, is in the context of a profession that has, historically (except for 'stars'), paid low wages in general, to the point where it is valid to say (and often is said) that the performers subsidise the theatre in a major way (Baumol 27, 169).⁷ As a result the rise in wages (costs) was even more precipitous in the post-war period, because of the "discovery among professionals at all levels in the

performing arts that they are entitled to a living wage” (Bensman 28).

A third way to reduce costs would be to reduce cast sizes -- in effect, reduce the product. The outcome of this (and it has been tried many times) is a plethora of one, two and three performer productions: the type of thing that as a steady diet ends up in driving audiences away and excludes about 85% of the existing repertoire. Douglas Buck argues that the effects can become pervasive:

One result of a decade of underfunding is a kind of cultural anemia that can affect any theatre: small cast, one-set productions become the only thing that theatres can afford. Anything that involves extra expense or risk is avoided. Since the rent on the theatre building and the fuel bill must be paid, the only large discretionary part of a theatre's budget is its artistic expense. While a successful theatre may save money in the short term by cutting artistic costs, audiences quickly tire of one- and two-person shows. What is more serious is the deliberate attempt by theatres to produce ‘safe’ seasons -- seasons with lots of comedies, with nothing controversial that might offend subscribers. (Buck 11)⁸

Thus, with productivity per ‘man’-power a constant, theatre is caught between the problem of raising wages dramatically and the inability to reduce costs, and therefore, says Baumol, “[r]ising costs will beset the performing arts with absolute inevitability” (Baumol 169).

Although wages are the major factor in terms of rising costs, they are not the only one. Theatres are also sensitive to costs for materials, particularly speciality items used in bulk to produce theatre sets: lumber, cotton, paint etc. Jack Poggi's study of the impact of economic forces on American theatre shows, for example, an increase in costs of theatre-

related materials of between 47 and 200 per cent between the 1913-14 season and the 1928-29 season. At the same time, wages in the theatre rose from 46 to 52 per cent. The result of this is that a production of Paul Dickey's play *The Misleading Lady* mounted in 1913 cost about \$7,000 and a duplicate re-mounting of the show in 1928 would have cost \$15,000 – a rise of 118 per cent. The running costs for the re-mount would have increased, says Poggi, by 97 per cent. American inflation in general over the period was running at only 24 per cent (Poggi 67). Other cost sensitive areas are transportation and advertisement not to mention attached costs such as audience transportation and dining (Baumol 261). In short, “[t]he general conclusion to which the foregoing evidence leads is that rising costs of performance can certainly not be laid to increases in performers' wage levels alone. Cost increases have been pervasive and have affected almost all categories of expenditure” (Baumol 217).

In fact, of course, the situation is not that simple. Although it has been argued that theatre can become technologically innovative in order to reduce cost, specific suggestions as to *how* have been few. Dick Netzer, for example, has suggested that, “[l]ike all other industries, the performing arts generally fall short of maximum efficiency. Hence, they have significant unexploited opportunities to increase technical efficiency” (Netzer 29). However, his specific suggestions are limited to permanent lighting systems in Broadway theatres and better storage space for the Metropolitan Opera; valid suggestions but hardly likely to have any but minor impact (Netzer 29-30). The installation of computerised ticket systems, more efficient heating and air conditioning and other peripherals have helped somewhat, but the central problem remains.

As far as reducing costs is concerned, theatre has always striven to do so through

some form of reproduction:

As early as the 1880's, road companies were frequently duplicated, triplicated, or quadruplicated, but the really efficient way to mass-produce drama for a growing mass society was to photograph it on moving film. The initial cost might be higher, but innumerable copies might be made and sent throughout the country in a tin can instead of a box car. Thus it seems that the motion-picture camera was invented because there was a need for it.

(Poggi 78)

In fact, technological innovation has become an enormous threat to theatre prosperity, for logically the central innovative development towards cost-efficiency and large profits for theatre has been the motion picture (and television) camera. These mechanical instruments of reproduction have allowed the dramatic text to be transformed into a huge commercial success on a vast economy of scale: but, in the process they have produced something that is no longer theatre -- and more than that, something that is theatre's largest and most successful competitor. As Baumol and Bowen indicate,

The development of motion pictures and phonograph records, radio and television has made possible a revolutionary change in the mechanics of presentation whose proportions it is difficult to exaggerate. This in turn has meant that the cost of providing a given hour of entertainment to each member of the audience has dropped precipitously. The change is probably far more radical than that experienced in any other economic sector where vigorous technological progress has been observed. . . . But these developments have not helped the live performing arts directly. In fact, the

competition of the mass media for both the audience and personnel of the living arts has sometimes had serious adverse consequences for the performing organisations. (Baumol 163)⁹

Because of the size of the market, first for motion pictures and then for television, these industries are able to produce their product for prices that largely under cut the prices for theatre. One result of this, in the United States, was to transform the theatre from an entertainment for a mass audience to a much more expensive 'luxury item' for the few. Jack Poggi relates the process:

Here is probably what happened: As the development of our modern industrial society brought about a general increase in the cost of labor and a greater demand for entertainment, the legitimate theater found it hard to compete with the low-priced, mass-produced entertainment provided by the motion pictures. This competition did not result in an immediate reduction in the number of legitimate productions per season. Rather, there seems to have been a gradual change in the habits of theatergoers: as they had more opportunity for satisfactory entertainment from movies at a low price, they began to go to the theater less frequently, and naturally they chose the plays with the most outstanding reputations. . . . Thus plays began to fall into categories of 'hits' and 'flops.' The movies had taken over the job of providing everyday entertainment, so that a play had to have extraordinary appeal if it was to make any money. Thus the risk of putting on a play was increased, independently of the increase in costs; there was no longer room for a middling success -- at any price. Then as costs continues to rise, the

risk grew greater still. (Poggi 84)

In Canada, as we have seen earlier, the foreign touring syndicates (the vast majority of available theatre) were wiped out.¹⁰

Thus, we can see that any effort (beyond a few logical peripherals) to cut costs through the use of technological innovation and economy of scale has only resulted in transforming live theatre into something other than itself, and that other, rather than ameliorating the situation became a major factor in worsening it. As Baumol summed up the problem: “[w]e see then that technological development, which places live performance at such a cost disadvantage, entraps it at both ends, as it were. The pattern of technological change causes costs of live performance to rise progressively, while at the same time it limits prices through the competition of the mass media” (Baumol 175). But even this is not the final word on cost since there is a further cost factor of great significance that even Baumol and Bowen did not completely perceive: the problem generally referred to now as “the edifice complex.”

Part of what spurred Baumol and Bowen to conduct their study on the performing arts was a wide-spread belief in the United States, that the sixties had entered into a “cultural boom” of some magnitude. They found little evidence of this except in the fact that an enormous building program of cultural centres was under way across North America (Baumol 39). Their inability to come to any hard conclusion on the cultural boom was simply a consequence that much of their work had concluded while the boom was still getting under way.¹¹ The fact is that by 1969, “the rate of annual U.S. investment in physical plant for the performing arts had risen to more than \$200 million, or more than two-thirds of all contributions to performing arts institutions.” This was an enormous increase over the

estimated \$50 million spent in the same area in 1964 (Twentieth 1).

On the surface, this would seem to be a huge boon for the performing arts -- an enormous upgrade and modification of existing facilities and a whole new series of brand new cultural centres complete with fully equipped theatres. The building boom was even stronger in Canada than in the United States:

Per capita, Canada has built many more arts centers than the United States.

The list is a roll call of Canadian cities of any size: St. John's

(Newfoundland), Halifax, Charlottetown, Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto,

Winnipeg, Edmonton, Calgary, Saskatoon, Vancouver. At Quebec,

Hamilton, Regina, Victoria and St. John (New Brunswick), centers are either

planned or under construction [1970]. Nearly all of these centers are either

large (2,000 seats and up) multi-purpose halls; most of them serve more as

convention halls than as auditoriums for the performing arts; others are busy

with professional or amateur performances more than two hundred nights a

year. All but one were built in large part with public funds and are maintained

with public subsidy. (Twentieth 65)

In a country where, as we have seen, there were virtually no theatre facilities (apart from privately owned ones) in the mid-50s, there was suddenly the largest construction and renovation project in North America.¹² And yet, economically, rather than assisting the fiscal situation of theatre these edifices became, in large part, a contributing factor to the income gap.

Large performing arts facilities are not only expensive to build -- the St. Lawrence Centre in Toronto had cost \$5.4 million when it opened in February 1970 -- they are

expensive to run. Even if the cost of the building is factored out (generally they are paid for by a combination of government grants and private donations) and the building is provided in a paid up position, the cost of daily operation is also high and that is often not covered by government but by the performing arts companies that use the facility. The Twentieth Century Fund report, *Bricks, Mortar and the Performing Arts*, warned in 1970 that:

No major facility for the performing arts should be built unless the sponsoring group is assured that the maintenance and operation of the building will not be a burden for the performing groups, resident or touring. In some of the arts centers and large theaters, the costs of running the building are as much as \$2 per seat for each use of the auditorium, and \$1 per seat is common -- quite apart from real or imputed interest on the costs of construction. It is no kindness to an orchestra or opera company or concert manager to provide a paid-up performing facility if the costs of operating it take away so heavily from performance receipts (Twentieth 3)

The simple fact is that someone has to pay the operating and maintenance costs (subject to inflation) of these large buildings. And they are unavoidable costs, like cleaning, heating, repairs, painting, light bulbs and taxes. Theatres in a financially precarious situation can -- and do -- reduce cast size and design requirements and limit experimental works (with the concomitant loss of audience revenue and artistic integrity) but they *cannot* stop heating the building. While this is, of course, true in any venue, the use of enormous and expensive cultural centres exacerbates the fiscal problem. Theatre becomes, in fact, real estate; reacting to the pressures of real estate:

Performance before live audiences rests primarily upon the construction of

expensive auditoriums and theatres, usually on valuable, accessible plots in high-traffic urban areas. As the size of the auditorium increases, real estate and construction costs also increase; no substantial cost reduction is achieved by creating smaller auditoriums. Costs per seat are high. Unit cost reductions can be achieved only by having a full house at each performance, having performances on as many days a year as possible, and having as many performances a day as possible. The necessity of continuously attracting full houses is a challenge to the individual impresario; some are successful. But this means that the performing arts as a whole depend upon such very high levels of audience support that very few are self-sustaining. (Bensman 27)

Therefore, while the great boom in edifice construction was presented to the public (and may, possibly, have been seen by some governments) as a great contribution to the development of the theatre and the performing arts, it was in many cases an additional cost burden to those organizations, increasing the income gap.

Inability to Raise Price

The other side of the 'income gap' coin is the matter of prices. It is certainly logical to assume that if costs must inevitably continue to rise for any non-profit theatre that the appropriate, indeed necessary, response would be a matching rise in prices to offset the cost increase and to avoid an accumulating deficit. In addition, one would assume theatres would attempt to increase their audience base as well, so as to raise income by means of two different strategies. However, once again there are a number of basic 'givens' built into the financial situation of the performing arts that reduce the effectiveness of these two

strategies.

To begin with it must be acknowledged that theatres *have* raised prices substantially over time. In fact, as Harold Vogel indicates, “ticket prices for live performances have risen at rates consistently higher than the consumer price index” (Vogel 263). But in raising prices for tickets, theatre companies encounter a number of very real dangers. Firstly, it must be remembered that the principle market competition for theatre (movies and television) can deliver their product -- because of economies of scale -- at considerably lower cost. The result is that any major rise in theatre ticket prices would inevitably reduce audience size because of competition and thus offset any increase in income (Baumol 174). This is particularly important in a field where the product is low on most consumer's hierarchy of needs, placing well behind necessities such as food and shelter (Baumol 172). There is clear and persistent evidence that higher ticket prices for theatre “reduce demand -- especially from less well-to-do and younger segments of the population. Moreover, in periods of economic recession, even upper-income consumers may reduce spending in this area” (Vogel 263).¹³

Secondly, it is clear that price increases would place themselves in direct opposition to the other strategy open to theatre companies: that of expanding their audience base. Audience attendance can be expanded in a number of ways. Seasons -- and running length of individual ‘hit’ productions -- can be lengthened, if the venues are available for this purpose. Audiences can be increased by offering price reductions on package deals -- such as the subscription series first developed, and promoted by Danny Newman in the early 1960s (Baumol 250). Season repertoires can be selected with the purpose of attracting a larger audience; in the conventional wisdom of the promoter, this means low risk, popular

works such as Broadway musicals, current comedy hits (such as Neil Simon's plays) and easily accessible classics. The financial pressures of the realities of theatre economics have forced theatre to attempt all of these methods, with some success, since the early 60s, but as

Baumol and Bowen have discovered in their study:

the financial problems of the arts will not be solved by increases in audience demand alone. Unused capacity in the arts is substantial, but even if the audience grew enough to eliminate unsold seats completely, many performing arts organisations would find that the increased revenue still fell far short of their current income gap. If the demand grows beyond this level, we cannot rule out the possibility that the resulting rise in costs will exceed the income gained in the process. Second, we conclude that audience size can sometimes be stimulated by means of requiring sacrifices of principle, such as the avoidance of contemporary works, sacrifices which some organisations may be unwilling to accept. Yet despite these reservations we conclude that stimulation of demand is important. It may become a matter of absolute financial necessity as performing seasons are lengthened. And, above all, the desirability of increased audiences will be accepted as an article of faith by all those who believe in the importance of the arts for society.

(Baumol 257)

It can be seen therefore that while these strategies can improve income they can also increase costs further. For example, longer runs require extra costs in the form of salaries, facilities, operating costs and rental of props, costumes etc. What is worse however, as Baumol and Bowen have indicated, is that all these measures -- including the sacrifice of

artistically vital seasons -- will not in general, avoid an income gap and the resulting deficits.

The situation worsens with the size of the theatre. If Baumol and Bowen are correct and the ratio of income to costs is constant, and costs will always exceed income in the performing arts, then it is logical to assume that the larger the theatre, the greater the gap. Larger theatres have larger costs as well as larger audience capacities and a study of Ontario theatre undertaken in 1973 shows that the income gap is, in fact, greater in larger theatres than smaller ones (Book 34). This does not necessarily mean that smaller theatres do not run deficits, only that they tend to run *smaller* deficits.¹⁴ Thus, economic pressures will be greater on larger theatres and the concept of expansion, dear to the heart of the Canada Council in its early years, is a recipe for financial difficulties. It is further clear that since "income gaps are intrinsic characteristics of the performing arts" (Book 27) that government support for theatres and theatre networks is vital for their survival.

So far we have been examining theatre finances in an over-all fashion but there is another set of contributing factors that is more specific to the situation in Canada. It will be remembered from the discussion of the Massey/Levésque Commission and the mandate of the Canada Council that one of the goals in establishing a Canadian theatre was to remove theatre from the status of a luxury good for the elite and to open up availability to a general audience in order to allow that audience to experience, enjoy and become regular attendees of theatre. Access to theatre was seen by the commission as a social benefit to the majority of Canadians allowing them to expand their experience of the performing art. Besides achieving the social goal outlined above, this would also seem to have an economic benefit for Canadian theatre, in terms of expanding the audience base. However, the economic forces that we have been examining here, show that there are serious obstacles to that goal.

The economic pressures of the income gap, unless they are eliminated by government funding, would still have an impact on Canadian theatres in two specific, and related, areas: the audience and the choice of repertoire.

The Audience and the Prospective Audience

Once the principle of government financing for theatre was accepted by the Massey/Levésque Commission (and therefore, obviously, the Canada Council) it should have been vital to examine precisely how that financing should be carried out -- not simply, to whom it should be given. The introduction of government subsidies has a wide range of impacts on the economics of theatre. For instance, government financing of theatre, without an awareness of the realities of theatre economics and an accompanying teaching of advanced performing arts accounting, "brought to light the lack of expertise in sophisticated accounting procedures in many of these organizations" and also brought to light in the course of company collapse, the fact that "[u]nlike business enterprises, arts organizations could not effect income gains by increasing output, nor could they efficiently control input resources. This feature of the nonprofit structure inevitably results in economic constraint, aggravated by inflation and expansion in the arts" (Bensman 249). The Council's dedicated policy of company development, while serving other ends, resulted in further economic woes brought on by expansion.

Since one of the major goals of expansion was to open theatre up to new audiences, the result was further economic conflicts. To examine this we must return briefly to Gans' divisions of culture and examine as best we can, with the available statistical studies available (starting with Baumol and Bowen), who made up theatre audiences in the 50s and

60s. Canadian statistics for this period are non-existent and therefore we must rely to a large extent on American ones. Gans describes three levels of culture that directly affect theatre and the various attitudes towards it at the time. The people who interest themselves in higher culture, the elite, “are almost all highly educated people of upper and upper-middle class status, employed mainly in academic and professional occupations” (Gans 76). Based on the demographics of the 50s and 60s, these comprise the largest proportion of the ‘traditional’ theatre audience. The second sub-division is that of upper-middle class culture made up of “professionals, executives and managers and their wives who have attended the ‘better’ colleges and universities” who “want culture and want to be cultured, but prefer a culture that is substantive, unconcerned with innovation in form, and uninterested in making issues of method and form a part of culture” (Gans 81-2). This group makes up the second largest proportion of the ‘traditional’ theatre audience of the time, although Baumol would include teachers. The third sub-division, “numerically, . . . America's dominant taste culture and public today,” is lower-middle culture (Gans 84). This group, “[a]lthough it still dislikes abstract art and although it continues to reject most high culture and much of upper-middle culture, it now accepts ‘culture’ and is already participating in cultural institutions which are seeking a large audience and are willing to make the needed changes in fare” (Gans 85). In addition, “[t]he lower-middle public provides the major audience for today's mass media; it is the group for which these media program most of their content” (Gans 86).

Baumol and Bowen's findings correspond almost exactly with Gans' categories: “despite the allegations of increasing grass roots interest in the arts and the optimistic view that audiences include a wide range of social groups, it will be shown that the typical audience at professional performances is drawn from an extremely narrow segment of the

population -- a group characterised by unusually high levels of education and income.”

Baumol also discovered that this audience description was consistent with British statistics (Baumol 89) and remarkably consistent from region to region in the United States (Baumol 96). In 1978 DiMaggio, Useem and Brown reviewed an amalgam of 270 studies done mostly between 1970 and 1977 in the U. S. with much the same results.¹³ Based on best estimates of the available data it seems fairly clear that theatre audiences prior to Canadian policies of subsidization were comprised of the financial elite (where, of course, there were audiences at all).

The Canada Council's strategy of expanding this audience would therefore have to be directed at those groups who were not traditional elite elements of the theatre audience, based on income (and educational) levels. Yet these would be the very groups most sensitive to the price increases called for by the income gap. Book states that, without government support,

performing arts companies would be forced either to increase ticket prices sufficiently to cover present levels of expenditures, thus making it financially impossible for many citizens to attend performances, or to reduce levels of expenditure and associated levels of quality and scope. The former action would serve to reserve the performing arts for the wealthy few, the latter would serve to reduce performing arts to an insignificant fringe industry.

(Book 27)

But this is only part of the equation. Any pressure on theatre companies to economize carries with it the accompanying implication that audiences must be increased and ticket prices raised -- two practices in firm opposition. It seems, therefore, not only are

government subsidies necessary but they must be sufficiently large to permit the theatre to operate with low ticket prices or the goal of widening access would be defeated. However, as we shall see, the Canada Council was constantly attempting, based on a less than full understanding of theatre economics, to pressure theatre companies to balance their books. This pressure for solvency, if it could not be achieved by raising prices, or in any other way because of the various contingencies of the income gap, left theatres only one alternative: to reach for the widest audience base possible in its choice of repertoire and at all cost avoid financial risks.¹⁶ The Canada Council, in its economic policies can be held directly responsible for this even though they can be partially excused for economic ignorance up until the publication of Baumol and Bowen.

Playwrights

As we have looked at the general economic circumstances of theatre in general it is important that we also examine the general economic situation of the playwright since the latter is also a major factor in the creation and production of Canadian plays. First, it must be understood that the playwright, like the composer and the choreographer, but unlike other types of creative writers, does not have the economic advantage of direct publication. By that I mean that plays are seldom, if ever, published until they have had a production before a live audience. Therefore, it is the economic (as well as the creative) goal of the playwright to procure a production of her/his play by a professional theatre company to have any chance at royalty income from public print consumption. Since statistically we know how poorly recompensed the majority of writers are in Canada, it is reasonable to suggest that Canadian playwrights are particularly fiscally disadvantaged.

Having said this, it has also been documented how difficult it is, in general, for a playwright to secure production of a new play: “[p]erformance of plays is difficult to arrange because of the very substantial cost of a new production in the commercial theater. It can be argued that in this respect the novelist is in a far better position -- it is much less expensive to publish a book than to produce a play, and many more books than plays make their appearance every year” (Baumol 112). Most theatres are reluctant to undertake new works because of the extra costs involved (extra rehearsals) and because of potential risks at the box office -- a substantially serious concern in light of the income gap. In general, Baumol and Bowen found that new plays (except from established writers) are not that well attended by traditional theatre audiences unless there is a particular, local concern dealt with in the play, or the play places “little strain on conventional attitudes” (Baumol 255).¹⁷ This general distrust of new works on the part of traditional audiences presents a serious problem for both theatre and the playwrights, since:

an organisation which pursued an art-for-art's-sake approach and disregarded the type of audience response that we have documented might well be committing financial suicide. On the other hand, if new plays, operas and musical compositions are not performed, they may not long be written and the arts will lose their vitality. The problem, then, will probably not be solved by the individual organisations; they cannot be fairly criticised for hesitating to embark on a path which may be catastrophic financially. Instead it must be solved by organisations together, and ultimately by society itself. (Baumol 256-7)

Since the consequence of a lack of opportunity for the playwright is likely to lead to his/her

pursuit of an alternate career, a number of measures have been suggested to alleviate the financial problem. Direct subsidy to the writer is the most common method suggested and followed, either in the form of the limited grant practised by the Canada Council or even, it has been suggested, a guaranteed minimum wage to buy the writer time to write. For other types of creative writer this is a logical route, but it does not solve the plight of the playwright: “[I]n conceiving of ways to help the creative artist, I must reiterate that a subsidized wage alone will not solve the problem. Support must include the transmission of the artist's work to exhibition or performance, so that it reaches an audience. . . . the playwright, composer, and choreographer need to be performed” (Arian 105).¹⁸ All of this is compounded by the situation of a new writer. The neophyte playwright needs to learn the requirements of the stage and the specific craft of writing for live actors. This can only be learned in practice, with actors, designers and directors and yet the economic realities of the theatre are generally in opposition to this need. The production of new plays, by new playwrights, in any theatrical milieu is a deeply troubled one and naturally presented (and continues to present) one of the greatest challenges to the developing of Canadian theatre.

Consequences

An economic analysis of theatre and the performing arts in general shows that there are serious and unavoidable fiscal imperatives at work that may mitigate even the most idealistic attempts to place theatre on a sound financial basis, encourage its vibrant development and enable it to produce a viable indigenous drama. This is not to suggest that some of these goals are not attainable -- although sound financial independence from government subsidies is clearly remote. But no objectives could (or can) be reached without

knowledge and acceptance of some basic economic factors. It must be accepted that the economic difficulties of the live theatre stem from the very “economic structure of live performance” and that they “are not temporary -- they are chronic. Above all, this view implies that any group which undertakes to support the arts can expect no respite. The demands upon its resources will increase, now and for the foreseeable future” (Baumol 10). The early history of funding bodies like the Canada Council and the Ontario Arts Council shows that at their inception they felt that with a little ‘seed money’ and an opportunity to grow, Canadian theatres would soon achieve financial independence.¹⁹ The subsequent discovery that this was not so, resulted in a necessary change in funding policies due to a realization that the Council's commitment to professional companies, rather than leading to a short period of development before turning to other needful areas of concern had become a long-term commitment, with no conceivable conclusion, monopolizing an extremely large proportion of the Council's available funding.

Secondly it has to be accepted that a policy of rapid growth and development (particularly with a boom in performing arts real estate) was certain to exacerbate the problem. The very policy of ‘raise’ rather than ‘spread’ would contribute to significant drains on the Council's endowment and subsequent additions to its budget. As Book summarizes the situation:

If a performing arts company operates on a small scale, uses mostly non-paid or low-paid performers and part-time voluntary administrators, and caters to a small, loyal and reasonable [sic] affluent audience, it may indeed cover its annual operating expenses through the box office plus private donations.

Once a company approaches a reasonable level of professionalism and

expands its scale of operations to reach a significant portion of the general public, rising labour costs and material costs will force the company to look beyond private sector revenues to government assistance. The performing arts world faces an odd paradox: as companies expand and prosper in audience reach, number and quality of productions, and community involvement, total operating expenses rises faster than total earnings from audiences and an increasing amount of outside financial assistance, particularly from government, is needed. (Book 23-4)

The 'raising' of professional standards, increases in audience and numbers of performances, more and better facilities -- all the attributes of success in normal business -- spell increasing demands on funding agencies rather than less. This is not to criticize the goal, but rather to illustrate the consequences, unforeseen in the early days of the Canada Council.²⁰

There are, as well, a number of further implications from these economic consequences. Because of the differences between the expectations of the Canada Council and the economic realities of the theatre, there rapidly developed an economic impasse whereby the amount of funding available was never adequate for the Council's goals (see below). The resulting funding squeeze had a number of disturbing effects in theatre. In general, the obvious foregrounding of financial problems, particularly deficits, led to a focus on management and accounting expertise within the Canadian theatrical community. A number of programs were instituted to train 'arts management' personnel, particularly at Banff.²¹ While this did improve theatre management expertise it led to a considerable focus on arts administration and organisational complexity in Canadian theatres, often at the expense of artistic creativity. This is, in fact, the norm in North America where unrealistic

funding policies and continuing demands for fiscal restraint on the part of theatre companies has led to a heavy focus on administration versus artistic development (see Martorella).

Finally, and perhaps most seriously in terms of this study, this gap between economic expectations and reality and the subsequent focus on rationalisation, administration and the reduction of deficits led to a severe restriction (unspoken, perhaps, but ubiquitous) on artistic experimentation. Again, this is not uncommon in theatre in general, where budgets are an overwhelming pre-occupation. Since all artistic undertakings are experimental, and failure is an essential part of that experimental process since it leads to deeper understanding and, perhaps, later success, this can be a serious problem, inhibiting the creative potential of a theatre (see Netzer 24). In our particular circumstances it had two serious consequences for Canadian theatre that we must now turn to in detail. Firstly, it contributed to the already (as we have seen) established bias towards the traditional repertoire of British, classic and some American works; euphemistically referred to as international repertory but generally considered as *safe* repertory. As we have seen above, since theatres have few means of actually controlling the gap between income and prices, repertory choice remains one of their limited strategies in combating deficits.²² In this type of situation Canadian plays will inevitably come up the losers, despite any policy to encourage them. As we shall discover, there was a distinct belief during the first twenty years of the Canada Council (particularly among a large percentage of artistic directors of regional theatres) that Canadian plays would be consistent disasters at the box office. Naturally, they would fall victim to financially dictated repertoires. The economic realities of theatre would present severe challenges to the Canada Council's stated policy of promoting the work of Canadian playwrights.

Endnotes for Chapter Four

¹ Baumol estimates that Broadway as a whole “comes close to showing a profit” (Baumol 126). The situation of the commercial theatre is greatly ameliorated by a series of potential tax ‘write-offs’ which often wipe out losses but are, curiously, not seen by producing entrepreneurs as government aid.

² Without going into elaborate details, the arguments for government subsidisation for the performing arts, generally fall into the following groupings:

(i) Market Failure: for reasons that will be explained here in detail, theatre (and the performing arts) cannot exist without subsidy in the open market-place.

(ii) Merit goods: this justification, used frequently in the Canadian context is explained in the Applebaum/Hébert Report as follows:

the notion of a category of goods and services that deserve to be fostered, in both their production and public enjoyment, irrespective of how the market may measure costs and benefits - simply because they are meritorious.

Clearly this concept offers a congenial setting for the view taken by this Committee of the manifest value of cultural activity in releasing the creative potential of a society, and in illuminating and enriching the human condition -- celebrating its strengths and exposing its frailties. (Applebaum/Hébert 68 see also Baumol 385-6)

(iii) Future Generations: While theatre might be unable to sustain itself within current market forces, it could conceivably find itself, in the future, in an economy in which it might

survive or even flourish. We therefore owe it to future generations to preserve it as an art form against such an eventuality (see Baumol 384-5).

(iv) Aesthetics: A widely held opinion that theatre, as one of the primary art forms, deserves preservation and encouragement: “the inherent value of beauty and the ineffable contribution of aesthetic activity.” This is no longer a popular argument -- certainly not with economists -- and to the ‘man in the street,’ “it is likely to smack of things he rightly considers dangerous: paternalism, dictation of tastes and violation of consumer sovereignty” (Baumol 377). On the other hand, theatre as elite art can be seen as a form of “cultural capital”, in Bourdieu's terminology and therefore returns to the category of the useful in sociological terms.

(v) Denial of Opportunity: A popular argument and central to the position of the Massey/Levésque Commission, it argues that one of the reasons that theatre cannot sustain itself is that audience support, because of prices and cultivated taste, is limited to the wealthy elite and if it were available to everyone -- in the form of low ticket prices, and greater accessibility -- the general population would learn to appreciate it, attend -- performances and, ultimately, sustain it without subvention (see Baumol 379).

(vi) Other Arguments: Art, like education or national defence, is an essential public good and should, therefore, be provided by government since market forces would fail to provide it in any general way -- except for the wealthy.

All these arguments have been strongly attacked, of course, on political and economic grounds.

³ Box Office is generally considered to include such things as bar revenues, parking,

program advertisements, souvenirs etc..

⁴ For one of the more convincing arguments against government subsidies see Globerman xx.

⁵ Countless examples could be given of this. From Baumol and Bowen: “[s]urely we have learned something since 1720, when that early foundation, the Royal Academy of Music, undertook to support opera in London ‘till Musick takes such Root, as to Subsist with less aid;’ for as we saw, even then, instead of less support, it constantly needed more” (Baumol 346). Harley Granville-Barker, one of the earliest proponents of the idea of a National Theatre in Britain, wrote from long experience that theatre could not be a commercial success (Granville-Barker 4) and Jack Poggi describes the case of The New Theatre, one of the first ‘non-commercial’ theatre experiments in the U. S., in 1909. Well funded, with high artistic standards, excellent facilities and intentions, it folded after two years with a deficit of \$400,000 (Poggi 104-5).

⁶ "The central point of the argument is that for an activity such as the live performing arts where productivity is stationary, every increase in money wages will be translated automatically into an equivalent increase in unit labour costs -- there is no offsetting increase in output per man-hour as there is in a rising productivity industry" (Baumol 171).

⁷ In Canada wages in the theatre tended to remain lower than in the U. S. since the indigenous system was newer and labour was less well organised. Although L'union des artistes was founded in 1937, the union for actors in English -- Actor's Equity -- was a subdivision of Actor's Equity in the U. S., and did not become an independent body (Canadian Actor's Equity) until 1976. However, many of the smaller theatres rely on non-

Equity personnel, mostly actors just beginning their career. Since Equity wages are arguably low across the board, non-Equity actors work for wages that are generally below the poverty line. As a result, theatre artists live in poverty and yet “provide the largest single component of [theatre] subsidy” (Hendry, “Cultural” 19). As a result of this you can imagine the reaction of artists when they read economists' statements that public funding of the performing arts is designed only to enrich “a select group of performers, producers, and technical personnel, while the bulk of the Canadian population has been burdened with higher prices for the cultural services they consume” (Globerman xix). It is only in the last twenty-five years in Canada that performers in the live arts have been able, without guilt, to insist on wages commensurate with their training and abilities. In addition, the Canada Council has stoutly maintained (with considerable justification) that one of the main objectives and successes of public subsidy to theatres has been to keep ticket prices low.

⁸ For a discussion of the various methods that theatres have tried in order to evade the economic realities of the theatre, see Baumol 175.

⁹ For example, this, from 1966:

It has been estimated, for example, that the few network productions of Shakespeare's plays, although they were far from successful by ordinary television standards, were seen by more persons than have seen a live performance of these plays from the day they were written. Here indeed is a revolution in output per man-hour! (Baumol 229)

¹⁰ It is worth noting that quite a number of studies have gone out of their way to warn the mass media of the danger to themselves inherent in their own success. Theatre feeds the

mass media in the form of ideas and talent and the elimination of that feed could have a disastrous stagnating impact on the movies and television (see Baumol 230). In fact, the *Applebaum/Hébert Report* warned that,

In the view of the economist Kenneth Boulding, this concentration on the culture of mass production and mass consumption has potentially disastrous consequences. By his account, the culture of mass appeal -- the superculture -- is incapable of sustaining itself creatively and relies for its continuing vigour and productivity on the creative and experimental capacity of those kinds of activity that serve minority interests; yet, by its very success, it tends to eclipse and extinguish the activity on which it depends.

(Applebaum/Hébert 69)

¹¹ The growth of the performing arts in the 1960s throughout North America has been documented in a number sources. See, for example, Martorella, 97.

¹² A sad element in the construction boom is the notably poor usability of these performing arts complexes. Whether the cause in each case was architectural ineptitude based on lack of experience in building 'purpose' facilities for theatre, or socio-political in the sense that while the overt purpose of the structure was cultural, the actual agenda was aggrandizement of the particular government level (municipal, provincial or federal), the result was quite a large number of facilities that had major aspects of their physical plant so badly designed that they were virtually (in part) unusable for the purpose for which they were ostensibly built. For example, the Banff Center theatre has a fly-gallery with insufficient height to actually 'fly' sets and a scene paint shop with such a small entrance/exit that flats cannot be

painted there and is used instead as props storage. The O'Keefe Centre in Toronto is an acoustical nightmare requiring the use of microphones. Theatres have been built with parquet floors, rendering them useless for theatrical sets and metallic trap doors have been installed in wooden stages making them useless as well. The Saidye Bronfman Centre in Montréal (built by a premiere Canadian architect) is walled in glass, possibly an intriguing architectural look, but to be *used* the walls have to be completely covered in black curtains, somewhat defeating the purpose. I have had a 'theatre architect' ask me, during renovations of a theatre, whether it is actually necessary that there be access from the dressing rooms to the stage. The Twentieth Century Fund's Book, *Bricks, Mortar and the Performing Arts*, has a running list throughout the book of these architectural 'follies.' See, also, Baumol, 4.

¹³ A number of studies have disagreed with each other as to the *extent* of the reduction of demand caused by higher ticket prices, but no-one has been prepared to state, based on empirical evidence, that higher prices do *not* reduce demand. (See McSkimming, DiMaggio, Book, Globerman and Shafer)

¹⁴ For a detailed analysis of this in Canadian terms, see Book, 34.

¹⁵ The breakdown was as follows:

Statistics for Theatre Audiences:

Men 43.5% Women 56.5%

Median Age 34

Education: Post B.A. 32.7% At least College 58% Some College 82.7%

High School only 17.1% Less than High School 4%

Occupation:

Professionals 56.3%
 Teachers 17.9%
 Artists 8.2%
 Managerial 16%

 Blue Collar 2.9%

 Homemakers 14%

 Students 18.9%

 Retired/Unemployed 4.2%

 Clerical/ Sales 19.7%

Average Income \$16, 819 (U.S. Average at the time \$14,000)

(compiled from: DiMaggio)

¹⁶ The Canada Council's goal of broadening audience participation was, to a considerable extent, achieved (see Book, 24-5). The question to be answered is at what cost, and were there other means of achieving this?

¹⁷ This audience distrust of new works appears to be a general one and especially evident in products of high culture like opera. (see Baumol 254)

¹⁸ Perhaps of lesser concern but still important is the fact that playwrights (particularly newcomers to the profession) are usually ill-equipped at grantsmanship and generally distrustful of "bureaucratic procedures and requirements" and "selection processes" (Arian 104).

¹⁹ In its first annual report the Ontario Arts Council wrote: "The Ontario Arts Council has accepted the premise that if we use our grants to raise the artistic levels of organizations in

the Province, then it will be easier for them to sell more tickets at the box office. Eventually they will require less public subsidies of perhaps even none at all to continue to flourish” (MacSkimming 21). After a number of years of deficits, and the chance to read some of the studies quoted here, the Ontario Arts Council was forced to acknowledge that, “producing companies can be expected to generate, on average, only about half their operating revenues from the box office and must obtain the other half from a combination of federal, provincial and private-sector subsidies. Eventually the Ontario Council, like other arts-support bodies, accepted this fact” (MacSkimming 22). This necessitated, as can be expected, substantial changes in subsidy strategies and mirrors the situation of the Canada Council.

²⁰ The expectations and experience of the Arts Council of Great Britain was similar (Minihan 228).

²¹ This created some bizarre situations. Since arts management in Canada started at level zero, business management facilitators (‘efficiency experts’ as they were called at the time) were brought in by various government agencies to teach some of the basics in accounting, production efficiency and management procedures. In at least one instance, the expert, on being given detailed information on the day to day production procedures of how theatre’s actually had to operate, threw up his hands in horror and said, virtually, “you’re on your own!” (Personal experience).

²² As recently as 1990, The Board of the Canadian Stage Company cancelled an entire season on the basis of ‘fiscal responsibility’ although the cancellation cost the company a minimum of \$434,000 (and probably a great deal more) in cancelled contracts, designs,

advertising etc. Though there were other factors in operation, it seems no coincidence that the planned season was an all-Canadian one. This could have been part of the now-dying belief (see below) that Canadian plays are box office disaster, or it could simply reflect the cultural bias of the Board (see Sprung "Getting" 14).

Chapter Five: The Canada Council 1957-1969

The Council

The purpose of this section is to examine in some detail the practices of the Canada Council from 1957 to 1969 in order to differentiate between its practices and policies in regards to the development of the regional theatre system and its relationship to the English-Canadian playwright. I have decided to take a chronological approach in order to make it clear how policies changed in light of specific events and conditions and how the Council was forced to fund in ways that were sometimes inimical to its own policies. Trial and error often superseded specific strategies in order to reach overall goals that were themselves developed *ad hoc*. Key organizations like the Crest Theatre and Canadian Players were supported (often beyond a point where the Council had lost faith in their 'quality') as long as they enabled the Council to pursue its overriding objective of a professional theatre network and then discarded when they were felt to be no longer necessary. While the Council was not always certain what route to pursue, its determination to remain true to its initial philosophy never wavered.

What follows is a detailed examination of the slow development of what would come to be called the regional theatre system, led by the establishment of the Manitoba Theatre Centre and followed by Neptune Theatre, the Vancouver Playhouse and others. It will show how the definition of that system was based more on a *fait accompli* rather than a thought-out plan: as the specifics of the definition grew out of the philosophies of existing theatres such as the Manitoba Theatre Centre rather than being developed for them. Also, the way that the Canada Council dealt with Canadian playwrights, through the medium of the developing regional system, will be delineated, showing how poorly the Council served the needs of Canadian dramatists and Canadian drama in those years. Some introduction to

the procedures and methods of the Council is necessary, however, in order to clarify how decisions were taken, and based on whose opinion.

Procedures

It will be remembered that the Canada Council was set up as a form of public trustee, positioned independently between the government (to whom it was obliged to report on financial matters) and the artists, whom it was to serve and yet to whom it was not to be responsible: a position of some ambiguity (Milligan, "Ambiguities" 85-6). It was designed as a two-tiered structure: members of the Council proper, "voting though largely inactive" political appointees (McPherson 334), and a second level of officers such as the director, the arts supervisor and others. The appointed members, who bore the ultimate, voting responsibility for Council decisions were, like the members of the Massey/Levésque Commission, drawn from the political, economic (and in a few cases cultural) elite and were, on the whole, white, male, middle-class and well-educated (Litt, *Muses* 21). That they were not appointed for their expertise in the areas of arts and scholarship was a fact that was of some concern even within the Council. The second Chairman, Claude Bissell, commented on the importance of the Council's officers (the second tier) since he felt that the appointed members were not "collectively . . . as wise and informed as [they were] handsome and amiable." (quoted in Granatstein, *Canada* 145)¹

The second tier of the Council, made up of its officers from the director down and including various individuals who advised on specific applications and organizations, did the bulk of the actual work. A grant application with supporting documentation would, generally, go to some kind of panel of anonymous (often unpaid) adjudicators for vetting

before being evaluated by the officers. In the early years, before an internal bureaucracy of advisors had been built up, arts applications invariably went to the Canada Foundation, with its own voluntary adjudicators, for evaluation before arriving on the desks of the officers for a decision. In addition, private individuals with knowledge or expertise in the field concerned were also consulted unofficially and in the area of individual awards exercised great power (McPherson 331-2). Once the consultation process was completed the decisions rested entirely in the hands of the senior officers of the section concerned, and particularly in the hands of the director. In fact, the by-laws of the Council required that *all* requests for grants must be presented to the Council by the director (Trueman 140) so that while the appointed members bore the responsibility for the final decisions, it was the director that presented each request complete with comments and recommendations for the Council to vote on. The same thing was true for changes in policy. This was an enormous responsibility since the Council almost invariably accepted the director's recommendations (McPherson 332) and Trueman, the first director, admits to, at times, not feeling adequate to the enormity of the task (Trueman 153). The Council minutes for this period show no clear example of the Council rejecting the recommendation of the director in over 65 separate meetings -- each of which lasted several days.²

The Council's budget for grant disbursement in the area of the arts was the interest on the original \$50 million establishment fund, although, more like a private foundation than a government organization, the Council could accept gifts and donations and was not obliged to spend all of its available budget each year; it could, and did, carry money forward and at times, in the early years, it built up an emergency buffer fund with unspent moneys (see Granatstein, *Canada* 143). Grants for theatre (and all other) organizations were

disbursed on a yearly basis and the policy was that organizations should not assume that a successful season would be the basis for grant renewal. This did not, however, stop them from assuming that this was a paper policy only:

In spite of this warning it seemed that many organizations budgeted on the assumption a grant would be forthcoming. Inherent in this lay a second problem. Having achieved a balanced budget during a year of operation, an organization would make more ambitious plans for the year following; not only was continued Council support assumed, but an increase in the amount of that support was anticipated to keep step with the total budget expansion.

(W. Whittaker 243-4)

Another problem was the chronic lack of funds as new and developing organizations began to line up for funds. From 1957 until 1965 the Council managed to 'make do' with the approximately \$1.5 million in interest available for the arts each year. Once the emergency fund was spent it was clear (1963) that more money would be needed and the Council approached Parliament for an increase in its invested capital. The government responded instead with the first of many direct grants to the Canada Council which substantially changed the Council's relationship with Parliament and began the slow erosion of the Council's 'arm's length' status (Milligan, "Ambiguities" 71). While this erosion was not to become massive and marked until much later, the process began during the period under discussion.

It is fundamentally clear from the *Annual Reports* and the *Minutes* of the Canada Council that the vexed question of a National Theatre was in abeyance for the first few years of the Council's operation. What the Council was faced with was the *status quo* of

theatre in Canada at the time (as outlined above), and the need to insert itself into the equation, to find ways to assist the existing structures and organizations and to develop a strategy for the future that would enable it to assist the development of Canadian theatre and give Canadian theatre a cohesive shape. As we have seen in the section on Canada Council mandate and philosophy above, Canadian theatre would be shaped by professionalism rather than amateurism, the national more than the 'local' (or regional), the raising of standards within existing organizations rather than spreading, or creating new ones and quality over quantity. All of these imperatives overlap and support each other but in the early years were still developing as policy. Because there were few major organizations vying for grants and because the Council was initially conservative in the amounts it released, there were some funds available for use outside the policy. Indeed, the first Chair, Brooke Claxton, tended to be leery of total commitment to large organizations - - simply because they were large. As a result some money was made available for experimentation and for smaller, regional organizations (Trueman 144). Furthermore, as the Council became disenchanted with some of the existing organizations and began to look for alternatives, money began to move from existing structures to new ventures like the Manitoba Theatre Centre (MTC), the Vancouver Playhouse and Neptune Theatre. Yet, I will argue that this was not a change in the Council's philosophy but rather a search for theatre companies that better fulfilled the parameters of that philosophy, both individually and collectively within the structure of a growing regional system. As new funds were released to the Canada Council in 1965 and after, the financial focus continued to be on the same types of large organizations that fitted the Council's philosophy. And though policy was modified from time to time, it never essentially changed.

1957-1969: A Chronological Account

In its initial year of operation, the Canada Council disbursed grants in the area of the arts totaling \$639,300, of which \$120,000 was spent on theatre: \$90,000 on English theatre and \$30,000 on French theatre. The individual recipients of the \$90,000 were the Canadian Players, Ltd. (\$10,000 for operations in progress and \$20,000 for the next year's tour), the Dominion Drama Festival (\$10,000, mostly for group travel) and the Stratford Shakespearean Festival (\$50,000) (*Annual Report* 1958). On the French side, all of the money went to Théâtre du Nouveau Monde (\$10,000 in operating costs, \$10,000 for a Canadian tour and \$10,000 to cover possible losses on a European tour).

In 1959, Stratford received \$50,000 again (plus \$14,000 for exhibitions and a delegation to Moscow), Canadian Players received \$3,400 (on top of the advance of \$20,000 from the previous year) the Dominion Drama Festival got \$10,000, Montreal Repertory Theatre received \$6,000, La Poudrière (Montreal International Theatre) received \$3,000, TNM was given \$39,000 and the Comédie Canadienne³ received an equal sum to Stratford: \$50,000. In addition to these grants, the Comédie Canadienne and the Crest — were each given a \$5,000 grant to commission a new Canadian play, The DDF received \$4,500 in awards for Canadian plays and the Ottawa Little Theatre Workshop was granted \$1,500 to make available unpublished Canadian one-act plays “of merit.” a total of \$175,400 to organizations and \$16,000 in some form of play development. Various types of statistical analyses of these numbers would produce various types of interesting results but two facts are of importance here. The largest, high profile groups got the largest grants and the amount spent on play development in 1958 would remain the highest percentage of its

theatre budget (about 9%) ever spent in that area and the largest amount in actual dollars until the end of the sixties.

The initial, international successes of the Stratford Festival and the high profile of the Comédie Canadienne and the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde explain the large grants given to these organizations. Stratford was the sole 'success story' on the English-Canadian theatrical scene and reaped the rewards through Council money. TNM, founded by Jean-Louis Roux, Jean Gascon, Georges Groulx and Guy Hoffman, had had equal success with the classical repertory, specializing in plays by Molière as well as Priestley, Achard, Shaw, Motherlant and Bréal⁴ despite the fact that it had no permanent home (Beauchamp-Rank 269-270). If it is remembered that The Canadian Players (next highest on the list) was an off-shoot of the Festival -- initially a winter tour for members of the company -- the proportion is even more shocking. Yet, as we shall see, given the context of the time, there was little else that the Council could do if it was to adhere to its stated philosophy. And, in fact, the Canada Council was looking for theatres that, within that philosophy, it could give money to and was not finding them. At the end of 1957 and 1958 it had a surplus that it used to begin building an emergency fund. The other reason for the disparity is that the Council, as I have already argued, sincerely believed that these grants were for individual theatre company development and would come, in time, to be unnecessary. They still felt that "a first-class company might avoid loss or even make some money" (*Annual Report* 1958, 23). It would take time to disabuse them of this belief. Privately, however, at least some officers were already aware of this: applicants for grants were sometimes referred to in the minutes as "another resident in its orphanage" (*Minutes* 18-21/07/1958).⁵

Two of the 'orphans' mentioned in the list of grants above were to play a prominent role in the early years of the Council and therefore deserve some discussion here: The Canadian Players and the Crest Theatre. The Crest had been founded (see above) as a limited-liability company and after accumulating losses of nearly \$100,000 up to 1957 was converted into a non-profit foundation and therefore became eligible for Canada Council grants (*Oxford* 120). It was at the time the largest and most prominent (after Stratford) professional theatre in Canada and Council perhaps saw it as a kind of base on which to begin to develop other professional theatres in Canada. They began to fund it with a modest \$5,000 commission for a new Canadian play with some enthusiasm. The play, mentioned earlier, was *Ride a Pink Horse* by John Gray, and was slated for the May slot in the 1959 season. The Council would invest heavily in the Crest before becoming disillusioned with its potential and finally presiding over its demise.

The other major component of the 'orphanage' was the Canadian Players. Begun by Tom Patterson and Douglas Campbell in 1954, the company was founded in order to tour the country with Stratford actors in "Stratford-quality professional productions" (*Oxford* 74) between seasons at Stratford. While it might have been considered an exercise in self-employment by some, it proved, at first, to be critically well-accepted and so popular that by 1956 it was touring in the U.S. as well as Canada and expanding to the point that it needed two companies to fulfill public demand (*Oxford* 74). Touring was difficult and expensive, since, as we have seen, there was little theatrical infrastructure in terms of facilities and tour bookings, and the Canadian Players lost \$40,000 in their first season and continued (despite the demand) to lose money. Since they had private patronage in the person of Lady Flora

Eaton, they managed to struggle through their financial woes until the arrival of the Council and its first grants.

While much of the detailed history of the Canadian Players remains unrecorded, (Stuart, "Theatre" 8) particularly the reason for their subsequent decline in product, it is clear why the Canada Council was interested in heavily supporting this group even after becoming unhappy with its productions and methods. The Massey/Levésque Commission had recommended creating the Council "largely as an attempt to overcome a small population, [and] great distances" (Granatstein, *Canada* 141) and in the absence of a solution to the national theatre problem had suggested touring as a temporary alternative. The Council quickly endorsed this solution and the Canadian Players presented them with an already touring, professional company, thus fulfilling their philosophic criteria. What is more, the company toured exclusively the classics of high culture and was therefore the perfect vehicle for the Council. The *Annual Report* of 1958 spoke of the geographical problems faced in trying to expand theatre in Canada in much the same terms as had the Massey/Levésque Commission and urged touring as a solution, in addition to justifying it on the level of decentralization, since all of the other theatre grants seemed to be going to Toronto and Montréal. In addition it was hoped that the tours of the Canadian Players would serve as a model for "local organizations" offering "first class . . . performances" that might "increase public interest" in the theatre.⁶ It warned, however, that the high cost of touring might cause the Players to reduce their offerings to small casts -- "reducing quantity not quality" (*Annual Report 1958*, 25). It did not occur to the Council that a model for Canadian theatre of a largely British cast doing the classics might be less than appropriate in a country struggling to emerge from colonialism in a new-found nationalism.

But it did occur to the audiences and a number of areas (particularly in the West) began to decline the honour of a tour from the Canadian Players.⁷

The *Annual Report* of 1958 (there is none for 1957) strikes a number of key notes that were to be repeated incessantly over the next several years. In the light of the fact that all the grants to theatre in the first two years had gone to Toronto and Montréal, it noted that Winnipeg, Calgary, Edmonton and Vancouver were in the process of planning or building new theatres or concert halls for possible future use by possible future theatre companies and reminded regions and municipalities that these types of projects were the responsibility of local organizations and governments (*Annual Report* 1958, 22). It encouraged local organizations to “enlarge their activities, improve their standards, increase their audiences and raise more local money” with the prospects of future Council aid once they reached a “national standard” (*Annual Report* 1958, 19-20) and it promised a study of “local theatre groups” (*Annual Report* 1958, 15). But it steadfastly maintained that an organization was unlikely to receive “substantial support” until it reached what the Council sometimes referred to as “national standards” and, less frequently as “world standards” (*Annual Report* 1958, 25). Finally it repeated the Massey/Levésque Commission appeal to nationalism by gently warning Canadians about American cultural competition and invasion at the same time as it pointed out that Canadian performers were now achieving “the *cachet* of success in New York” (*Annual Report* 1958, 22).

While some of these statements may have had a cautionary, even chilling, effect on theatrical artists and audiences outside of central Canada, playwrights must have been heartened by the 1958 *Annual Report*. In addition to the (relatively) large sum expended on

play development and commissioning, the report contained vague but promising statements such as

perhaps the most fruitful investment that can be made is in people of talent whose early promise is recognized and who need and can profit from assistance that will free them to study and to work. There is no way of assuring success in every case; risks must be taken; we may not know the results for years; there will be many disappointments; and there is no mathematical scale whereby the product can be valued. But in the end what we are and what we do depend on the talent, the training, the opportunities and the work of people of promise. (*Annual Report 1958*, 21)

Playwrights who had been faced with severely limited opportunities in theatre and forced to earn their living in other media may have seen this as a good omen for the future. And more was to come.

In 1959 the Canada Council unveiled its new "Policy for the Arts" which seemed to promise these great opportunities in a more concrete and institutional form. This policy was intended to "give the creative artist an opportunity to produce new work, and secondly to bring his work before the public." Since, for a playwright, these are one and the same thing, the proposed policy held great promise. The policy promised individual grants to creative artists in the forms of commissions that *required* the theatre to produce the work that it had received the grant to commission. The grant was not direct, however, it was

made to an organization in which the Council has confidence and which is devoted to the presentation of works of art. . . . The organization is then required to commission or choose a work of art and to pay the money

provided (sometimes matching the grant with an equal amount from its own resources) to an artist or artists of its own choosing. . . . Finally, the organization is required to play, present or otherwise show the work of art created for it. (*Annual Report* 1959, 20)

As an example the Council cited the grant to the Crest Theatre or the previous year for *Ride a Pink Horse* (*Annual Report* 1959, 22).⁸ The yearly amount set aside for this, although not mentioned in the *Report* was \$10,000: \$5,000 for plays in English and \$5,000 for plays in French (*Minutes* 19-20/5/59).⁹

Several disturbing features about this new policy were not made public. The decision to allot \$10,000 was hardly dry on the paper when the Canada Council decided to alter it almost to the point of ineffectuality. The minutes of November 5-7, 1959 read:

The Council discussed its policy regarding grants to theatre companies to commission new plays by Canadian authors. It had been brought to the attention of the Council's officers that there were a number of plays by reputable Canadian authors already written and awaiting stage performance; in these circumstances it seemed unreasonable to insist on the writing of new works. After discussion, it was agreed to modify the policy to permit either the commissioning of a new Canadian play or the production of a play already written but not performed. (*Minutes* 5-7/10/59)

Though the policy would now *enable* theatre to commission new works, the same funds would be allocated to producing a Canadian work already written. The commission policy was dead before it could even be applied. In addition, *all requests* for grants to commission new plays in that year (two from the Crest and one from the Winnipeg Summer Theatre

Association) were denied and, in 1959, no commissions for new Canadian plays were issued (*Minutes* 5-7/11/59). Although future commissions would be granted it was clear that the Council, for all its rhetoric, placed a low priority on the creation of new Canadian plays -- after commissioning only one.

On top of this, the policy announced the "Canada Council Awards" for distribution through the Dominion Drama Festival "in order to give further encouragement to the writing and production of Canadian plays" (*Annual Report* 1959, 27). These were to be in each of the eight zones of the DDF for the best production of a Canadian play (\$400 to the company and \$100 to the playwright) with the further award of \$500 to the playwright whose play wins the Calvert Trophy. Plays which had never been presented at the Festival before were eligible and therefore these were not specifically awards for new plays (*Annual Report* 1959, 27). The Council had initially suggested that the awards should be stipulated for use in commissioning a new Canadian play for competition in subsequent year, but the DDF balked, claiming that many winning companies might not be capable of "carrying out the project." Thus, what might have been an extremely modest type of commission for *new* plays, became simply an award for doing a Canadian play.

In the press, the Crest theatre was coming under increasing attack for its performances and for its repertoire. Robert Fulford accused the Crest of performing neither enough classics nor "Canadian originals" but instead of attempting to copy "Broadway or West End hits" (Fulford 82). He also bemoaned the decline in the Canadian Players whom he had strongly supported (claiming they had occasionally "nudged greatness") before they "became professional." "Today," he wrote in 1959, "the Canadian Players push on: they still play Shakespeare in small towns in Canada and colleges in the United States. But somehow

no-one except those personally involved seems to care whether the Canadian Players live or die” (Fulford 83). Fulford blamed the decline of both these theatres on a desperate desire on their part to make “the slow ascent towards professionalism” which he defined as a slavish imitation of foreign theatre models and concluded that “terrible pressure seems to bear on all of these companies: they must be big, they must be slick, they must be professional” (Fulford 83). While Fulford is unlikely to be making a direct attack on the Canada Council (he was, and is, a great, though critical, supporter of the Council) it is inescapably true that part of that “terrible pressure” must have come from the Council and its granting policies stressing growth and professionalism.

The Canada Council continued, however, to enthusiastically support the Crest Theatre calling it, in director Trueman's words: “without any question one of the most important English-language theatres in Canada and its application for assistance is strongly supported by the Canada Foundation . . . The only weakness which the Arts Supervisor has observed is that no provision appears to have been made for it to become self-supporting eventually.” In the case of the Canadian Players the Council noted a total liability of \$120,000 and commented that, “the performances of Shakespeare have lost the dynamics and originality of earlier productions.” Still, the Council continued its support with a grant of \$20,000 and promised an \$8,000 study into touring conditions by the Canadian Theatre Centre (*Minutes* 17-19/08/1959). The Council had also received an application for a grant from a new company, the Manitoba Theatre Centre but on February 2-3 it declined to approve a grant request for \$26,000. “Let the Centre,” said one anonymous advisor, “find its own unaided path to success” (*Minutes* 2-3/02/1959). However, at its August meeting, it reversed itself and granted the new MTC \$10,000, commenting “this is not a fully

professional theatre but appears to be in the process of becoming one" (*Minutes* 17-9/08/1959). The first of the future English regionals was on the books of the Canada Council.

On the French scene a battle for that position seemed to be shaping up between Le Théâtre du Rideau Vert and Le Théâtre du Nouveau Monde. Rideau Vert had been founded by Yvette Brind-Amour (who began her career at the Montréal Repertory Theatre) and operated out of Le Théâtre des Compagnons and then the Gésu. After closing in 1952, it reopened in 1956 with Félix Leclerc's *Sonnez les matines* -- a critical failure but a popular success -- and moved into the Théâtre Stella in 1960. With the advantage of a permanent theatre over TNM, Rideau Vert began receiving Canada Council grants in 1959 starting with a modest \$6,500 compared to TNM's \$15,000. This gap in funding differential widened rather than shrunk and by 1962 TNM was receiving \$35,000 and Rideau Vert \$15,000. Looking ahead, for a moment, to the end of the period under discussion, we find that by 1969-70 TNM was receiving double the funding of Rideau Vert (\$325,000 to \$160,000) and was clearly -- from a financial point of view -- in the position of Montréal's premier regional theatre (see Gruslin 308).

By 1960 the Council budget for English theatre had risen to \$131,500, the major difference being the addition of the Manitoba Theatre Centre. In terms of overall priorities within the arts sector, theatre ranked second behind ballet at \$145,000. Now it was the Crest's turn to be in serious difficulties with the Council because of a "bad season" -- even though the theatre mounted another Canadian play without commission: Michael Jacot's *Honour Thy Father*. The Council, after consulting exhaustively with advisors, decided that there was "complete agreement that the 1959-60 season lacked courage and quality, but

also that the collapse of one of the few established repertory theatres in Canada would be a very serious blow to our theatre generally” (*Minutes 22-4/08/1960*). The Council's officers even questioned the accuracy of the grant application and concluded that: “we recommend that the theatre should be supported for a further year, but that the Council warn the board that unless there is substantial improvement at the box office showing a genuine interest on the part of the Toronto audience, support will not be continued” (*Minutes 22-4/08/1960*). The Crest had also applied for \$10,000 to *present* (not commission) two new Canadian plays -- they had obviously been informed in the change in policy -- and the Council laconically gave them *permission*, but only \$5,000 and only after it was duly noted for the record that no commissions had been given out the previous year (*Minutes 22-4/02/1960*). The Crest was in serious trouble with the Canada Council.

The Canadian Players continued to struggle with their burden of debt, having lost in excess of \$85,000 (\$2,000 less than the previous year) but a “general re-organization” was underway, presumably in hopes that the problems could be solved: “your officers feel that the company is moving in the right direction both artistically and administratively and would recommend that the Council back them as far as possible” (*Minutes 22-4/08/1960*). The Council was prepared to be more sympathetic having received the “Theatre Facilities Survey” which detailed appalling conditions in the form of high school “auditoria-gymnasia,” all totally unequipped requiring the Players to carry everything with them except the bare stage. (see *Annual Report 1960*, Annex E) Even the Manitoba Theatre Centre came in for some harsh words when the Council granted it \$15,000 (on an application for \$50,000), as the Council noted that “there does not seem to be any prospect of the organization becoming self-supporting in the future” (*Minutes 30-1/05/1960*). The Council

later added a grant of \$5,000 to commission a play -- and thereby exceeding the allotted budget for commissions to English theatre. Finally, the Dominion Drama Festival reported that it was only able to award \$2,000 in "Canada Council Awards" due to lack of interest among its constituency. The DDF wanted to know if the awards were to be continued and was told that they would be (*Minutes* 21-2/11/1960).¹⁰

It was a sombre year for the Council and led to some reflection that may have been helpful in the long run. A pattern was beginning to emerge that was, as yet, only seen darkly; but two facts had clearly become evident. On the financial side, arts supervisor Peter Dwyer had opined officially that: "it is now quite clear that there are certain types of organizations in the arts which will never be self-supporting and which the Council will probably continue to assist indefinitely. He suggests that these are . . . [among others] certain important repertory theatres" (*Minutes* 22-3/02/1960). He may have been referring to the still youthful MTC, but he was certainly targeting the Crest. Nonetheless it was a statement the Council accepted, although it would continue to hound its clients to balance their books. The second realization was in the area of repertoire. It recognized that, in the area of basic organizational grants, the size of the grant in many ways dictated choice of material, with the largest grants (Stratford and, now, Canadian Players) going to the classical repertoire, the second size of grants (repertory theatres like the Crest) playing "more run-of-the-mill productions with an occasional flyer into experimental theatre" and "one or two small groups doing new Canadian plays" (*Minutes* 22-4/08/1960). The vast bulk of the Council's support was consistently going to theatres that were not inclined to produce Canadian plays. While this fact was public knowledge by the mid-1970s, it is astonishing how early it was clear to the Canada Council itself.

On May 2 and 3, 1961, the senior officers of the Council attended a meeting in Toronto prior the meeting of the Canadian Conference on the Arts to discuss the Council's relationship to the arts. One of the hot topics of discussion was the status of the Canadian playwright and what could be done to encourage a greater output of new Canadian plays. Among the responses were suggestions that playwrights wouldn't write in a situation where there was no market for their work (as there was in television) and that perhaps commissioning could be increased and playwright residencies set up. It was pointed out that playwrights, particularly new ones, needed the right to fail in order to learn and that they must work closely with theatre companies and directors to perfect their crafts. Since Canadian theatre companies were financially strapped as it was, these needs called for a greater commitment of Council money. The Council representatives came away with two conclusions regarding playwrights which they brought back to Council: 1) The Council should encourage the development of theatres outside Toronto and Montréal. As a first step the Council might sponsor someone to study local conditions. Such theatres might eventually make national touring companies unnecessary. 2) The Council should increase the number of grants for the commissioning of plays by Canadian authors (*Minutes 4-5/09/1961*).

These conclusions became part of a revised "Policy for Arts Organizations" put forward at the September meeting of the Council. As a sort of preamble to the proposed policy review, Dwyer reiterated his earlier remarks about funding patterns (above) and admitted that the pattern was "a tangible result of a philosophy, as it were, which has been built up during the Council's existence." He recommended that the philosophy continue to be applied even though of the three repertory theatres the Council deemed "significant,"

two were in serious artistic and financial troubles and one (MTC) was “not yet” professional. Nevertheless, the Council should continue its focus on professionalism, quality and national standards. Since the situation seemed fraught with contradictions, Dwyer offered the following explanation:

Two considerations appear to have dominated in cases where assistance has been given to organizations where standards were not of the best: that the organization was an integral part of the national scene; or that it showed a potential for development and improvement. The Council has not always been successful in raising standards but we feel nevertheless that the principle has been a sound one. We therefore deduce from the pattern of grants that the Council's intention has been to give first consideration to organizations which are demonstrably national in scope or significance -- that is to say, it has set the national interest above regional issues. (*Minutes* 4-5/09/1961)

As a result the proposed “Future Policy For Arts Organizations” reads essentially like the policies that have already been outlined here, and can be shortly adumbrated as follows:

Council should concentrate its aid on:

1. Professional organizations which “are important in the national scheme.”
2. Organizations which nationally “contribute needed services to the professional artists.”
3. “Those organizations or projects which contribute substantially to the development of the paying public the artist requires” (*Minutes* 4-5/09/1961).

However anything that falls outside such parameters would be covered by a new fund called the "Arts Development Fund," for the which purpose, a sum of \$60,000 would be set aside and no grant from this fund could exceed \$2,500.¹¹ Members of the Council were urged "for the time being" to keep this change "private to members and officers of the Council until we have time to see if it works successfully" (*Minutes 4-5/09/1961*). Dwyer's realizations of the year before had become part of Canada Council policy and represented a tightening of the existing pattern and the institutionalization of it. The economic realities of theatre had entered Council policy, since the Council was now entering a fifth year "in which we shall give continued support to a limited number of groups, and it no longer seems reasonable to pretend that we shall not continue to support them for the foreseeable future" (*Minutes 4-5/09/1961*). At no time in the discussion was any space reserved for the issue of repertoire and it must be concluded that the Council felt that the *exclusively* classical repertoire of the Canadian Players and the mostly West End and Broadway hit (with occasional Canadian works) repertoire of the Crest was perfectly acceptable to the Council. For public consumption in the *Annual Report*, the message was gentler, but no less clear:

Our golden apple is divisible but cannot be endlessly divided if it is to provide any sustenance worth having. For organizations concerned with the arts, the apple stays at approximately \$1,000,000 a year. As the arts develop in Canada and as the needs of their organizations grow in proportion, the Council may be forced to concentrate its assistance even more heavily on those which show the greatest excellence. Organizations which provide little more than useful and pleasant amenities for the arts, or which are attempting

to duplicate things already well done, may not be able to look at The Canada Council for help in the future. The beginning of a withdrawal here and there in the country has already been noted with some concern. But unless additional funds become available for the arts the judgments which the Council must make will have to be increasingly strict. (*Annual Report* 1961, 16)

In blatantly direct contradiction to these new policy offerings, the Canada Council authorized a grant to the brand new Civic Square Theatre, Toronto, of \$10,000 -- which was precisely the amount asked for; a great rarity. The grant application offered to produce five plays, including John Coulter's *Riel* (unseen since its original production by the New Play Society) and a series of "Special Monday night Canadian productions" to include: *A Beach of Strangers* by John Reeves, *The Sun and the Moon* by James Reaney, a new children's play by John Hirsch and *The Secret of the World* by Ted Allan (*Minutes* 20-1/11/1961). Unlike the later Canadian offerings of the Crest, mainly 'Broadway-style' imitations, these plays offered the first possibility of a serious, mostly Canadian season -- even though the majority of the plays would have a 'second stage' production. The grant is still considered "extraordinary" by theatre historians (Scott 83), partly because it went completely against the grain of revised Council policy, partly because the directors of the company (Anthony Ferry and Harvey Hart) drew their experience mostly from dramatic criticism for both the Toronto *Star* and the CBC, partly because it opened in a former burlesque house, but largely because it was such a drastic failure. After two productions, the first one of some quality, Civic Square disintegrated, folded and disappeared. (see Scott 83-4)

On the surface it looked like a terrible blunder on the part of the Canada Council, and perhaps it was. It may be argued that at last the Council was prepared to venture some 'seed money' on a project that promised greater Canadian content, if not new plays. Yet it is clear from the minutes that the Civic Square grant was as much a warning to the Crest to straighten itself out as it was a gamble.¹² Trueman's commentary to the Council on the grant application stated that "a new theatre of quality is being formed of a kind which is badly needed in English-speaking Canada" and that, "theatre in Toronto has fallen far behind developments which have been taking place in Montréal and the current productions of the long-established Crest Theatre which the Council has supported with a grant of \$22,000 do not command the attention of a lively audience" (*Minutes* 20-1/11/1961). While Trueman (and the Council) may have felt that Civic Square and its partly Canadian season was a worthwhile gamble on its own, a large part of the justification for the grant seems to have been the creation of a new theatre company that could take the place of the troublesome Crest. The gamble was unsuccessful and remained a sore spot to the Council for years and another justification to remain with its original philosophy.

Meanwhile, the Crest received another \$5,000 'commission' to produce a "first performance" of a Canadian play (*Minutes* 4-5/09/1961) and then had it withdrawn in favour of an award of \$4,400 to Donald Jack (playwright) and Hugh Webster (actor) in conjunction with the Actor's Theatre, Toronto. Donald Jack's earlier play, *The Canvas Barricade*, had won the Stratford playwrighting competition and the grant was for the production of a new play, entitled *Exit Muttering*. The reason for reducing the grant from \$5,000 to \$4,400 is not made clear, but the further slight to the Crest is Trueman's comment: "the showing of this theatre to date has been far from encouraging" (*Minutes* 20-

1/11/1961). In its *Annual Report* for 1961, the Council continued to demonstrate the wide and widening gap between its rhetoric concerning the need to support Canadian playwrights and its poor efforts to actually accomplish this. The *Report* states that:

The health of the theatre cannot depend only on its actors, directors and designers. It is vitally dependent upon its playwrights and upon the quality of the work they produce. . . . The Council is of the opinion that living theatre demands living playwrights and that the Canadian theatre demands Canadian playwrights. Through its commissioning grants to theatres, the Council has attempted to give some additional stimulus to the writing and production of new plays. . . . The Council's help to our writers, composers, painters, sculptors, and other creative artists is provided first through its scholarship system. But the Council has recognized the need for additional and continuing help and has therefore devised a number of policies, adapted as best possible to the nature of various arts, to provide some further stimulus. Funds are provided to permit the commissioning of . . . new plays to be written and performed. (*Annual Report* 1961, 36)

We will return to the issue of the “scholarship system” below, but clearly the Council's efforts to date had hardly satisfied the living theatre in Canada's “demand” for living playwrights.

Also in 1961, the first of the provincial funding agencies was created in Québec. Following the victory of the Lesage liberals in 1960 (with the campaign slogan *Il faut que ça change*) the government of Québec set up a Ministry of Culture which began disbursing funds immediately.¹³ This step began a process that caused the funding situation in Québec

(particularly in Francophone theatre) to differentiate more and more widely from that in English Canada. Theatre funding in Québec developed an even more political agenda earlier than in the rest of the country and a higher public profile (see Hébert 28) and tended to interfere more directly and openly in the theatrical scene (Nardocchio 51-2).¹⁴ One example of this difference that is pertinent here is the fact that while the Canada Council was clearly preferring TNM over Rideau Vert, the Ministry of Culture funded these two theatres almost equally (Gruslin 312).

There were other new developments in the 1960-61 year. The National Theatre School opened its doors on November 2, 1960 and the Manitoba Theatre Centre was clearly improving its performance in the eyes of the Council:

We have also noted . . . the emergence of a new form in the Manitoba Theatre Centre. Here is an organization which provides a regular season of popular plays for adults, a studio series of experimental plays and special productions for children. It has recently proved that it is not just a Winnipeg theatre by taking one of its plays on a provincial tour. With the assistance of a Canada Council grant of \$15,000 the Centre is bringing largely professional theatre to an increasing audience. We think that it is an important addition to our theatrical life and one which might serve as a model to other communities which have the population to support such a venture. (*Annual Report* 1961, 33)

Compared to its older clients MTC was offering hope for the future. Exactly what kind of a significant model the MTC could be would emerge in the following year.

In 1962 the Canadian Conference of the Arts met and a panel representing theatre, ballet and the opera made a number of recommendations that were “to form the basis of the Canada Council's policy with respect to regional theatre centers” (W. Whittaker 226, see 220-227 for details). While the minutes for this year do not record any detailed discussion of the idea, the term “regional theatres” appears for the first time in the minutes of August 20-1, 1962, and the *Annual Report* for the year goes into the concept in considerable detail. The Council expressed its concern over the lack of development in professional theatre east of Montréal and west of Winnipeg; “other cities have had to rely largely upon the uncertain glory of touring companies.” In addition, the Council was worried about the lack of professional opportunities for young actors about to emerge from the new National Theatre School. Since, it “tentatively” agreed that a “truly national theatre is not likely to be created in any one city . . . the essential of a *national* theatre . . . is that it should reach a *national* audience -- even if this audience must for convenience be broken down into regional audiences” (*Annual Report* 1962, 4). Then the *Report* proceeded to outline what it thought a regional theatre should be:

A regional theatre must first be situated in a city with a population capable of giving it support and bearing the brunt of its expenses. . . . In addition to a regular season of plays, the company would have to provide productions designed to be taken to small centres within its general area, or to plan one or two regular periods of touring each year with a small repertoire of plays. It would also have to provide theatre for children and, if possible, should organize a school for training embryo actors on a more modest scale than that of the National Theatre School. . . . A theatre of this kind has been in

the process of formation for a number of years in Winnipeg -- the Manitoba Theatre Centre -- and it may be that this theatre will set a pattern to be used elsewhere. (*Annual Report* 1962, 5)

In addition to this it added several other criteria: the regional theatre must have strong enough local support to “offset the possible conflicting interests of local amateur groups,” it must strive for “professional and inspired direction,” it must build towards “professional levels” and “hunt down that wildest of foxes -- style.” In doing these things it must not “hesitate in the early stages to look outside the country for its director if only in this way it can ensure quality.” It was hoped that with these criteria met, a number of regional theatres might be established and linked within a decade. With a sideways look at the troubled Canadian Players, the Council speculated that “if a national theatre were to develop on a regional basis, the days of the national touring company might be numbered” (*Annual Report* 1962, 5-6).

The Canada Council seemed to, at last, have in its sights a model for the Canadian theatre of the future that it could fit into its working philosophy of national/professional quality; one that would begin to respond to regional needs and also allow the Council to disencumber itself of the Canadian Players. True to its philosophy and procedures it cautioned that the development of each regional theatre (particularly in the area of physical plant) would lie in the hands of local organizations and governments, but it was prepared to start the ball rolling by sending Tom Patterson and Leon Major to Halifax to assist local groups in beginning the process there (*Annual Report* 1962, 7). The Canada Council's idea of a regional theatre is interesting mostly in its multiplicity of purposes. Clearly modeled on the Manitoba Theatre Centre (which was modeled on Planchon's theatre in Lyon, France)

the regional theatre was 'regional' only in the sense that it would serve the region surrounding it through touring (providing a finished product to the hinterland) and draw from the region surrounding it in the form of students for its schools, audiences for its shows and potential actors for its company (drawing on the hinterland for natural resources). As such, 'regional' is really an inappropriate title since the description fits much more aptly the model of Metropolitanism as explored by J. M. S. Careless in his book: *Frontier and Metropolis*. Each theatre operated out of a major metropolitan area and was supposed to both provide productions for and draw audiences and funding from the economic areas serviced by and servicing the metropolis. The title would become even more inappropriate when "regions" such as Alberta and B.C. possessed two regional theatres each -- although by that time most (if any) of the touring to surrounding communities had ceased. Since the above description is the only existing definition of what a regional theatre is, it is not surprising how many people -- even those running them -- are unclear as to what they are supposed to be.¹⁵ The term is no longer utilized by the Canada Council although it lingers on in popular usage.

With a new plan (if not philosophy) in hand, the Council warned the Canadian Players that, in the face of an accumulated deficit projected at \$77,802, their days might be numbered. Convinced that there was little likelihood of an improvement in standards the Council resolved to warn the Players that the coming season might be the last that they could expect a grant and set in place yet another re-organization.¹⁶ In addition to this, the Council (despite DDF objections) cut off the "Canada Council Awards" from the Dominion Drama Festival because, once again, only a portion had even been competed for (*Minutes* 19-20/02/1962). It was clear, at last, to the Council that they served absolutely no purpose

in the development of new Canadian plays.¹⁷ The Council continued to hope in a vague sort of way that Canadian playwrights of talent were “lurking round the corner” (*Annual Report* 1962, 8) but some critics were less sanguine. Robert Weaver wrote at the time that the records of the Crest and the Manitoba Theatre (that is, the theatres receiving Council subvention) were “not good enough” in the production of Canadian plays (Weaver 80) and suggested that more could be done by the Council in the form of regular commission grants over longer periods of time -- he suggested three years -- in order to “attract playwrights” (Weaver 81) but this suggestion went unheeded. In the meantime, George Luscombe's Workshop Productions, with an excellent track record in developing and producing original Canadian scripts, was refused an operating grant (although a scholarship of \$4,000 was given to Luscombe, personally) because the company actors were not “professional” and because Luscombe “finds it difficult to work with regular actors in whose training he has not had a hand” (*Minutes* 20-1/08/1962).

Finally, the Canada Council, in its ongoing, secret review of its policy for the arts, resolved to continue to harden its policy against funding non-professional organizations even though it was aware that this would eliminate most grants outside of metropolitan areas. Arguing that “professionalism equates with quality and excellence”¹⁸ the Council projected an over-all re-allocation of some \$216,000 in the arts sector, partly gained through the elimination of “Arts Development Fund” -- its own meagre compromise of a year earlier (see above). These further steps, felt the Council, would move it “closer to the policy of the Arts Council of Great Britain and away from those of the American foundations which were such a strong influence at the outset” (*Minutes* 19-20/11/1962). What the Council was in fact doing was setting in stone its philosophy and policy without

reconsidering it in the light of its self-admitted failures (Crest and Canadian Players) and loosening up funds from the limited resources available in preparation for the anticipated regional theatres. Financially it made a great deal of sense. But the Council was now committed indefinitely to a process that ignored indigenous talent outside of major professional theatres; and in those organizations, box office exigencies called for a 'safety' in repertoire that left little space for Canadian plays, new or otherwise.

In the period 1957-1963 the Canada Council had spent \$1,334, 845 on Canadian theatre in what has been best described as a "holding pattern" (Weaver 77): a maintenance of existing organizations until something better, Micawber-like, turned up. What turned up, initially, was the Council's toughest year financially. The *Minutes* of August 26-27, 1963 record the crisis. The Council's carefully accumulated reserve was gone and "for the first time we have found ourselves, during the course of the current year, making recommendations based not upon the reasonable requirements of the applicants but upon the availability of money. In other words, we are beginning to cut the cake to make it go round rather than to meet the appetite." The budget for arts organizations has been reduced by 8% -- "crippling" at a time of growth -- while the subsidized theatres all carried accumulated deficits (*Minutes* 26-7/08/1963).¹⁹ The large deficits were particularly embarrassing, since they might reflect on the acumen of the Council itself: "[t]he good judgment of The Canada Council, which is known to be a strong and consistent supporter of these organizations, may also be called into question" (*Minutes* 26-7/08/1963). The financial crunch, growing, as we have seen, over the years, would have serious policy repercussions as well. As the *Annual Report* put it:

The inescapable fact is that each year The Canada Council's budget becomes increasingly inadequate. So far, its primary concern has been for excellence, which it has tried to promote without paying too much attention to the particular subjects or fields of study for which assistance was sought. In view of the circumstances, should this attitude be maintained or should the Council, without discarding the criterion of quality, give greater weight to the factor of immediate and practical utility, in the light of the needs and problems of Canada? The Council has always carefully avoided any attempt to 'plan' the nation's intellectual life. Yet the pressures of time and place -- and of inadequate funds! -- cannot be shrugged off. (*Annual Report 1963*, 15-16)

Consistent with its funding policies the cuts would be made from the bottom up to protect the established, professional organizations.

One of these (still) protected companies, the Canadian Players, was being reorganized once again, this time under the artistic directorship of Mavor Moore. By now a number of cities in the West were refusing to accept the touring productions and the original shows had to be scrapped and replaced by *Masterpieces of Comedy* with Eric Christmas, William Hutt, Amelia Hall and Frances Hyland -- all working at reduced salaries (*Minutes 18-9/02/1963*). Moore, even as artistic director, could see the handwriting on the wall. Writing to Peter Dwyer he opined that "until adequate coverage can be given from such centres as Winnipeg, there is a genuine need for some organization to fill the bill. This organization is presently and uniquely the Canadian Players" (Moore, *Reinventing* 292). However, as Moore himself later confessed, "I arranged three productions for the Canadian

Players that winter, reduced the company's debt, and quit -- convinced that its role could only decline as that of the regional theatres grew" (Moore, *Reinventing* 294).²⁰

And surprisingly, in the financial climate of 1963, the regionals were beginning to grow with two new companies planning to open in Halifax and Vancouver. While the Council had problems with some of the financial planning of the new theatres (Neptune planned a deficit of about \$80,000 -- the Council felt this to be "dangerous"), they were prepared to break policy and fund both companies in their first year, if only in a token way. The grants were planned to be in the order of \$5,000 and were taken from the budget for new Canadian plays (otherwise known as the budget for commissions). Neptune had to decline its \$5,000 since it had planned for no new Canadian plays in the first season (Minutes 3-4/06/1963). In the end, Neptune received \$30,000 in its inaugural year and Vancouver Playhouse got \$14,000 (*Annual Report* 1964, 24-5). Despite this almost comic beginning, it was becoming more likely "that a concept of regional theater centers might actually become a reality" (W. Whittaker 320).

As far as commissions were concerned, the previous year had been a disaster and no money had been given for this purpose. MTC requested the (by now) standard grant of \$5,000 to mount the new play *A Very Close Family* by Bernard Slade but was given only \$3,000 (Minutes 25/03/1963). Workshop Productions again requested an operating grant specifically for producing Canadian plays: this season it was Jack Winter's *Joan* (later to be called *Before Compiègne*). Although Trueman confessed himself to be "encouraged to see that Mr. Luscombe has decided to work with professional actors" he worried about Winter's status as a "relatively untried playwright" -- which was not accurate since a number

of his plays had been produced by Workshop Productions. The Council granted a minute \$1,800 (plus an \$1,800 matching grant) (*Minutes* 25/03/1963).

The *Annual Report* of 1964 treats the advent of the two new regionals as a qualified success: "two years ago in our annual report we advocated the development of regional theatres as components of a national theatre in a country with our geographical configuration. Since then two such theatres have in fact come into being in Halifax and Vancouver" (*Annual Report* 1964, 23-4). Neptune was praised for presenting (after all) a new Canadian play in its first season -- John Gray's *Louisbourg* -- but also taken to task for its grim financial situation:

Unfortunately the Neptune Theatre's attendance figures declined in the late autumn and its campaign for \$300,000 to purchase the theatre, pay for renovations and offset part of the operating losses for three years produced less than a third of its target figure. The strain of financing a year-round operation and simultaneously paying for expensive renovations proved excessive. A close examination of revenues, taking into account the uncertain vagaries of public taste, shows clearly that audiences begin to fall off rapidly in the middle of November and pick up only in the latter part of February. (*Annual Report* 1964, 25)

The Playhouse is dealt with in less detail since the Council remained less sanguine about the potential of the Vancouver theatre company, although Malcolm Black's opening production of *The Hostage* had been quite successful, and they withheld \$10,000 of the next season's grant of \$15,000 until they could see part of the season (*Minutes* 17-8/08/1964).²¹ The

Manitoba Theatre Centre continued to lead the way as an “example of healthy evolution” (*Annual Report* 1964, 25).

Meanwhile as the regional system began to grow, the financial situation continued to deteriorate. The Canada Council (still learning the basics of theatre economics) only saw the relationship between the two in a general way. They knew that success in establishing new regionals would eventually exhaust the funds allotted to theatre, what they didn't yet understand was the cost of success within each, separate theatre company:

If a performing arts company operates on a small scale, uses mostly non-paid or low-paid performers and part-time voluntary administrators, and caters to a small, loyal and reasonable [sic] affluent audience, it may indeed cover its annual operating expenses through the box office plus private donations. Once a company approaches a reasonable level of professionalism and expands its scale of operations to reach a significant portion of the general public, rising labour costs and material costs will force the company to look beyond private sector revenues to government assistance. The performing arts world faces an odd paradox: as companies expand and prosper in audience reach, number and quality of productions, and community involvement, total operating expenses rise faster than total earnings from audiences and an increasing amount of outside financial assistance, particularly from government, is needed. (Book 23-4)

Since the Council was always urging theatre companies to grow, with statements (even in years of financial crisis) such as “at Canada's stage of development in the arts, if you do not grow you are a dead duck” it is no wonder that all of the theatres funded by the Council

were in debt. Indeed, “the gravity of the situation is indicated by the numbers of performing groups that are carrying heavy and increasing deficits which in our opinion are growing beyond their financial capacities” (*Annual Report* 1964, 11). The Council was urging growth and decrying it at the same time.

Given the growing financial crisis at the Canada Council in the early 1960s, it might be wondered how the Council was able to fund these new regionals at all. The answer was that it did it by cutting off (as it had threatened to do) all funding to the Crest (*Minutes* 17-8/08/1964). 1964 was also the year that the Canadian Players began to collapse under the twin pressures of debt and superannuated purpose (see Scott 80-1) although it did receive a petty grant of \$3,000 to produce Len Peterson's *The Great Hunger*, its one and only sojourn into Canadian material (*Minutes* 10-11/02/1964).²² Clearly, however, the Canada Council could not sustain itself by simply cutting off old clients to finance new ones. There was a clear and present need for more money.

On March 3, 1964 the Canada Council made a request to the Liberal government of Lester Pearson for \$10 million to be added to the endowment fund in each of the next three years. The government responded (on March 19, 1965) with a straight appropriation of \$10 million to be spent over whatever period the Council saw fit. The reason for direct funding rather than an increase in the endowment fund was twofold: the government was considering hiving off the humanities and the social sciences into a new agency and was also awaiting a major study on university financing. The liberals chose a short-term solution until these two issues had been settled (Granatstein “Culture” 452).

Granatstein claims that the Council was “overjoyed,” but Trueman, in his autobiography, describes some “serious soul-searching.”

[t]he difficulty was that as long as we depended entirely for our income on the revenue from the Endowment Fund, which was in the sole possession of the Council, we were independent; the Canada Council Act gave us complete freedom -- that is, within its limiting provisions -- to decide, with no possibility of outside interference, who should receive scholarships and other types of grants, and for what reasons: if we asked for and received a substantial annual appropriation from Government, we would put the affairs of the Council on the floor of the House, inviting interference from members on behalf of constituents who had seen little or nothing of Canada Council money, or from those Members who might try to force us to alter our policies and our priorities. Would not this very natural development ultimately destroy the Council's cherished independence? Had not the Government been wise, when it drew up the Act, to confer this independence upon us? (Trueman 160-1)

While Trueman's speculative questions were entirely germane, there is no suggestion that, from 1965 until 1968, the government meddled in the affairs of the Canada Council. Later, when the appropriations grew in size and political importance, various governments attempted to influence Council policy for their own political purposes.²³ The importance of the 1964 appropriation is the principle it set for direct gift rather than an increase of the endowment fund. It also drew the government's attention to the *possibilities* inherent in being able to influence, through the Canada Council, a constituency of high culture and therefore of considerable wealth and power: the kind of cultural politics that was to become so popular with the National Endowment for the Arts in the U. S..²⁴

In the area of commissioned plays there is a great deal of confusion in 1964 because of some of the events described above. The Crest, for example, requested \$5,000 to produce a new play by John Gray but presumably lost it when they lost their operating grant. The Canadian Players were given \$3,000 (why \$3,000 instead of \$5,000?) to produce *All About Us*, which they did do. Jack Winter's play *Before Compiègne* had been a critical and box office success, and therefore he was no longer "untried," but a request from Workshop Productions was again turned down although \$5,000 was held in "reserve" for a production of Winter's new play *Steam Bath* (*Minutes* 17-8/08/1964).

In 1965 the Canada Council had an entirely different financial perspective. Although its programs might now be legitimately debated on the floor of the House of Commons each time appropriations came up, the funds available for disbursement over the next three fiscal years would be 2.12 times greater than in 1964 -- or, \$6,750,000 total each year (*Annual Report* 1965, 2). The Council was not only flush, they were busy hiring new staff to help disburse the money (*Annual Report* 1965, 3) in a number of new programs. In August 1965, at the 42nd meeting the Council put together a "Theatre Development Program" to assist all the existing theatre organizations. It was planned (in its general outline) to break down as follows: a Management Training Scheme (\$19,500); a Communications Fund (\$22,500 in travel costs); a Technical Development Scheme (\$81,000 to upgrade the skills of theatre technicians); an Apprentice Project (\$21,000) and an advanced study for Technicians (\$35,000); consultants (\$15,000); a General Information Services (\$10,000); and, finally, a Dramatists Service Project (\$90,000). Part of the Dramatists Service Project (\$25,000) was for honorariums to Canadian playwrights to assist them in having their work read and considered. It was agreed that the Canadian Theatre Centre (also largely funded by

the Council) would set up a reading committee to consider all new plays submitted. Any new play accepted by the committee would be reproduced in a mimeographed form and distributed to all theatre companies in the country and to a selected list of amateur companies. . . . The author of any play so accepted would be offered an honorarium of \$1,500 immediately (*Minutes* 1-5/08/1965).

To provide a subsidy for each professional established company that produced one of the approved plays in the amount of \$5,500 each the Council agreed to set aside the remainder of the Project grant (\$55,000). It was also agreed that until such time as plays were received and made available through the new system proposed above, the \$55,000 might be used as required during the coming season to help any reputable company producing a new Canadian play of its own choice. If financial assistance were available to a company for this general purpose from other sources, the Council's assistance would be limited to making the total sum up to the amount of \$5,500 and no more. In addition, under the new Theatre Development Program, "[t]he Council agreed that an award of \$10,000 be made to the Dominion Drama Festival to promote the production of Canadian plays at the regional festivals in Western Quebec, Central Ontario, and British Columbia" (*Minutes* 15-6/08/1965).

At first glance this seemed to provide a new and hefty boost to the playwright in Canada -- sums of money that might actually achieve something; although it should be noted that the actual amount *per* production has grown only \$500 from \$5,000 to \$5,500. However, before the ink was even dry on the program's outline, in the detailed report Section 8 on playwrights vanishes. We are subsequently informed in the *Minutes* of November 22-3 that "(i) Honoraria to Canadian Playwrights and (ii) Production of

Canadian Plays had required further study.” In the meantime, “some departures from the original idea of a direct production subsidy was permissible” (*Minutes* 22-3/11/1965). As a result of this decision, the Council authorized a grant to Vancouver Playhouse for the purpose of engaging Ed Penner for a period of six months as playwright in residence in the princely amount of \$1,500: that's \$60 take-home. Otherwise the program for playwrights remained an outline in the *Minutes* (*Minutes* 22-3/11/1965) subject to further discussion and watering down. Eventually, it would prove to be the only section of the program not fully applied.

In the midst of new plenty, 1965 also marked the first year that the Council faced (or admitted to facing) serious questions in the area of repertoire. In an address on January 20 to *Seminar 65*, Peter Dwyer (now director of the Canada Council) remarked that the Conference's guidance paper suggested that “the Council should ‘reassess its concentration on the traditional European arts and give more consideration to indigenous art forms’.”

Dwyer chose deliberately to misunderstand the criticism:

I am not entirely clear as to the meaning of ‘indigenous’ as it is used here; but I take it that it could include the development of newer and the extension of existing arts forms into a blend particularly our own -- and in this sense I find it a stimulating comment and would hope that it will be discussed here. It may be one of the functions of art that it should hold, as 'twere the mirror up to nature; but it is surely not valid that we should hold the mirror up to the art of others. If we do so, we run the risk of becoming only pale imitators. And yet we surely do our arts no service if any of us abandon forms which have been developed in Europe and which still exist precisely

because they have withstood the ravages of time and because they have in the past provided the form of expression for some of the greatest creations of the human spirit. (*Annual Report* 1965, 93-4)

The answer, for Dwyer, was twofold: to examine the *possibility* of placing less emphasis on the “manifestation” of “traditional forms” in Canada and to back off from too rigid an enforcement of ‘raise’ over ‘spread’ -- or at least maintain it as an “open question” (*Annual Report* 1965, 94 and 90-1). Anything further, felt Dwyer, would be to stray from the Council's policy of avoiding direct interference in artistic policy (*Annual Report* 1965, 95).

This side-step is not unusual in Dwyer whose style within the Council had been, despite various quasi-nationalist statements about Canadian writers, “marked by a very European tendency to consider artistic institutions, rather than individual creative artists, more appropriate objects of public patronage” (Woodcock 59). But it could not hide the emerging fact that the European, particularly British, impact on the emerging Canadian theatre system was enormous. For example, in the same year Tom Hendry (one of the founders of the Manitoba Theatre Centre) wrote an article for the *Tulane Drama Review* in which he described how “European values, and of the people who bring them” make up “the largest percentage of our artistic leadership in theatre” and served to “bridge the gap until the day arrives when young Canadians, who from their formative years have grown up in an easy and natural relationship with responsible professional theatre, come along and take over” (Hendry, “Trends” 70). However, warns Hendry, in the interim we must beware of the fact that:

of 11 Canadian Artistic Directors, five are European by birth, three are French-Canadians whose first influences in professional theatre came from

France, and only three are English-speaking Canadians whose first experiences in theatre were “North American” -- of these, one has been strongly influenced by observation of the English repertory system and a second by the work of the Berliner Ensemble; the third is a rugged individualist who runs Canada's only frankly profit-seeking organization. (Hendry, “Trends” 62)

What must be remembered is that non-interference in a situation where the trend towards a British-European style and repertoire were rapidly becoming dominant was tantamount to an acceptance of the process. The prestige of the Council and its granting of funds placed an official *imprimatur* on that trend and other funding agencies often followed suit. In this instance we see an early example of a growing gap between the traditional high culture approach of the Council and its supporters and Canadian cultural nationalism. While the Council still stood firm behind Dwyer's “forms which have been developed in Europe and which still exist precisely because they have withstood the ravages of time and because they have in the past provided the form of expression for some of the greatest creations of the human spirit” (*Annual Report* 1965, 93-4), increasingly discontented cultural nationalists, not content to await some putative natural development of Canadian creativity, chided the Council for its ignorance (in both senses of the word) of the Canadian creative artist.

In 1966, it appeared that the Council had taken some of the criticism on “indigenous art forms” to heart and besides commissioning “two or three new plays, including Eric Nicol's successful comedy *Like Father, like Fun* at the Vancouver Playhouse” (*Annual Report* 1966, 10). It also announced the re-constituted prize system for the Dominion

Drama Festival (already acknowledged by all concerned to be of little use) and set in place, through the Canadian Theatre Centre,

a series of play-reading committees attached to the professional theatres.

Chosen by the artistic directors themselves, the members of these committees are people of taste and discernment who can spot talent that should be encouraged and, if a good well-written script appears, recommend it for production. This system should prevent unread scripts piling up on the desk of a busy director who would like to find new playwrights but has no time to look for them. The Canadian Theatre Centre will eventually be able to circulate worthwhile scripts to professional and amateur producers. (*Annual Report* 1966, 10)

What it did not reveal was that these measures were a gutted version of the originally tabled "Theatre Arts Development Program" (see above) which had initially proposed an expenditure on play development of some \$90,000 and was, in addition, no longer an on-going project but limited to the next two years only. The new program looked (as of April 5, 1966) like this:

	Originally Allotted	Released
Honoraria	\$25,000	\$7,500
Productions	\$55,000	\$20,000
DDF	\$10,000	\$10,000

(*Minutes* 4-5/04/1966)

In effect what this meant was an expense of "\$1,500 to the Playhouse Theatre Company as a retainer to a young playwright active in its workshop [Ed Penner]. An amount of \$10,000

is retained for fees to readers and for the reproduction of scripts . . . We estimate that an amount of \$7,500 can be released from this allotment while leaving adequate provision [\$6,000] for contingencies pending a study of the renewal of the programme” (*Minutes 4-5/04/1966*). This means that from an originally proposed budget of \$25,000, only \$11,500 would be spent by the Canadian Theatre Centre and \$6,000 held on reserve. And from the larger proposed budget of \$55,000 for “The Production of New Canadian Plays,” \$20,000 was released from the budget and the remainder was to be used not just to commission new plays (like the Nicol play) but *also* “to cover real costs or anticipated loss in revenues over and above those foreseen in current budgets” (*Minutes 4-5/04/1966*). In the meantime the sum of \$20,000 (possibly the released \$20,000 from above) was allotted to a Playwright's Workshop:

It is suggested that a professional playwright be allowed to apply for residence for a period of approximately six months during which he could observe rehearsals and performances at the theatre, work at his own play and lead week-end workshops with potential playwrights and with the co-operation of the personnel of the parent theatre's studio. This implies that such a programme could be established only by a major regional theatre already having a studio programme: . . . We would like to reserve funds for one [English or French] workshop project, subject to the selection of a suitable applicant. (*Minutes 22-3/08/1966*)

The Canada Council, rather than moving forward with increased grants to commission plays, was actually renegeing on its own proposals, but because this material was unpublished the Council looked like it was making huge steps forward -- and prepared to

boast about it. In the meantime, a landmark production of George Ryga's *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* by the Vancouver Playhouse, was being commissioned by the Centennial Commission (Carson, "Luscombe" 162).

Financially the Council decided to further place itself in the political hands of government by requesting a further appropriation of \$17 million for 1967-68 -- Council's first request for a regular appropriation. The battle to increase the endowment fund seems to have been permanently given up, the concerns of the Treasury Board over procedures were over-ridden by Cabinet, and the grant was readily given. (see Milligan, "Ambiguities" 73) An attempt was made to rescue the Canadian Crest Foundation but to no avail and the result raised serious concerns about the future of regional theatre in the metropolis of Toronto, once thought the centre of Canadian theatre. Future hopes were pinned on the planned St. Lawrence Centre. (*Minutes* 21-2/02/1966 and see also McSkinning 27) Meanwhile, the Citadel Theatre entered the ranks of the regional system with an operating grant of \$15,000 despite Council's concern with "its strong U.S. orientation" (*Minutes* 22-3/08/1966).

As 1967 was Centennial year, it was a time of reflection upon the developments of the past ten years of Canada Council work. The *Annual Report* noted in detail the development from 1961 of the regional system and expressed satisfaction at its achievements from where it stood in 1957, "eyeless in Gaza" (*Annual Report* 1967, 20-22). Attendance at all Canadian professional theatres had risen dramatically from "392,000 in 1957-58 to 1,055,000 in the present season. Total operating expenditures have gone from \$1.1 million to \$4.2 million. Box office has risen from \$1.06 million to \$2.43 million" (*Annual Report* 1967, 22). Growth had, after initial problems, been enormous. Yet there

were trouble spots and the Council acknowledged them, including the continuing “paradox of the unhappy course of theatre in Toronto” (*Annual Report* 1967, 20). The Council also admitted that there was “not yet a clearly identifiable Canadian Theatre,” and their concern “as to whether the regional theatres have been able to broaden in any fundamental way the outlook of their audiences. . . . Can the theatres reach beyond the habitués to an audience as yet almost untouched?” (*Annual Report* 1967, 20). Both these issues related to the central problem of being unable to “uncover new playwrights of quality and thus provide a social commentary on our own society?” (*Annual Report* 1967, 22) In answer, the Canada Council offered its, much tinkered with, Theatre Development Program, discussed above, which it planned to continue in an undisclosed form.

In Québec the Council maintained its high level of subsidy to the regional, or institutional, theatres (TNM: \$255,000, Rideau Vert: \$110,000) and it aside a small sum of \$7,752 (to be decreased to \$2,500 in 1968) for the Centre d’Essai des Auteurs Dramatiques. CEAD had been founded in 1965 and was to prove the single most important organization in the development of Québec playwrighting (see Nardocchio 53, Weiss 25, Gruslin 19). It helped, in only its first ten years, to develop to production level the works of playwrights such as Michel Tremblay, Jean Barbeau, Robert Gurik, Antonine Maillet and Michel Garneau.²⁵ Beyond assisting the playwrights, the Centre introduced their works to theatre companies and the audiences through public readings, play publishing, and “a vigorous effort” at their promotion (Weiss 19). Later, in the mid-seventies, the Council would begin to support the Centre more adequately.

The arts policy was again reviewed, “following the Government's decision to provide the Canada Council with greatly increased funds” and it was concluded “that with

modifications we should do well to continue the mixture as before” (*Minutes 20-1/02/1967*). However, with substantial new funds at its disposal, the Council felt that some “new” initiatives were definitely worth pursuing. Annual grants to the regional theatres would be substantially increased since the Council considered “these organizations to be the instruments by which the creative artist and the performer is enabled to communicate with the public and we believe it essential that the former should not be buried in the interests of the past” (*Minutes 20-1/02/1967*).²⁶ This, of course, left the question unanswered as to what happened if the regionals chose -- even with larger budgets -- to largely ignore Canadian playwrights. In order to ameliorate that situation the Council proposed “the establishment within the regional theatres of experimental workshops for the production or live reading of new Canadian plays or of experimental work generally” (*Minutes 20-1/02/1967*). This was the first step in developing a two-level system in the regionals which unfortunately led to the kind of system that the Civic Square Theatre proposed: a regular mixed repertoire, with Canadian plays largely relegated to ‘workshops’: that is, underfunded, low quality productions that clearly were of secondary importance. Vancouver Playhouse immediately jumped on the idea (in fact, their grant application may have suggested it) and received an additional grant for “an assistant director who will be given an area of responsibility in a plan for a smaller experimental theatre where new plays will be tried with less financial risk, and which will provide opportunities for new authors, actors and directors to work together” (*Minutes 14-15/08/1967*).²⁷ The loan application for a direct grant for production of a summer season of Canadian plays from Summer Theatre (directed by Keith Turnbull) for \$6,000 was responded to with a grant for \$1,450 for royalties, “to be paid directly to the Canadian authors of plays performed” (*Minutes 3-*

4/04/1967). Even with extra funds, the Council was still being cheap with the (promising) non-professionals.

One final note on the year 1967. The Council expressed in the *Minutes* (unlike the *Annual Report*) a concern about audience growth particularly among those who had no familiarity in the arts and noted, in passing, “the social remoteness of various classes or groups of society in an area where the arts are in fact omnipresent.” It felt that “a determined effort should be made . . . to make the audience more aware of the arts and to develop its level of appreciation.” The only concrete suggestion that it made was to resort to a cheap tour of a “show in which theatre, music and dance are shown in a way to be attractive to an audience with limited experience of these things. A musical show such as the “Fantasticks” has been recommended” (*Minutes* 20-1/02/1967). It illustrates once again the basic view of the Canada Council that it would suggest an American product rather something like a revival of the immensely popular *Spring Thaw* (or any other Canadian product) that would speak directly to Canadians in Canadian terms.

In 1968, the focus of the *Annual Report* and the Council was on the political side of the arts -- and, thus, theatre. The *Report* noted the huge growth in funding for the arts in general and the increasing existence of other funding bodies in Canada, citing the presence of

the Ministère des Affaires Culturelles in Québec, the Province of Ontario Council for the Arts, the Centennial Cultural Fund in British Columbia and the Manitoba Arts Council. The Cultural Development Branch of the Department of the Provincial Secretary gives assistance in Alberta, New Brunswick has recently formed a Cultural Development Division in the

Department of Youth, and other provinces help the arts in other ways.

During the same time, Parliament has multiplied fivefold the funds given the arts through the Canada Council. (*Annual Report 1968*, 8)

This reflected a political commitment to the arts; public subsidy that had increased over ten times since 1957. The Council itself had raised the amount of money going to theatre from \$120,000 in its first year to about \$1,050,000 (not counting \$125,000 for the National Theatre School). Total government support (federal, provincial and municipal) for theatre had risen to \$3,669,000 (Pasquill, *Wooden*, Table M). In order to maintain and even to accelerate the pace the Canada Council had regularized its position with the Treasury Board and Parliament and "in future," the Council would, "submit details of its program plans to substantiate its requests for annual appropriations -- like any department or agency of the government" (Milligan, "Ambiguities" 73). In principle, and agreed upon by the Treasury Board, this was to continue to mean 'arms-length' status for the Council, but in practice that was not to be the case in some fairly significant ways.

The first note of a changed relationship with the government was a speech in 1968 by Gerard Pelletier, the Secretary of State who announced "the development of a comprehensive cultural policy (which had) as its objectives the promotion of a genuinely popular culture and cultural equalization -- in other words 'democratization and decentralization'" (quoted in Hay 10). This was done, it seems, in conjunction with the CRTC's announcement, in that year, of its new Canadian content regulations -- a fact that was unlikely to escape the Council given its policy on non-interference with repertoire. Jean Roberts was the Theatre Officer at the time and later remembered: "Gerard Pelletier invented the word 'democratization' during my four years and we all had a great time

pointing out how practically everything that we did was democratization in one form or another. I always wanted to go back to him and ask him to define exactly what he meant by democratization, as he never really did” (Kilbourn 173-4).

What Pelletier *meant* would be clarified even further by a later speech he made in Vancouver. In response to “agitation for greater funding for the arts, he agreed that more might be given, but added the caveat that they would find the public paymaster more exigent in the strings it attached to the money; undaunted, the artists showed an overwhelming readiness to accept the *quid pro quo*” (Milligan, “Ambiguities” 77). What Roberts and her co-workers may have failed to understand (or chosen to ignore) is that there is *always* a price to be paid for appropriations and if the Government in power hesitated in intervening directly in the Canada Council's disbursement of cash, it had other means to force the Council to change its policies. The key phrase in Pelletier's first speech was less “democratization” than it was “popular culture.” I would suggest here that the Government was becoming aware of the increasing disenchantment of the cultural nationalists with the lack of Canadian content in the performing arts (and theatre) and with the focus on elitist high culture. The government was, it seems, attempting to send a message to the Council to rectify this and to force the Council to move on the issue. If Canadian content (by Canadian playwrights and other creative artists) was not to be more actively supported by the Council, the Government would enter the field itself. The Canada Council should have considered itself warned.

In 1969 the Council began to respond to the new direction of the political wind, acknowledging that “we are in a real sense concerned with a marriage of the arts and politics. This report is to Parliament. Yet it must equally be directed to the artists of Canada

and to people to whose lives the arts are sometimes as essential as religion is to others. We are therefore the servants of two masters, and like Janus we face both ways" (*Annual Report* 1969, 7). The Council was realizing, in the words of Frank Milligan, that

as rising annual appropriations stimulated a growing interest within the government and Parliament, the need for stronger links with its clientele became apparent. If the Council was to preserve its independence from political direction it must, at the very least, have the support of its clientele. Unless artists and scholars were confident that it understood and respected their interests and wishes, it would stand little chance of maintaining its autonomy in the face of the growing tendency in government circles to see that autonomy as an objectionable anomaly. (Milligan, "Ambiguities" 86)

Consultations with artists were increased and a more systematic and visible means of grant evaluations was actively pursued -- including an increase in the size and power of the Advisory Arts Panel (Milligan, "Ambiguities" 87).

At the same time, it stubbornly defended the basic philosophy that had guided its judgments over the past twelve years. While admitting the necessity to err on the side of generosity in evaluating young creative artists, it continued to hold up professionalism and quality as the two signposts of the Council's policy: "we have never thought it our function to preside over the expedient proliferation of mediocrity, and indeed to do so would be to deny the existence of any criteria of quality in the arts" (*Annual Report* 1969, 8). It also returned to its constant (almost uninterrupted) refrain against organizational deficits, partly because, despite its own growing awareness of theatre economics, it had never, somehow, lost the conviction that deficits could be eliminated -- even in a period of growth. The other,

less obvious reason was that deficits were embarrassing the Council (as it had stated in an earlier *Report*) and were, therefore, politically embarrassing now, in the light of growing Government interest in cultural politics. As the 1969 *Report* points out, in the context of deficits, “organizations, unlike individuals for the most part, are constantly in the public eye of which we are the iris” (*Annual Report* 1969, 10). And if the point was not clear in that hint then the Council would make it clearer: “[i]f we place some stress on the problem of operating deficits it is because they are at present of real concern not only to many of the organizations themselves . . . but also to all those officials who are required to make a financial analysis of the state of the arts in Canada” (*Annual Report* 1969, 11).

In the most sensitive area of playwrighting the Council began the first of a series of statistical statements that did (and do) more to obscure the issue and exonerate the Council than they did (and do) to clarify the situation. The Council reported that:

We have long been aware of the need to encourage our own authors in order to strengthen our indigenous theatres, and it is good to know that twelve plays written by French-Canadian authors were performed during the normal course of last year's season in Montreal. In all there were 25 Canadian plays performed across the country and this represents about 25% of the total number of productions -- a high and encouraging figure in a country with a habit of leaning easily on imported works. (*Annual Report* 1969, 23)²⁸

The statement is interesting for a number of reasons. Firstly, to note in passing that the Council has now clarified (for the time being) the meaning of indigenous as that of Canadian playwrights. Secondly, because 25% of the nation's theatrical repertoire is considered to be a matter of pride to the Canada Council. Thirdly, because of the acknowledgment by the

Council that Canada's theatres have a "habit of leaning easily on imported works" -- something that would not even have been considered worthy of discussion, more less criticism, a few years earlier. And finally, because the figures given are misleading because of a lack of complete information.

For example, if (because this is a study of English-Canadian playwrights) we extract the twelve French-Canadian plays, we are left with 13. But we do not know if those thirteen were in all Canadian theatres, including amateur, or just semi- and professional theatres. Were they performed only in the theatres sponsored by the Canada Council? How many were performed in the regional theatres that received the bulk of Council money or were, for example, a large number of the thirteen performed in Keith Turnbull's Summer Theatre or George Luscombe's Theatre Workshop (consistently refused operating grants). It is entirely possible that at least eight of them were performed by the Vancouver Playhouse.

All this is complicated by the fact that the theatre officer of the time, Jean Roberts, later stated in a seminar that "in the 1969 season, there were 25 new Canadian plays, which were performed in that season across the country, in 25% of those established theatres that I have just been talking about" a statement that seems to be using the same numbers in a very different way, and certainly suggesting that that 75% of the "established theatres" were performing no Canadian plays (Kilbourn 172). The Council has since been unable to locate the statistics on which these statements were based. Whatever the (statistical) truth, the Canada Council was at pains to paint a positive image of the situation of Canadian playwrights "recently." This was done, I would suggest, mainly to cover its embarrassing (in the new political climate) lack of success in aiding and promoting the Canadian playwright.

In 1970 the previous five years of financial bounty came to an end during which the Council's funds for subsidy to the arts had grown by 600%. The Council anticipated a growth of no more than \$500,000 in its appropriation and although as late as 1964 that would have been considered enormous, in 1970 it meant the *elimination* of programs that "seemed valuable in order to release funds to those it knew to be essential." Among the first to go was the Theatre Arts Development Program, containing the only (much reduced) section directed specifically at playwrights (*Annual Report* 1970, 57). The funds released were to be used to continue to support the Festival theatres (now grown to include Charlottetown and Shaw) and the regional theatres which had been augmented by the addition of Theatre New Brunswick, the Globe Theatre, Regina and the St. Lawrence Centre in Toronto (with Centaur Theatre in Montréal, and Theatre Calgary being funded although the Council does not at this stage mention them as regionals) (*Annual Report* 1970, 57). The regional system was nearly complete.

Despite the fact that the vast bulk of the Canada Council's revenues were now going to Festival theatres and regional theatres (See Appendix A for breakdown of funding in 1970) the deficit problem remained and the Council prepared itself (in this year of retrenchment) to help them pay down their debts in the future. But there was a 'catch' that certainly would make the regionals even more conservative in their program than they had already been:

As a part of this joint venture, however, the Council has imposed certain new conditions for subsidy. The most significant are these: In 1970-71, or in any year thereafter, if a performing arts organization subsidized by the Council makes expenditures larger than those accepted in its annual budget by the

Council, it may not apply again to the Council unless it has guaranteed to retire the amount by which its actual expenditures in any year exceeded its budgeted expenditures. An exception will be made where earned income is higher than forecast and sufficient to offset the over-expenditure fully.

(Annual Report 1970, 57)

No one, of course, was going actually to be cut off but the Crest *débauche* was not far enough in the past to be forgotten, and the regionals must certainly have taken the warning seriously when it came to planning repertoire.

Once again, the playwrights were caught in the squeeze: commissions were disappearing altogether, the Theatre Arts Development Program was history and the regionals were being cautioned by the Council to exercise even more financial caution.

Indeed the 1970 *Annual Report* warns them of this quite specifically:

Performing arts organizations often attain their standards of excellence by taking severe risks. They continually bring new products into their market. But performances of an unfamiliar opera, of an untried ballet, or of a new Canadian play may not please a general public that tends to be conservative. The result at the end of the season may be a considerable deficit; the result at the end of several seasons may be a very serious deficit indeed. Of course this is not the only cause of deficits and working capital deficiencies, but it is one of them. *(Annual Report 1970, 57)*

What, then, were the writers to do -- besides procure other forms of employment? The *Report* has an answer for that as well:

A vital theatre must develop its own writers, and we are encouraged to see that many young playwrights are applying for our Bursaries to gain time to practice or perfect their difficult art. The names of the twenty-two playwrights who have received grants in this competition during the past two years can be found in the lists that follow under "Theatre" and "Writing."
(Annual Report 1970, 57)

The list is there, but it contains 120 names (not counting travel grants) and since none are characterized by profession (i.e. actor, designer, playwright etc.) it is impossible to check this or determine how much money was set aside for playwrights.²⁹ The maximum the Council could have spent in bursaries to these twenty-two playwrights over two years is \$51,200 although it is highly unlikely that the maximum was spent. A reasonable guess would be \$44,000. While this is a appreciable amount, it is in the form of bursaries not commissions: the playwright gains no working relationship with a theatre, no professional experience with the stage and the end result could easily be a stack of twenty-two plays that no-one would even bother to read for the consideration of production. For that, commissions are needed and in 1969-70 the Canada Council spent \$750 to commission one play: an adaptation of *The Good Soldier Schweik* for Toronto Workshop Productions, not a regional theatre. The "stage was set," as the metaphor goes, for the political/cultural clashes of the seventies.

The Canada Council and the Playwrights: 1957-1970

What precise role, then, did the Canada Council play in the development of Canadian playwrights and new Canadian drama from 1957 until 1970? To begin, we must remember the public stand the Council took on the issue over and over again:

The health of the theatre cannot depend only on its actors, directors and designers. It is vitally dependent upon its playwrights and upon the quality of the work they produce. Playwrights of other countries and of the past can become a part of our heritage, but it was one of them who observed with his usual penetration that one of the purposes of playing was to 'show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure.' The Council is of the opinion that living theatre demands living playwrights and that the Canadian theatre demands Canadian playwrights. (*Annual Report* 1960, 33)

This and numerous other statements, some quoted in this study, show that the Canada Council was rhetorically committed to the development of playwrighting in this country and stands in stark contrast to the Council's practices in the years in question and the results they achieved. As we have seen, Council practices in these areas fall into three divisions: prizes distributed through the Dominion Drama Festival, individual awards and scholarships (or bursaries) and plays commissioned through individual theatre organizations.

The prizes awarded through the DDF need concern us very little. As we have seen, they were sporadic, never fully awarded and subject to enormous skepticism by both the DDF and the Council itself as to their efficacy. Such a simplistic approach is hardly likely to achieve anything and as Michel St-Denis, longest running adjudicator of the DDF (and co-

founder of the National Theatre School), said in an interview, encouraging the writing of new Canadian authors, was “not going to be achieved without many efforts” (St-Denis 24). More likely the entire effort was an early exercise in Canadian cultural politics on the part of the Council to support the work of the Dominion Drama Festival, one of the more powerful cultural organizations in the 1950s and early 1960s.

The second approach, scholarships and awards, was viewed by the Council, at the time, as the most important approach to inspire new writing for the stage. The Council made this clear in the 1960 *Annual Report*: “the Council's help to our writers, composers, painters, sculptors, and other creative artists is provided first through its scholarship system” (*Annual Report* 1960, 36). This policy has been repeated a number of times by various officers, including Jean Roberts (Theatre Officer from 1967-1970), who said in 1982: “one of the ways in which the Council did a great deal of work in helping the theatre was its grants to individuals. It was very aware even in those days, about the need to encourage Canadian playwrights and it tried to do this mainly in those days through the individual grants -- the awards, the bursaries and the short term grants” (Kilbourn 172).

Based on the minutes of the Council and the *Annual Reports* it is possible to make a rough estimate of how much was spent on scholarships, awards and bursaries to English-Canadian playwrights from 1957-1970. The figures are rough since the Council records often do not distinguish playwrights from other writers or, in other cases, from other theatrical artists. The total amount spent by the Council in this area seems to have been about \$88,000 over thirteen years (about \$6,800 a year) and the bulk of it (about \$44,000) was spent in 1969 and 1970 (see above). In fact, from 1957 to 1968 the Council awarded to potential English-Canadian playwrights in scholarships and bursaries an average of about \$4,000 a year. Since

all concerned recognized the high risk factor involved, and since this was considered to be the *major* investment in playwrighting in this country, the amount seems pitifully small and hardly justifies apologists who claim that it “exceeded what was politically expedient or customary elsewhere” (Shafer 51). (see Appendix C for details)

In many ways, it was probably just as well. Very few of the scholarships produced plays that have remained in use (if they were used at all) and most studies into funding of creative artists have concluded that direct subsidies do little to help creative artists: particularly playwrights, who “need access to the means of production” in order to perfect their craft (Arian 103). This has been stated over and over by the Massey/Levésque Commission (including the Davies study on theatre), working playwrights and even Massey himself as early as 1922 (see also Bensman 19). A new playwright cannot write until s/he has a working knowledge of the theatre and rehearsal process, and no scholarship will provide that.³⁰

The third method is that of commissioning plays through theatre companies. As we have seen, commissioning through a theatre allowed the Council to “stay out of the critical arena” (W. Whittaker 241) and allowed the theatre not only to choose who and what to commission, but also *whether* to commission at all. For the playwrights of this period the commission did not represent anything approaching adequate compensation – even with royalties -- but it had its benefits. W. Whittaker recounts the example of MTC's commissioning of Len Peterson in 1960. In addition to expenses Peterson took home \$2,000 plus about \$1,000 in royalties for a play that took about a year to write. What the playwright does get however is the experience, the chance to see the play in performance and the public exposure that might lead to other productions or publication (W. Whittaker

311). But, as W. Whittaker admits, the amounts of individual commissions were “most inadequate” (W. Whittaker 313).

The record in the Canada Council documents reveals the extent of play commissioning that the Council engaged in from 1957-1970. In total, on direct commission the Council invested only \$49,200 (again, approximately; see Appendix B) and the usual grant was \$5,000 although it could go as low as \$1,500 and once went as high as \$8,500. In no season were more than three plays in English commissioned and in the years 1959 and 1962 the Council allocated no resources to commissions. In 1968-70 it spent \$750 in this area. As much as \$60,000, originally slated for commissions, was used for other purposes, including cost overruns. A number of regionals declined to apply for commission, such as the Citadel (Mooney, Private Correspondence) while theatres such as Vancouver Playhouse, Rideau Vert, MTC and the Crest applied often and were sometimes turned down. The playwrights share of a \$5,000 commission might not be a lot but for a regional theatre struggling to get started it was a lot of money (Black, Private Correspondence), yet a number of them didn't bother to apply in the early years.

It is hard to avoid the conclusion then that the Council's practices regarding the development of English-Canadian playwrighting failed to live up to their rhetoric. The most praise I have encountered on this issue comes from W. Whittaker who allowed that the Council “did what seemed best” (W. Whittaker 252) while others involved at the time considered it “debatable” (Weaver 80), “neutral” (Hendry, Private Interview) and “inadequate” (Robert Allan, Private Interview). The Canada Council seems to have been successful with its publicity in convincing its supporters that it was trying hard, but it is important to remember, as Arian puts it, that “you do not have to be a political theorist to

understand that the way in which an agency chooses to spend its money is indicative of its priorities. Regardless of publicly proclaimed goals, the rhetoric of public relations, or the need for legislative accountability, the direction of an agency's support reveals its true "agenda" (Arian 35). On this basis, it is not unreasonable to charge the Council with indifference to Canadian playwrights in the 1950s and 1960s.

Repertoire

Chronologically speaking, the first model for repertoire in the early era of the Canada Council was that of the Crest Theatre. A mixture of classics and contemporary plays, the Crest's repertoire featured (particularly before it started receiving Council money) a fairly high number of Canadian works -- some written for the Crest (see Chapter One). Later on, in the 1960s the number of Canadian plays declined somewhat and the Crest repertoire began to focus more on hits from the Broadway stage or London's West End (Fulford 82) making it almost resemble a roadhouse for touring shows. This certainly hastened its decline since it was, in effect, setting itself up for comparison with the originals.

By 1963 a new model repertoire for the regionals had emerged at the Manitoba Theatre Centre, what has come to be described as the 'mixed season' typical in a general way, even today, of many of the regional theatres. W. Whittaker has described this type of season as, "2 classics, 2 contemporary plays of distinction, 1 play from the high school curriculum, 1 original play, 2 box office plays (1 usually a musical)" and explained the rationale for its evolution in Winnipeg:

This formula was based on a fact that Winnipeg was isolated by a thousand miles from any other professional theatre; the Centre had therefore to try to do the work which several theatres might do in larger cities. As a result the repertoire between the period 1959-1963 included an extremely wide range of plays. The formula evidently pleased the Winnipeg public because the size of the audience grew from year to year as did the number of regular subscribers to the whole season's program. (W. Whittaker 303)

As the mixed season grew in popularity with the spread of the regionals it became clear that the position of the new Canadian play (despite available grants for commissions) was to be a minor one within the regional repertoire. In fact, the one thing that most Canadian theatre critics (either newspaper or academic) agree upon is this fact. They have stated, for example, that "large theatres in the 1950s and '60s had a dismal record of producing new work" (Filewood 9), that "the record of the regional theatres in this regard is not impressive" (Benson and Conolly 83), that the regionals "play it so safe with classics and farces that no one is really sure they aren't road-shows from England or the United States" (Palmer 6) and that "one Canadian play a season is usually a token nod to native drama" (Anthony, *Stage* xxiii). Even Joy Coghill, a pioneer in the early development of Canadian plays has commented that "I suppose it became apparent that our programming was almost entirely based on European and U.S. models" (Coghill, *Private Correspondence*). This is, of course, a terrible irony since the regional theatres,

were intended to stimulate the professional development of Canadian theatre in all its aspects, including the drama. The Canada Council urged that the first of the new regional theatres -- the Manitoba Theatre Centre (1958) --

should be the prototype for other regional theatres because of its perceived commitment to its immediate community and the province, and because of its stated aim to present Canadian plays. (Benson and Connolly 83)

Even in Québec, where the record for producing indigenous plays was considerably better – more than twice as many Québécois plays were staged in the sixties than in the fifties according to Nardocchio (53)³¹ -- there remained serious concerns about the repertoire of the institutional theatres. In an article published in 1967 by the Centre d'Essai des Auteurs Dramatiques the authors (Gilbert David, Claude Deslandes and Marie-France Deslandes) stated that: “Les troupes professionnelles puisaient inlassablement au répertoire universel sans être trop préoccupées par l'émergence souhaitable d'une dramaturgie ambiante; même les groupes d'amateurs . . . en tant qu'avant-garde, avaient davantage au programme des oeuvres étrangères que de cru. La scène, à l'image de notre culture, était colonisée” (quoted in Gruslin 223). Although the record of Rideau Vert was good as far as the use of indigenous material was concerned, Théâtre du Nouveau Monde remained staunchly focused on the classical and modern repertoire (particularly Molière), although it occasionally staged works by Québec playwrights.³²

A study done in 1971 shows that “of the 108 plays produced by seven regional theatres between 1965 and 1971, only nineteen were Canadian” (Benson and Connolly 83) and a large number of those were done at the Vancouver Playhouse. So serious was the problem that it caused playwright John Palmer to comment, on behalf of Canadian playwrights, that “the Canadian playwright does not believe that the theatres in this country are interested in his work and he is, to all intents and purposes, right” (Palmer 7).³³ There is

no question that Canadian plays were, with certain exceptions, a low priority in the planning of the seasons in the regional theatres of the 1960s. The question is, why?

The most commonly given reason by the regionals and the Canada Council itself for this lack of Canadian plays in the regional repertoires is, quite simply money. Any production of a new Canadian play was perceived, by almost everyone concerned, as a 'high risk' endeavour, a gamble at the box office (see Pollock 12). On top of this were the extra costs of developing a new play in the form of extra rehearsal, re-writes etc. But even long-completed plays were viewed as a financial risk, not only for that particular show but in the long-run as well. As late as 1973 (and probably later) it was believed that "to a degree, a company trades off consistently large audiences against a desire to experiment with contemporary, Canadian plays. While experimenting with new Canadian theatre may result in a few hits, there will inevitably be more than a few misses" (Book 33). The fact that 'hits' and 'misses' and the concomitant financial results are part of the reality of any theatre in any country of the world, seems to have been missed here. Certainly, the regional theatres seemed inordinately concerned by this to a point that "when a Canadian play failed . . . there was a tendency to regard this as a major catastrophe, although in the theater capitals of the world it was not uncommon for plays written by reputable playwrights to fail. The Canadian theatre tended to want the kind of guarantee which few playwrights could make" (W. Whittaker 316).

Part of this excessive concern can be laid to the Canada Council itself. By its incessant focus on finances, deficits and reducing costs (particularly when it was, itself, short of money) it consistently suggested to the theatres that the taking of risks was inappropriate in Canada, and that the 'safe' season was what the Council preferred. Another

part of the concern was probably due to audience unfamiliarity with Canadian work which may have been a damaging fiscal reality at the box office but would never change if Canadian work remained undone. A third, determining factor was that the lack of production of Canadian plays led inevitably to inexperienced playwrights whose work (when chosen) might be rushed to the stage, or altered in order to make it more like the imported material it was, temporarily, superseding.³⁴ Finally, it was not unreasonable to suggest that Canadian producers, like Canadian audiences, tended to view Canadian work as second rate in general and yet, at the same time, develop instant visions of Broadway success (the final measuring stick) each time a play showed promise. A subsequent failure (the list here is endless, from *Like Father, Like Fun* to *Jeanne*) led to renewed (“I told you so”) pessimism.

The second most commonly given reason for the lack of Canadian works in the repertoire is the attitudes of the artistic directors at the time. For some it was a stubborn refusal to believe that Canadian plays (the works of Roberston Davies, for example) existed or were stageworthy. For others it was simply a lack of interest. In 1967, for example, Eddie Gilbert, artistic director of the MTC was quoted as justifying his eschewing of Canadian material by saying: “I don't see how a play can be Canadian. I mean, what is a Canadian play? Is it a play written by a Canadian, is it a play written in Canada? What happens if a Canadian writes a play in Bermuda? Is that a West Indian play or a Canadian play? The whole issue seems to me to be a total red herring.” His successor, Kurt Reiss, had much the same to say: “Frankly, I don't think there is any way to suddenly cause good Canadian plays to appear. What does the phrase mean? Does it mean the author was born in

Canada? Writes in Canada? Writes about Canada? Once visited Canada?" (quoted in Filewood 9).

Herschel Hardin has recorded his own difficulties in interesting artistic directors in his plays:

I found myself writing about things that Artistic Directors and producers of theatre weren't interested in or didn't understand. They had little background in producing original Canadian work; their training didn't allow them to relate to the direct and vital things that a playwright might try to say about where he was living, either locally or in terms of Canada as a whole. (quoted in Zimmerman 17)

Ken Kramer has, from the point of a regional artistic director, corroborated this position, although he suggests convincingly that artistic directors of the time tended to be inexperienced in producing new plays of *any* kind and therefore avoided them (Kramer, *Private Correspondence*). Hardin's experiences, and the attitudes of Gilbert and Reiss were not unique, yet it is unfair to attribute this attitude to all artistic directors of the time. It is equally unfair to suggest, as is often done though not often in print, that the fact that a majority of the artistic directors were ex-Britishers, was the root of the problem. But the central fact remains that since the Canada Council refused to set any guidelines or priorities regarding the content of seasons -- "there was no 'system' that I know of, it was left to the individual Artistic Director" (Black, *Private Correspondence*) -- the responsibility for repertoire must be placed partly on the shoulders of the artistic leadership of the time.

But it need not be laid equally. Manitoba Theatre Centre, under John Hirsch, had a strong record for producing and commissioning Canadian works. Malcolm Black and Joy

Coghill in Vancouver commissioned perhaps the largest number of new plays in this period, including launching the playwrighting careers of Eric Nicol and George Ryga. Nicol's *Like Father, Like Fun* was one of the first new plays by a regional theatre to be picked and re-produced by another Canadian theatre -- Ed Mirvish's Royal Alex presented it and then sent it on to failure in New York (Carson, "Towards" 63). The commissioning of George Ryga's *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* (commissioned by the Vancouver's Centennial Commission, not the Canada Council) is a wonderful example of what a regional theatre could do. Ryga was without stage experience and both Black and Coghill gave him sufficient time, advice and expert guidance to transform an "amorphous poetic vision" into a powerful and very popular piece for the stage -- and later television and ballet (Carson, "Towards" 64-5). It also prevented a case of national embarrassment, being the only Canadian work at the opening of National Arts Centre in 1968. In addition to this, Black produced an entire season of Canadian works in 1966-67 (in all Black produced a total of eight new Canadian plays for the main stage) so that by the end of the 1960s Vancouver audiences -- unlike others -- associated excitement in the theatre with new Canadian works (Coghill, *Private Correspondence*). At the other end of the spectrum was Edmonton's Citadel Theatre (admittedly a late start) which commissioned no plays before 1980, pleading economic reasons and did not feel that it was the role of regional theatres to do so. Their seasons in the early years were steadfastly imported and were generally dictated solely by financial considerations (Mooney, *Private Correspondence*). In between, and varying in program from one artistic director to another, lay the other regionals.

The crucial question, then, concerns leadership in the developing regional system. The Canada Council was certainly prepared, at times, to dictate to the regionals on matters

of finance and personnel. They were even prepared, in the case of the Crest, to withdraw funding and hasten its collapse. What was their position on the subject of repertoire? We know that from the beginning they declined, on the basis of “artistic freedom” to interfere *officially* in this area: “The content of programmes or choice of plays should not be dictated. Even the performance of Canadian works should not be an express condition of a grant, although the extent to which an organization has presented Canadian artists and works *may be considered* when an application for a grant or a renewal is made” (*Annual Report* 1958, 25-6 my italics). Whether one agrees or disagrees with the idea, it is important to get a sense of what “may be considered” means.

Malcolm Black comments that “if the Canada Council was concerned with the types or the content of the plays, they never said so” (Black, Private Correspondence) and there is nothing in either the *Annual Reports* or the *Minutes* before the political turmoil in 1969 to suggest that the Canada Council was concerned by the overwhelming foreign content of the regional repertoire. Indeed, in the *Annual Report* of 1967, one reads an ecstatic account of an official of the Council touring the country and seeing the following performances:

Twelfth Night in Ottawa by the Stratford Company, *Swan Lake* by the National Ballet, *Lucia di Lammermoor* by the Vancouver Opera Association, Cole Porter's *Anything Goes* at the Vancouver Playhouse, Benjamin Britten's *A War Requiem* by the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, and Théâtre de Nouveau Monde's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* and then expressing nothing but pride in what the Canadian performing arts have accomplished - all this in Centennial year. Not a word was mentioned about the conspicuous lack of Canadian content. This piece of *reportage*, more than anything else, revealed the Council's true position. Rather than refusing to interfere with artistic license in the matter of

programming, they were proud of Canada's international repertoire. It is the type of repertoire they wished to see. (for reaction see Granatstein, "Culture" 462)

Edward Arian in his study, *The Unfulfilled Promise: Public Subsidy of the Arts in America*, has examined the impact of elitist attitudes on repertoire and the development of indigenous art forms and creative works. Although there are substantial differences between the Canadian and American situations, some of what he has found has bearing here. He wrote in 1989:

In regard to contemporary art, the cultural preferences of the elite are hostile to modernism because their tastes are the result of a self-perpetuating circle of conservatism wherein traditional organizations are forced by the necessities of the marketplace to continue to satisfy elite demands for the tried-and-true repertoire. . . . Repertoire is selected with an eye to the sale of tickets and/or records, thereby excluding new and unfamiliar works. Thus, elite audiences are not educated to the acceptance or enjoyment of contemporary art. Moreover, elites claim that the first responsibility of public policy is not to encourage or exhibit the contemporary artist but to preserve and perpetuate those treasures of the past that have survived the test of time. They believe that this can best be done by publicly supporting the traditional institutions because only they can present these works under the highest standards of quality and professionalism, and within what they consider to be the proper, formal ambiance of the concert hall, the theatre, and the museum, even if by doing so they are not accessible to the average person. (Arian 8-9)

If what we have seen of the creation of the Canada Council as an extension of the alliance between the cultural elite and nationalism from the Massey/Levésque Commission, then the practices and a great deal of the rhetoric of the Council makes perfect sense. High culture in the form of foreign and classical repertoire had the priority for the Canada Council in its first thirteen years and the small efforts and large statements dealing with the development of Canadian playwrighting, on the part of the Council, serve only to maintain that alliance intact, rather than seriously attempt to displace the 'international' repertoire with a national one.

Where, then, does this leave the playwrights? Firstly, it leaves them in what W. Whittaker has described as a "vicious circle in which a lack of opportunities to present plays discouraged good writers from writing for theater and did not allow the embryo writer an opportunity to learn the craft; this then justified the existing theater companies in being reluctant to produce original plays because there were so few of merit available that the financial risk was too great" (W. Whittaker 315). Those that could, or wanted to, moved on to other areas where their work was appreciated and compensated for, and these artists were lost to Canadian theatre. Others, perhaps fueled by anger, took their craft to those struggling, un-funded ('non-professional') groups that were ultimately to form the "alternative theatre" and which focused and thrived on Canadian material. It is one of the many ironies of Canadian theatre that the theatre companies in this country in the early 70s which began work with the premise that the use and development of Canadian plays is of paramount importance would be referred to by the term "alternative."

Endnotes for Chapter Five

¹ As an example of this Granatstein quotes an anonymous author who “noted acidly, ‘there were suggestions at one point that one member wanted to reduce the grant to the Stratford Shakespearean Festival on the grounds of the immorality of its actors’” (Granatstein, *Canada* 145).

² That such a process led to almost no complaints was partly due to the respect in which the Council was held and partly due to the fact that the process was almost entirely opaque. As mentioned above, the Council gave no reasons for rejecting an application and the applicant had no way of knowing who had been consulted or what were the grounds for rejection. Certain individuals with personal motives may have been repeatedly consulted to the detriment of some organizations and individuals. Certainly, George Luscombe's Theatre Workshop was repeatedly denied organizational grants on the grounds that Luscombe didn't “work well” with professional actors. The evaluation process came under increasing attack and the Council began tentatively to reform it in 1963 and has continued to tinker with it until today. The present theatre officer is still refining the process, instituting a rotational scheme so that no individual can serve on an evaluation panel more than once in five years (Robert Allan, private conversation).

³ La Comédie-Canadienne opened February 22, 1958 and ran as a separate entity until the company declared bankruptcy in 1970 and the theatre building subsequently (1972) became the home of the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde. The company was created by Gratien Gélinas and received sporadic funding from the Council and yearly support from

the Québec government and the Montréal Arts Council. In addition it received the fully renovated (\$350,000) Gaieté Theatre from Dow Brewery at a very low rent (W.

Whittaker 271-2). It committed itself from the beginning to indigenous material and, despite ongoing financial difficulties, it lived up to its promise presenting (for example) eleven original Québec plays between 1958 and 1961 (see Oxford 108-9).

⁴ In its early years TNM also performed Québec plays by Eloi de Grandmont and André Langevin (Beauchamp-Rank 269).

⁵ Minutes of the Canada Council meetings have no page numbers and are bound by meeting. I have cited them by date (usually a span of two to three days), month and year. They are relatively complete and detailed up until 1969, after which they are very sparse.

⁶ The grant application from the Canadian Players reads: "The company is regarded by many Americans as the best touring classical company on the continent" and that money to continue the American tour is "a matter of prestige." It notes that Douglas Campbell has been replaced by Mr. Denis Carey, "an outstanding director from England" (*Minutes* 28/03/1958).

⁷ The Council did successfully request the Canadian Players to change the makeup of the company to include more Canadian actors (*Minutes* 17-9/08/59). Crean has also argued that "touring as a method of decentralization would rapidly bring about its opposite -- increased centralization -- if, as proved to be the case, the traffic in cultural information moved in one direction only, from the few urban centres to the outlying areas, with virtually no feedback, and the little interaction between the smaller communities and regions outside the big cities" (Crean 2). This is, I think, largely, but tours must come

from *somewhere* and the Canada Council had to begin with what was available. Because of their ‘raise rather than spread’ attitude, they simply held on to the Canadian Players for far too long, rather than promoting local organizations more quickly.

W. Whittaker has suggested that the Canada Council “recognized the need to set national standards by supporting the best of the professional organizations . . . [and] because these tended to be concentrated in the more densely populated areas, the Council also decided that the products of the arts from these larger city centers should be made as available to the rest of the country as was financially possible” (W. Whittaker 234). This is somewhat ingenuous since, as we have seen, the Canada Council had little to choose from to support in the way of professional touring companies.

⁸ *Ride a Pink Horse* was not a great success, although Peter Dwyer (arts supervisor at the time) called it a “rather original and lively experiment” and remarked that “only by the continuation of this policy over a period of time are we likely to produce a first class play” (*Minutes* 17-19/08/59).

⁹ As part of the policy the Canada Council decided that the total grants for commissions would be split 50% each between French and English theatres. For example, in this year Montréal's La Comédie Canadienne also received a \$5,000 grant to commission a play. Wherever figures are mentioned relating to commission grants in this work, you may assume that, up until 1970 at least, an equal amount went to the French theatres.

¹⁰ That year the Council also showed how parsimonious it could be in the field of commissioning new plays. The Arts Theatre Club applied for \$4,800 to present three professional productions, two of which were to be Canadian. While considering the

organization worthy of a grant, the Council responded: “on balance we believe that this group might be given a grant under the Council's policy for assisting Canadian dramatists. Grants for this purpose have normally been \$5,000 for each play and we are offered two plays for \$4,800. . . . I recommend a grant of \$2,400 for the production of one new Canadian play with a fully professional cast” (*Minutes* 30-1/05/1960).

¹¹ This was a “paper transaction,” as no new money was being offered (*Minutes* 4-5/09/1961).

¹² For details the of Civic Square story, see Scott, 83-4 and Weaver, 76-82.

¹³ In 1963, after the second liberal victory of 1962 (under the campaign slogan *Maitres chez nous*) a s theatre section was added to the Ministry under Guy Beaulne.

¹⁴ Elaine Nardocchio states that the influence of the theatre section of the Ministry of Culture was `so pervasive that some observers began to distinguish between ‘official’ Québec theatre and the ‘other’ (Nardocchio 51).

¹⁵ Laurie Lam, current producer of the Manitoba Theatre Centre writes: “I have often searched for a definition of the term ‘regional theatre’ in order to better understand our claim to having introduced it to English North America” (Private Correspondence).

¹⁶ Trueman says in his commentary on the Canadian Players’ grant application for the 1962-63 tour, that while the reputation of the Canadian Players had radically declined, and the company itself had become a group of young actors “on the make,” the Council had “little alternative” but to continue supporting them “since it will be some time before regional theatres can replace a touring company” (*Minutes* 20-21/08/1962).

¹⁷ In fact, only four new Canadian plays had been entered in the regional festivals in 1961 compared to nine the year before and only two were recommended for awards (*Minutes* 19-20/02/1962).

¹⁸ Except, it seems, in the case of the Crest and the Canadian Players.

¹⁹ The list of accumulated deficits in the minutes reads as follows: Crest Theatre \$48,000, the Canadian Players \$48,000 and the Manitoba Theatre Centre \$37,000 (*Minutes* 26-7/08/1963).

²⁰ What only made matters worse for the Canadian Players was their own inability to perceive the situation. For example, in their grant application in 1963 they proposed to administer a tour originally staged by the Manitoba Theatre Centre. The Council declined to give the grant (a mere \$3,500) and remarked acidly, "this request should be considered in relation to the development of regional theatres. If the latter can arrange for touring productions, as the Manitoba Theatre Centre is doing and as the Neptune proposes to do, the role of the Canadian Players as a national touring company will have to be re-examined" (*Minutes* 26-7/08/1963). This was a bad grant application.

²¹ Says Trueman in the *Minutes*, "the officers are disappointed with the results of the first season of the Playhouse Theatre Company" (*Minutes* 17-8/08/1964).

²² Regarding the Crest, or the 'Crest Controversy' as it has been dubbed by *Canadian Theatre Review (CTR)*, a great deal has been written with very little clarity. The argument all stems from whether one sides with those who felt (like Herbert Whittaker) that the work of the Crest, although uneven, was good and important enough to be sustained, and those (like Nathan Cohen and Trueman -- who was, at one time, one of Cohen's teachers

at Mount Allison University) who didn't. The Crest did receive funding for a further year after the controversy and many people (including Donald Davis) felt that it was the way it was done rather than the grant refusal itself that was so devastating. (see "Crest Controversy" *CTR* and MacSkimming 27) After the Canadian Players collapsed under *another* reorganized leadership (Charlesworth and Roberts) and the Crest lost its grant, the two companies attempted a merger in 1966. The attempt was unsuccessful and both organizations ceased to exist after brief struggles. (see Scott 80-1)

²³ The proportionate amount in appropriations (and thus government power over the Council) has grown in leaps and bounds: "since 1965 a growing proportion of its revenues -- in 1977-788 more than 85% -- has been provided each year by parliamentary appropriations" (Milligan, "Council" 270).

²⁴ The NEA was modeled on the Canada Council.

²⁵ It was at the Centre d'Essai des Auteurs Dramatiques the Tremblay's *Les Belles-soeurs* got its first public reading (Weiss 25).

²⁶ Status of the Regional Theatres in 1967:

Theatre	Operating	Revenue	Canada Council	Province	Municipal
MTC	560,000	284,000/51%	125,000/22%	45,000/8%	25,000/4%
Playhouse	397,000	191,000/48%	95,000/24%	5,000/1%	18,000/4%
Neptune	321,000	96,000/30%	95,000/30%	40,000/12%	15,000/5%
Citadel	172,000	96,000/56%	30,000/17%	3,000/2%	8,000/4%
TNM	827,000	386,000/47%	225,000/27%	120,000/15%	55,000/7%

-other incomes are from private donations and Centennial Commission:

MTC	42,000/8%	93%
Playhouse	78,000/20%	97%
Neptune	69,000/21%	98%
Citadel	19,000/11%	90%
TNM	0/0%	96%

(Minutes 16-7/10/1967)

²⁷ In defense of the Playhouse and its artistic director, Joy Coghill, it is clear that their original intent was *not* to relegate Canadian plays to second stage status. Indeed, in this same season Coghill, having produced *Rita Joe*, proposed two new Canadian plays: *How to Run the Country* by Paul St. Pierre and *Armageddon* by James Clavell. During the period of Malcolm Black and particularly Joy Coghill, the Vancouver Playhouse had, perhaps, the best record among the regionals for producing 'indigenous works.' But many other regionals did choose to regularly shunt Canadian plays to the 'workshop' level.

²⁸ The Council also pointed out that some more concrete methods of assistance, specific to the playwright, had been put into place: "[w]e have augmented this developing interest in our playwrights by a grant to Le Centre d'essai des auteurs dramatiques in Montréal for workshops, clinics and readings, and by another to the Playwrights Workshop in Montréal for productions of plays by author-members" (*Annual Report 1969 23*).

²⁹ The list referred to contains, under the heading "Theatre," 44 names at maximum \$3,500 and 58 names at maximum \$1,350 and, under the heading "Writing," 76 names at maximum \$3,500 and 64 names at \$1,350. It is impossible to tell which names in either list

are playwrights, although 3 names in the first list are definitely playwrights as are 7 in the second list. Assuming these 10 received the maximum grant in their respective categories, the total amount granted would be \$19,950 over two years – an average of \$1,995 each. Projecting this average over the remaining 12 would give them a total of \$23,940 over two years. The Canada Council was contacted on this issue but were unable to come up with a breakdown of this list so this is largely conjectural, but a total estimate of \$44,000 seems fair.

³⁰ An additional problem for playwrights, as Arian discovered in his study of subsidized American theatre, is that “creative artists are not equipped or organized enough to compete for funds within an interest group system. Also, they are not oriented toward playing the grant game, and generally have a distaste for bureaucratic procedures and requirements and a distrust of selection processes” (Arian 104). This puts them at a distinct disadvantage in a bursary system.

³¹ These plays were written both by established playwrights such as Robert Gurik, Françoise Loranger, Jacques Duchesne, Gilles Delorme, Gratien Gélinas, Marcel Dubé, André Laurendeau, Roger Huard and Roger Dumas – many of whom continued to compete in the DDF – but also a group of novelists and poets who were turning their attention to the stage, such as: Marie-Claire Blais, Claude Jasmin, Réjean Ducharme, Jacques Ferron, Félix-Antoine Savard, Roch Carrier and Ann Hébert (Nardocchio 53-5).

³² For example: *L’Oeil du peuple* by André Langevin (1957), *Le Temps des lilacs* by Marcel Dubé (1958), *Les Taupes* by François Moreau (1959), *Deux femmes terribles* (1961), and *Klondyke* by Jacques Languirand (1965). Later on TNM became somewhat

more adventurous with premiers of new works such as: *Les Oranges sont vertes* by Claude Gauvreau (1972), *La Nef des sorcières*, a collective work, (1975) and *Les Fées ont soif* by Denise Boucher (1978)

³³ For a specific example of this see Bessai, 18-9.

³⁴ Robert Fulford suggests the latter was a common feature of the Crest's Council-funded productions of Canadian plays (Fulford 84).

Chapter Six: The Canada Council and the Regional System Under Attack

Nationalism, Again

The purpose of this section is to examine radical changes that took place in the half decade from 1970-1975 in the situation of the English-Canadian playwright, particularly in the light of a series of assaults launched against the new regional system, the policies of the Canada Council and its cultural/political status. These attacks came in a number of forms: from the playwrights themselves in the form of a series of meetings and a document that has come to be called *The Gaspé Manifesto*, from nationalist academics whose cultural and economic studies of the new theatre system publicly revealed the consequences of Council policy, from those members of the Canadian theatrical community who had been shut out from both the regional system and Canada Council funding and, finally, from the government itself which, dissatisfied with Council practices and hoping to capitalize on nationalist sentiment, sought to force the Council into new directions by direct and indirect actions. The result of these attacks was to force the Council (with some success) and the regional theatres (with less success) finally to come to terms with the issue of Canadian playwrights. As a side product (in many ways more profound than the original intentions), a new Canadian drama and dramaturgy was created outside, at least initially, of both the reach of the Canada Council and the regional system, demonstrating its own validity and popular appeal and forming the basis for the future creations of Canadian dramatists.

As we have seen, the Canada Council was created, under the aegis of the Massey/Levésque Commission, principally through an alliance of post Second World War nationalism and the high culture of the Canadian elite. Through the sixties, the dominant force within the policies of the Council was high culture, expressed principally through the practice of reserving grants for organizations that were 'professional' and producing

'quality' work. This, and the focus on the financial side of theatre resulted in a regional theatre system (still growing in the early 1970s) that steadfastly maintained a 'mixed' repertoire that offered, at best, one Canadian play, or two, per season. The Council's totally ineffective procedures of scholarships, awards and "commissioning" grants (often little more than supplements to cost over-runs) had been unable to encourage the regionals (with the exceptions cited in Chapter Five) to include more indigenous material in their seasons and to help employ and train Canadian dramatists and introduce audiences to them.

Towards the end of the 60s this alliance began to fall apart, as cultural nationalists saw larger and larger amounts of money being spent (both by the Canada Council and other levels of government) on theatres and a theatre system that offered little to compensate them for their support.

Partly this was due to the natural waning of the Council's prestige with the passage of years. More important, though, was the enormous upsurge in nationalism itself in the ten years 1965-75. (see above and Resnick 145, Granatstein, *Yankee* 147) The centennial year celebrations had intensified Canadian nationalism and 1969-70 saw the publication of such books as *Close the 49th Parallel* and *Silent Surrender* drawing attention to the imminent threat to Canadian cultural and economic independence. This period also saw the formation of the Waffle movement and the Committee for an Independent Canada (Resnick 170), as well as a growing nationalism within the federal civil service (Resnick 176) and even within Canadian membership in the international unions (Resnick 179). In Québec the forces of nationalism were growing even stronger although pursuing an alternative path.

In the cultural arena, nationalism had always focused on the production of Canadian art and literature and, in theatre, on the development of Canadian playwrights. In 1948,

critic Nathan Cohen had warned: “[b]ut until we develop competent playwrights of our own, Canadian theatre must remain a minor and rather snobbish form of entertainment” and even at that time suggested that “I do think that the upsurge of belated nationalism is acting as a positive catalyst.” (quoted in Edmonstone 107) Its nationalism had brought much needed popularity to the *Report* of the Massey/Levésque Commission (see Litt, “Muses” 108) but nationalism had begun to demand results in the form of the production of Canadian works and these results were clearly not forthcoming in the organizations supported by the Canada Council. These tensions between elitist high culture and nationalism would lead to “a series of controversies regarding preferential hiring of British directors that marked the decade. Perhaps for the first time in Canadian theatre, a British artist found himself opposed as alien when, in its inaugural issue, *Canadian Theatre Review* editorialized that ‘no other country in the world has a foreigner running its ‘national’ theatre’” (Filewood 10). More importantly, here, they led to an intense concern with the lack of development of an indigenous Canadian drama (see Gygli 2) that had been expected, almost promised, as a result of the creation of a Canadian theatre system. The lack of these plays within the regional system created to produce them revealed to the cultural nationalists a failed cultural policy on the part of the Council and, it was becoming clear, a large part of the regional system was resisting any efforts to make changes.

The Regionals

When the Massey/Levésque Commission considered the case of Canadian playwrights it made the following observation: “[I]n Canada the writing of plays, in spite of the few vigorous creative writers who have found encouragement in the CBC, has lagged

far behind the other literary arts. We have been informed that there is little writing for the theatre in Canada because of our penury of theatrical companies” (*Royal Commission* 196). In a similar fashion, the Canada Council had concluded that the priority was to put a theatrical structure in place that would, once firmly established, turn to the playwrights for plays. By 1970 the majority of the regional theatre system was in place -- indeed, some parts of it were over a decade old -- and the playwrights were still waiting. In the 1971 repertoire, for example, of the seven major regionals there were only 2 Canadian plays (Zimmerman 21) and “the Broadway comedies of a single US playwright, Neil Simon, outnumbered all Canadian plays produced by professional English-language theatres from Victoria to Fredericton” (Crean 3). As we have seen in the last section, there were many complex reasons for this consistent choice of repertoire by the regionals and, to a certain extent, this remained much the same in the early seventies.

What *was* different was the fact that the regionals were beginning (because of rising nationalism) to come under harsh criticism because of their stand. One of the first critics to take on the system was Tom Hendry, who had helped begin it in the first place. As one of the founders (along with John Hirsch) of the Manitoba Theatre Centre, flagship of the regionals, Hendry had seen his original concepts for the Winnipeg theatre changed over the years. At the creation of MTC Hendry and Hirsch had already developed very clear ideas on the importance of Canadian playwrights:

We felt that a theatre, if it is to have a soul of its own, must present original material it creates itself or causes to be created. For this reason every year, we presented *something* -- either for children or adults -- original, beginning with John's *Cinderella*, going on to Mort Forer's *Desperate Journey*, Len

Peterson's *Look Ahead*, James Reaney's *Names and Nicknames*, my own *Trapped!*, Jack Olfeld's *The Spirit of the People is a Sometime Thing*, Bernie Slade's *A Very Close Family*, Martin Lager's *Who is On My Side? Who?*, the revue *Bonfires*, John's *A Box of Smiles*, and the much disputed *All About Us* not to mention Betty Jane Wylie's Canadianizations of *An Enemy of The People* and *Georges Dandin*. (Hendry, "MTC" 18-9)

Since leaving MTC a great deal of his energy had gone to the development of playwrights and Hendry was engaged in 1970 in the creation of one of the alternate theatres in Toronto, Toronto Free Theatre. As a critic he could speak from experience as a playwright and as an administrator, and his critiques of the regional system's (and the Canada Council's) treatment of playwrights were sharp and accurate.

Hendry made it clear that not only was the regionals' choice of repertoire troubling but their lack of awareness that anyone would consider it troubling was even more worrisome: "[f]ar from being abnormal, the indigenous expression of a nation's culture in its theatres is so utterly *normal* that we feel it is pathetic to have to mention the fact" (Hendry, "Theatre" 275). Hendry's criticism of the regional system was particularly bitter when it came to the way that system viewed Canadian playwrights:

The majority of English-speaking theatres in Canada present little or no Canadian work, and feel no compulsion to participate in the development of a national dramaturgy. They employ neither dramaturges nor literary managers, and their relationships with Canadian writers rarely extend beyond the ritual returning of unsolicited, unread manuscripts, accompanied by the customary form letter of rejection. Those are the good theatres; the bad

theatres neither acknowledge nor return manuscripts sent to them. Neither group reads the manuscripts with anything like professional care. Why should they? The production of Canadian material in their list of priorities ranks far below important needs like new furniture for the theatre's VIP room. In these conditions, it is doubtful if even the unlikely masterpiece, if and when it turns up, would even be recognized and produced. (Hendry, "Theatre" 273)

The result was, says Hendry, that playwrights responded to this treatment by "under-achieving" when they were "economically and emotionally knocked out of their logical places of employment" (Hendry, "Theatre" 274). Indeed, although it was not apparent at the time that Hendry wrote the article (1974), a number of potentially very fine playwrights -- such as Herschel Hardin -- simply quit writing for the stage in disgust, becoming what Peter Hay has called the 'lost playwrights.' What rubbed salt in the wounds was the additional comment, by certain artistic directors, that there were no Canadian plays: "[t]his state of affairs will neither produce nor recognize 'good' plays in any quantity. Faced with the challenge of a quota, the directors ask, 'Where are the plays?' Indeed. Similarly, the abortionist asks, 'Where are the children?' The answers to both questions are the same" (Hendry, "Theatre" 274).

Many reasons were given in the seventies (and later) to justify the regional system's dismissal of Canadian works. Tight finances, limited grants and the risk of doing new (read 'Canadian') work was at the top of the list (see Rubin, "Aside" 4-5) and yet it was often the wealthier theatres that eschewed the Canadian product. Peter Hay has suggested that runaway budgets and the lack of financial controls had led to deficits even with growing

audiences (Hay 9): in a sense, some theatres were suffering from success, and that made them uninterested in anything risky or exciting. The irony is, said Hay in 1974, that “the cultural projects that have been most disappointing and brought the least permanent return to the taxpayer have been those housed in extravagant edifices, requiring large outlays simply for upkeep” (Hay 8); “the current crisis facing . . . the chain of theatres midwived by the Council is no longer one of accessibility or hardware, but content” (Hay 9).

The difficulty in evading vague generalities and being specific is that each of the theatres within the regional system was different from the others, and, even more problematic, each theatre could (and did) change radically with a new artistic director. As a result any statement about the regional system could be untrue in any one theatre, and then true the next year. The only way to get an idea of how the theatres viewed Canadian plays -- short of a long and tedious dissection of each season of each theatre -- is to briefly examine a few examples within the system. For the purposes of this project I have chosen Manitoba Theatre Center (since it was the prototype of the system), the St. Lawrence Centre (since it opened at the height of the controversy), The Globe and The Citadel (one ‘good’ and one ‘bad’) and the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde to illustrate the parallels in French side of the system.

When John Hirsch left the Manitoba Theatre Centre in 1966, he left behind a theatre and a theatrical philosophy based on a strong commitment to the community, but the theatre was to change radically after his departure. In its first few years MTC had managed to create the type of ‘balanced’ season that became the model for the other regional theatres. MTC's first season is a perfect example of this: *A Hatful of Rain*, *Blithe Spirit*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *Born Yesterday*, *Ring Around the Moon*, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *Of Mice*

and Men and Patricia Joudry's *Teach Me How to Cry* for Canadian content. The Manitoba Theatre Centre had also developed a reputation as a leader in the area of Canadian content - a somewhat exaggerated reputation based on its early seasons, although there was a great deal of Canadian material in its children's theatre program and, later, in the 'Warehouse' program (second stage). When Hirsch and Hendry left, the theatre began, under Eddie Gilbert and Kurt Reiss, to veer completely away from Canadian material and, as a result, it came under heavy criticism for its "apparent lack of commitment in areas where years before it had been a leader -- in producing Canadian scripts, hiring Canadian performers, and making bold artistic decisions" (Stuart, *History* 177). Nevertheless, Gilbert, despite his dislike for Canadian material, brought a strong artistic presence to the theatre and his first season set attendance records and concluded with the "remarkable" premiere of Ann Henry's *Lulu Street*, commissioned for the theatre (but not with a Council grant). (see Stuart, *History* 180) Gilbert resigned in 1968 over difficulties with the new facility and was succeeded by Kurt Reiss (who was intent on MTC making "its mark internationally") and then by Keith Turnbull in 1970, when the new building at 174 Market Avenue was ready; at a cost of 2.8 million (Stuart, *History* 180).

Turnbull, who was a protégé of poet and playwright James Reaney, attempted to turn the theatre back to its roots and back to Canadian plays:

What I wanted out of MTC is what I want out of any regional theatre in Canada. I want it to reflect to the people in that community something about their community, and then that can be their gift, their donation to the rest of the world. . . . Variations on Shakespearean comedies, West End hits and slightly revolutionary Bertolt Brecht's now and then are, in my mind, a

complete rejection of the validity of the lives of the people that are in that community. I can see that there are real cultural needs in terms of seeing how other people see their world; but until you start seeing your own world, you don't realize that it is a very specific vision. (quoted in Manitoba 19)

It's easy to see how such an approach would lead to conflict with a theatre Board, which traditionally sees only the 'bottom line,' and it did. Turnbull (twenty-three at the time) had one season to settle in, and though his plan was for about 50% Canadian plays, he only managed one in his second (and last season). The board, with whom he had often been in conflict, did not re-hire him (Stuart, *History* 184).

Instead, they re-hired Eddie Gilbert who remained artistic director for the 1970-75 span until he left and was replaced by Len Cariou. During his second era at MTC, Gilbert often clashed with nationalist critics who disliked his programming, making statements like:

My basic response to the issue of 'cultural nationalism' -- which has loomed so large lately -- is that there's less in it than meets the eye. No one that I know of is *opposed* to the development of Canadian artists. On the contrary, there are few places where it is as easy to get new work seen and admired. *Meanwhile, I can't say that the much remarked absence of Canadian cultural identity affects me keenly. I have always thought of it, when I have thought about it at all, as a blessing in disguise.* As for the degree of 'commitment' each of us feels towards the country we live in, we can only answer for ourselves. (Gilbert 23-4)

Although I give a lot of care to the choice of plays which are presented at MTC, I have never tried to lay down a policy of play selection other than

that of striking a reasonable balance in the course of any given season. By definition, a regional theatre must appeal to a broad cross-section of the community. *But what gets done matters to me less than how well it gets done.* (Gilbert 22)

Why should we settle for less than has already been achieved -- by Euripides and Shakespeare and Chekhov, by Kean and Duse and Olivier, by Brecht and Copeau and Reinhardt, by Gordon Craig and Robert Edmond Jones. (Gilbert 25, my italics)

Statements like these were, of course, guaranteed to anger cultural nationalists and Canadian playwrights, but they also angered John Hirsch who felt that the theatre he helped create had “shrunk through the years from its original goals.” Hirsch, for one, had never bought the argument that Canadian material was box office poison: “[I]ndigenous plays worked when I was there even on a box office level. It was an organic connection between the audience and what went on stage. Real theatre doesn't occur until there is a true reflection of the audience in every possible way” (Hirsch, “Interview” 28). Moreover, said Hirsch, “[I]n the early days of MTC we were doing new works all the time” (Hirsch, “Interview” 30) forgetting that many of those new works had been shunted off to the second stage. (see below)

Gilbert was under attack throughout the early seventies for his ‘international’ seasons and his disdain for Canadian nationalists and playwrights. The attitude about regional theatres in Canada was changing,

and the Centre found itself out of step. It was branded ‘establishment’ and accused of being too conservative and of shirking its responsibility to the

development of Canadian culture. When almost every other professional theatre was making an effort to schedule at least the token Canadian play as part of its main season, the Manitoba Theatre Centre relegated its few Canadian plays to the Warehouse Theatre with its limited facilities and even more limited budgets. (Stuart, *History* 190)

MTC's policy towards Canadian material continued to fluctuate back and forth after 1975. In 1980, under Richard Ouzounian, the season opened with three Canadian plays in a row: *Creeps*, *Balconville* and *Billy Bishop*, by that time, all standard Canadian box office successes. Yet in 1981, Manitoba Theatre Centre was one of the loudest voices at the Applebaum/Hébert Commission against quotas on Canadian content, taking the position that it would impose financial burdens on the theatres for which the Canada Council would not compensate them (Applebaum, *Summary* 140). One can see how rapidly a theatre could change approach and repertoire. The Manitoba Theatre Centre had initially been held as a model for all that a regional theatre should be (although its actual number of mainstage productions of new Canadian plays never quite lived up to its mythology) but by the mid-sixties it had become a model of the mixed season and even a representative voice *against* mainstage Canadian works under Eddie Gilbert. Keith Turnbull's sojourn there is indicative of what could happen when an attempt was made to focus the theatre on Canadian plays, and he was soon an active member in the alternative theatre movement. The Manitoba Theatre Centre became a model for regional theatres in ways that the Canada Council had not foreseen.

The St Lawrence Centre, on the other hand, although it ended up taking the same route, was an anomaly in almost every aspect of its early history -- and continued to have

difficulties that may have, only recently, been resolved. Because it was conceived as a civic project (originally as an arts complex modeled on the Lincoln Center of New York), it “has been cursed with civic politics ever since” (Johnston 12).¹ The Centre was planned as a centennial project for the year 1967 but was not ready until February of 1970, “with an 830-seat theater adaptable to thrust, proscenium, or caliper configurations, plus a 483-seat ‘town hall’ for everything from chamber music to political debate to billiards contests at lunchtime” (Twentieth 67-8). The problem, then and now, is that the theatre is a separate entity from the company that is its tenant, and therefore whoever operates the theatre does not have complete control over the building. In the (seemingly endless) years of its planning, a number of Toronto companies vied for occupancy as its principal company, including the Crest, the Canadian Players, the Red Barn and Theatre Toronto, but by the time it was completed they had all gone under.

When the \$5.4 million dollar facility finally opened, its tenant was Toronto Arts Foundation (to become on January 1, 1974 Toronto Arts Productions) which had planned an ambitious opening season, with hefty Canada Council backing, comprised of nearly all-Canadian works under Artistic Director Mavor Moore and Theatre Director Leon Major (late of Neptune Theatre). The bold season² was a critical failure and brought on political as well as financial troubles before the Centre had been open a year. The problem was that Toronto in 1970s was already becoming the vibrant home of alternative theatre with nothing (aside from the O’Keefe and the Royal Alex touring houses) to be alternative *to*. Moore and Major had planned for years to present a new kind of regional theatre, one that based itself on Canadian work.³ Moore had told the Twentieth Century Fund Task Force that he would like to do “at least three new Canadian plays a year, plus a classic and a new

play from Europe. . . . The great sin," Moore said reflectively, "is to lose money on crap. It's all right to make money on crap, or to lose money on something you've put your soul into. But it's a sin to lose money on crap" (Twentieth 68). The central problem was that the Centre, as a regional theatre, was expected by its audience to produce a 'regional season' and not compete with the alternatives for the avant-garde in Canadian material. The traditional audiences of the mainstream, but now defunct, professional theatres of Toronto, did not know how to deal with Moore's first season: radical not only in material but also in production techniques.⁴

After the first season Moore left and the company retrenched under Major to produce seasons more typically regional; the second season had no Canadian content and the third had only one indigenous play. Toronto Arts became over the next few years the centre of a firestorm of criticism. Pushed and prodded by the Canada Council to avoid, and then reduce, deficits by producing 'safe' seasons, the theatre was also attacked by cultural nationalists and Toronto's alternatives, to produce and develop more Canadian work. As Dennis Johnston puts it, the Centre was "cast unwillingly as a symbol of establishment theatre" (Johnston 16) in addition to having to live up to that symbol to satisfy the Council's fiscal concerns. The company was also attacked by various elected municipal officials, the most vociferous of which was Dorothy Thomas. In a series of open letters, Thomas and Major faced off in public, with Thomas accusing the Centre of avoiding young and "ethnic" audiences and catering to the old, "Wasp" Toronto. Her public tirade continued, in part,

English theatre is vibrant in Toronto right now too. There are any number of small, struggling production companies devoted to developing acting, technical, production, directorial and writing talents. . . . [They] produce

mainly Canadian plays and set 70%-80% houses in their converted garages and warehouses. There is a sense of vitality, excitement and sheer enjoyment in these places which is conspicuously lacking at the juggernaut of Front St. All of these independent theatres are continually on the verge of going out of existence, through lack of money. Energy, better put to artistic endeavour, is dissipated in the tedious and ultimately destructive chore of always having to hustle money. But their tenuous existence could be wiped out overnight. Consequently, there is considerable bitterness when these theatres see, as one manager put it, 'the City pump money into the St. Lawrence Centre to get a Rosedale matron off her fat ass into the theatre to watch second-rate British garbage.' (Thomas 24)

Major's response reads (again, in part)

This season we've presented plays by Molière, Strindberg, Brecht and the Canadian dramatist, Michael Cook. Is this British garbage? . . . We've never tried to cater to a specific social or economic group but are involved in a concerted effort to arrive at the status of a popular theatre -- popular in the very best sense that we want to attract audiences from all strata of the society. . . . The Theatre Company at the St. Lawrence Centre has chosen to look at both the classics and at contemporary work (Canadian as well as foreign) and to present these plays when we feel we have something fresh to say about them in the light of our own Canadian experience. (Major 15)

The St Lawrence Centre, after a brave beginning, had found itself in exactly the same position, with exactly the same kind of repertoire, and under exactly the same kind of attack as the rest of the regional system.⁵

The Globe Theatre of Regina has often been credited with having a better record of developing and producing Canadian drama than many of the other regionals partially because it was run for such a long time by the same director and partially because he insisted on maintaining close ties with the community. (see Benson and Conolly 84) In their first repertory season (1972-3) they produced Rod Langley's *Tales From a Prairie Drifter* and in their second season they presented Robert Gurik's *The Trial of Mr. What's-His-Name* and a double bill of Ken Mitchell's *This Train* and *Heroes* out of the eight works produced. Their programming over the period was consistently a mix of "a couple of classics, a couple of modern international plays, and a couple of Canadian or original works" (see Stuart, *History* 200 and Silvester 127-8) and part of what made them a 'good' theatre was that it was "a couple" of Canadian or original works rather than one. In 1970-71 they commissioned Carol Bolt's *Next Year Country* which went on to become (as *Buffalo Jump*) one of the successes of the alternative movement (see Zimmerman 34) and during this period, they also presented Bolt's *Davin: the Politician* and Len Peterson's *The Queen Street Scrolls*.

Ken Kramer, on being asked about the role of the Canada Council in all of this was faintly bemused. He responded that he was generally convinced that the Council had *no* policy on the development of Canadian drama "particularly in the West." Kramer forged his own policy out of his own comfort with developing new scripts. The Globe, moreover, went ahead (at first on its own, and later with an ambiguous Council grant) in 1975 and

hired Rex Deverell as playwright-in-residence -- something that certain other theatres, such as Montréal's Centaur, would do around this time. Deverell has always spoken highly of Kramer as a director who serves the author well in a collaborative fashion (Burrs 43 and Private Correspondence).

Edmonton's Citadel Theatre, on the other hand, has always had a 'bad' reputation as a supporter and producer of Canadian playwrights. Because it was begun as a "one-man venture by a businessman," Joseph Shocter, the Citadel has concentrated on doing well financially, but has also followed Shocter's own philosophy of repertoire; consisting "primarily of modern Broadway successes with small casts -- half dramas and half comedies" (Stuart, *History* 209). In fact, Citadel has always carried the image of, in Herbert Whittaker's words, 'an outpost of Broadway' and, despite the critical intent of the phrase, has carried it proudly. The Citadel produced no Canadian plays until John Neville became artistic director in 1977, and these only on the second stage (under Neville). Shocter has never been shy about his opinion on Canadian content and has labeled content regulations as "protectionism" and "a gravy train for those of moderate talent" (quoted in Globerman 29). This has not damaged the Citadel's audience success in Edmonton where one critic referred, in 1975, to Canadian plays, as "the pedestrian offerings of . . . killer-Canada." (quoted in Foord 67) Even today, the artistic coordinator of Citadel, Margaret Mooney, in response to a question on repertoire, has responded with the statement that "complete control of programming is in the hands of the finances [sic]" and that the role of the regionals is in the "second and third productions, primarily" (Mooney, Private Correspondence).

Despite the considerable differences in the funding situation in Québec (see below), the situation of the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde was similar to that of other regional

theatres. TNM was founded in 1951 by a group of actors from Les Compagnons de Saint-Laurent (Jean-Louis Roux, Guy Hoffman, Georges Groulx and Jean Gascon) who were therefore trained in, and accustomed to, a classical repertoire. The early years of TNM maintained that dedication to presenting “standard and classical plays from the French theatre” (Nardocchio 25) and little was altered in the years after 1957 when the theatre began receiving Council grants. As we have seen, TNM was the most highly funded theatre in Québec followed by the Rideau Vert. From 1957 until 1971 TNM received 38.7% of all Canada Council funding to “institutional” theatres in Québec (Rideau Vert got 21.4%) and from the Québec government TNM received 13.9% of all money allocated by the Ministry of Cultural Affairs for the same purpose (13.4% for Rideau Vert). In fact, it appears that from 1957 to 1979, 60% of all Council funding for theatre in Québec went to three institutions: the National Theatre School, TNM and Rideau-Vert. (Gruslin 229)⁶ The reasoning behind this generous support from both funding agencies was the consistently high standard of performance which often surpassed that of Stratford (W. Whittaker 281). This high standard was, amazingly, sustained even though the company had no permanent home, performing at the Gésu and at the Orphéum (Beauchamp-Rank 273). Indeed, the need to constantly rent performance space, often at high cost, may have increased the amounts allocated. TNM finally acquired a permanent home at the Comédie-Canadienne in 1972.

Like regionals elsewhere, the Québec regionals were often under attack for their repertoire choices, particularly for eschewing the works of indigenous authors, and they have defended themselves by maintaining that this was simply not part of their function (see Gruslin 32-4). TNM had made its name largely on the basis of its productions of Molière

and other French classics. From 1956 until 1963 Molière continued to dominate (at least one and sometimes two a year) as well as works by Guitry, Labiche, Strindberg, Aymé, Rivemale, Strindberg, Synge, Tchekhov, Pirandello, Brecht, de Ghelderode, Claudel and Salacrou (Beauchamp-Rank 273). Occasionally TNM would venture a work by a Québec playwright -- *La Fontaine de Paris* by Eloi de Grandmont (1954), *L'oeil du peuple* by André Langevin (1957), *Le Temps des lilas* by Marcel Dubé (1958), *Les Taupes* by François Moreau (1959), and André Langevin's *Deux femmes terribles* (1961) (Beauchamp-Rank 273, Nardocchio 25) -- but, on the whole, it maintained a standard, regionals repertory mix from the late 1960s on: "a famous international play; a Québec work; a significant contemporary play; a major modern piece; and a classic -- frequently Molière" (Oxford 535-6).

As a result of this safe repertoire TNM maintained its reputation for excellence but never achieved its vision of itself as the "théâtre national" of Québec. Indeed, overall, its record for the production of Canadian works, while better than some other regionals, is not that impressive considering the growing nationalist pressures on Québec theatre in the 1960s and 1970s. By 1985 TNM had produced 23 Québec productions out of a total of 148 but most of those were performed after 1975 (Gruslin 37). Despite Théâtre du Nouveau Monde's daring in producing such controversial pieces as *Les Oranges sont vertes* (1972), *Le Nef des sorcières* (1976) and *Les Fées ont soif* (1978) it never moved largely beyond the standard 'safe' season of most of the regionals. Jean-Louis Roux (who became manager in 1966), himself wrote in 1968 that the evolution of Québec theatre depended, in large part, on "the establishment of a national dramaturgy which can compete with other dramaturgies" (quoted in Weiss 24) yet TNM, like the other regionals made only a few

steps towards that goal, content to leave it to others and made the standard excuses of budget restraints (Gruslin 35), the need to fill the seats (Beauchamp-Rank 273) as well as the lack of a permanent home before 1972 (W. Whittaker 280).

It is easy to see that in the early seventies, the regional theatre system placed a low priority on new Canadian -- and all Canadian -- plays. If a 'good' theatre managed to produce two per season (in an eight or nine play season) and the average number of mainstage Canadian plays (new or old) was around one (or less), Canadian cultural nationalists and playwrights certainly had a serious case of neglect to present. One feature that has always muddied the statistical (and rhetorical) waters on this issue is the question of "second stage" productions. Many regional theatres developed, in the late 60s and particularly in the early 70s, second stage companies -- or at least facilities -- which were used to develop Canadian material. These were often considered as part of the statistical basis (both by the theatres and by the Canada Council) of how much Canadian material was being produced within the regional system. Nationalists and playwrights denied the legitimacy of including second stage productions in mainstage statistics. Second stages deserve a brief look since the playwrights and their supporters had markedly different estimates of their value and purpose than the theatres did.

Second Stages

In 1987 playwright John Gray gave the keynote address to the Theatre in Atlantic Canada Symposium, in Sackville New Brunswick. Looking back on the struggle for recognition he and other playwrights had fought in the 60s and early 70s to have their

works performed by the regional theatres he mused on the growing movement by the regionals to establish second stages:

And can you imagine what we could have done had we had the cooperation and encouragement of our bureaucrats, our politicians, and the arts administrators of our major cultural institutions? What if a couple of big Regionals had taken the plunge and regularly produced Canadian plays on their Main Stages, instead of co-opting the smaller houses by creating squalid little hovels of their own, called "second stages," in which to do their duty by Canadiana? Maybe by now we would actually have some Canadian plays written with those larger houses in mind. But Canadian playwrights learned early that these larger plants were closed to them, and they continued to turn out small-cast pieces suitable for hundred-seat hovels. And we complain that Canadian plays can't 'fill' the larger houses, that they're small and cheap-looking, lacking in spectacle and excitement. And without the income that comes from working in large houses the Canadian playwright wrote, not when he or she wanted to write, but when he or she could *afford* to write. And we complain that there aren't enough Canadian plays to fill a season. (Gray 11)

Most of the large regional theatres had established second stages by 1975. Manitoba Theatre Centre had always had a second stage as part of its over-all plan: "in planning the Centre, we foresaw the need for a small theatre where new plays could be developed to the point where their quality was good enough for the main stage. We knew," said Hendry,

they wouldn't all be wonderful plays. Some would be dreadful, but this you don't always know about until the play is in front of an audience. Then you know -- right away. We felt they would be mostly not too good at first, then they would improve -- the way the MTC has improved -- and sooner or later one would turn up that you would demand to see on the main stage, demand to be sent on tour across Canada, overseas, around the world. (Hendry, "MTC" 19)

This would be the theory and plan behind all of the second stages. MTC established a Studio Theatre in 1960 and then the Warehouse Theatre in 1969. Vancouver had started their studio in 1967, as discussed above and Neptune opened theirs in 1971. Many of the later regionals followed suit.

There is little to dispute in the theory behind studio theatres: small, inexpensive venues where experimental plays could be performed, new works could be developed in concert with the authors, a director and a company of actors that could receive additional training themselves. This was the theory, but the practice was often quite different. For example the Neptune Studio rapidly (in the first season) became a production facility that produced *Creeps*, *Stonehenge* and *Home Sweet Home* -- all Canadian plays. The inclusion here of *Creeps* is the 'giveaway'. This play had already had two successful productions in Toronto -- the second one at Tarragon -- and was hardly an experimental piece. In keeping with the theory it should have been on the main stage, but it wasn't. In the second season (Neptune's most Canadian season during this period) they got it right (although, curiously *Forever Yours*, *Marie-Lou* was considered too experimental for the main stage) but by the 1973-74 season, the Studio theatre was gone. The same pattern was apparent at MTC

where the Warehouse was used to stage (among many others -- since the second stages were rarely used solely for Canadian material) productions of plays that were well enough established for the main stage such as *Wedding in White*, *En pieces détachés* (1972-73), *Esker Mike and his Wife*, *Agiluk*, *You're Gonna Be Alright*, *Jamie-Boy* (1973-74), *Crabdance* (1974-75), *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* (1975-76 and also "second staged" earlier by Neptune), *Canadian Gothic and American Modern* (1976-77). The pattern rapidly became as common as the pattern of main stage repertoires.

In a sense, Canadian playwrights must have been happy to get *some* exposure for their work and artistic directors often felt that this was the best place for them. Eddie Gilbert believed that this was true because most of these plays had been developed in the small alternative houses in Toronto and therefore worked best in an intimate environment. "Canadian plays were confined to the second stage not because they were secondary in importance but for their own good" was the working theory at the time. "However, financial statistics did not support Gilbert's reasoning. According to the Centre's own publicity, the warehouse received only 4.1 percent of the Centre's total operating budget. Canadian plays were secondary in importance" (Stuart, *History* 191). If Canadian plays were generally relegated to the second stages of the regional theatres, and evidence suggests that they were, then the audiences -- unused to Canadian material because of the regionals' mainstage repertoire -- were being taught that Canadian plays were secondary, deserving only of small budget, small house production and not worthy to appear on the main stage. As long as the second stages were being used to develop *new* material, they served a useful function. As "restagings" (Crean 167) they were doing a disservice that hurt more than the play in question. In this instance, the regionals were not only not developing

and commissioning new works, they were telling their audiences that most Canadian plays were second rate with cheap productions.⁷ In yet one more way, we see that “the development of writers was clearly someone else's business” (Stuart, *History* 191) and not that of the regionals.

Funding Patterns

Another way to look at our tripartite relationship (Canada Council, regional system and English-Canadian playwrights) in this period, is to examine the funding patterns for 1970-75. During this period a number of studies were done and the results are therefore more readily available than in the previous decade. In addition, the studies themselves often became political weapons in the growing nationalist disenchantment with the policies of the Council. One study, *Aspects of Canadian Cultural Policy* (undertaken for UNESCO), laid some basic groundwork. It determined, for instance, that between 1965 and 1975 the arts appropriation of the Canada Council rose from \$3.5 million to \$24 million (Shafer 49) and yet, despite this, the phenomenon of the income gap kept the arts organization under serious financial pressure. Among the twenty-nine largest performing arts companies, revenues from the box office accounted for only 50% of expenses and the rest was accounted for as follows: 22% Federal government (mostly Canada Council); 12% corporations, foundations and private donors; 10% provincial governments; 4% municipal governments; and 2% in accumulated deficits (Shafer 48). It is clear from this that no matter how fast the funding grew, the spending among these large organizations grew just as fast, if not faster.

But Shafer's study and the Canada Council funded study of the "29" on which it was largely based do not attempt to show any correlation between the money spent and the results achieved -- except in terms of growth. Another study, *Wooden Pennies: A Report on Cultural Funding Patterns in Canada* (1973), undertaken by Frank Pasquill and Joan Horseman at the Programme in Arts Administration, York University had much more devastating implications. Clearly nationalist in its approach⁸ the study examines the funding patterns of all three levels of government over a ten year period focusing on the funding patterns of the Canada Council, the National Arts Centre Corporation, and the Department of the Secretary of State. It does not essentially disagree with Shafer's conclusions on the financial state of the arts but it makes a number of further, startling, revelations.

It reveals, for instance, that the pattern of funding that the Canada Council had pursued had implications far beyond the actual moneys disbursed by the Council. The reason for this was that:

[t]he Canada Council effectively sets both the pattern and scale for all public and private subsidization of the performing arts in Canada. Grants from foundations, corporations, provincial and municipal governments are generally smaller in absolute terms, but these donors tend to follow Canada Council's leadership in funding: they *all* subsidize roughly the same group of performing arts organizations to a similar degree, and as time goes on they increasingly favour established organizations over newcomers. The conservative bias was most apparent in theatre. (Pasquill, "Cultural" 17)

In the early days this tended to be a bonus factor. W. Whittaker relates the implications of the first Canada Council grant to the Manitoba Theatre Centre:

Mr. Hendry was categorical in his assessment of the value of the Council in its support of the Manitoba Theatre Centre. . . . For every dollar the Council gave, other subsidies were able to be raised for twice that amount. His biggest problem was to try to estimate the likely amount of the Canada Council grant because he knew that other agencies were waiting to see what the Council did before deciding upon the amount of their individual support. In particular, the municipal and provincial governments were sensitive to the amount of Council aid which was regarded as a kind of federal grant. By 1962, in addition to the Council, five other agencies were making yearly grants to the Centre, whereas prior to the first year of Council aid, none of these was apparent. Membership support of the Centre increased by almost 500% the year of the first Council grant. (W. Whittaker 308-9)⁹

Once, however, this pattern became set in stone, as Pasquill found it had been, it had a number of serious and detrimental effects. If all the agencies are funding the same organizations, there is no variety in arts production; rather, there is more of the same. If funding bodies are merely following the Canada Council's lead, then the Council's (necessarily limited) judgment of values becomes the *de facto* value judgment for the nation and every mistake that the Council might make becomes that much more serious. Finally, and perhaps most seriously, the Council often based its funding on the assumption that other funding bodies were *not* following its lead. The fact that they were calls into question the validity of the Council's policies.

There is one very clear example that will illustrate this since it goes to the heart of Canada Council funding policies for theatre. As we have seen, above, it has always been

Canada Council philosophy to fund professional companies over amateur companies and Pasquill found that “[t]his trend is firmly established by The Canada Council, which moved from allocating 62% of its funds to the ‘professional’ group in 1961-1962 to 81% in 1970-1971. This trend reflected The Canada Council's policy to ‘raise rather than spread’” (Pasquill, “Subsidy” 59).¹⁰ We also know that it was reinforced when the number of ‘orphans in the orphanage’ grew faster than the available appropriations, causing funding shortages. The Council always reacted by cutting from the bottom (amateur) up to the top (professional). What was not known (publicly) until Pasquill's studies was that the other funding bodies were doing the same thing:

The percentage of funds allocated to the ‘professional’ group from the total performing arts budget of each government level, was calculated for each year during the fiscal period 1961-62 to 1970-71. . . . The Canada Council's policy to ‘raise rather than spread’ is then reflected by agencies operating at the provincial level, as their support for ‘professionals’ rose from 43 per cent to 57 per cent during the same period. However, the most dramatic and surprising result of the analysis was that the municipalities played ‘follow the leader’ to an even greater degree, as allocations to the 29 organizations rose from 52 per cent of the municipal budget in 1961-62 to 82 per cent in 1970-71. This destroyed an historic assumption by The Canada Council that amateur activity will be looked after by local governments. Municipal politics are simply too volatile, funds are too scarce, and knowledge of the arts is too limited for most politicians to support any but those sanctioned by Canada Council. (Pasquill, “Cultural” 17)

In overall funding for theatres only, 32 percent went to professionals in 1961-62, while in 1970-71 the amount had risen to 76 per cent and, of all the arts, Pasquill found the trend the most pronounced and dramatic in theatre (Pasquill, "Cultural" 20).

We remember how, in the early years, the Canada Council urged "local" organizations, shut out of the funding process because they were not "professional," to approach local governments in order to receive funding that would enable those organizations to rise to a level of professionalism at which time they would be entitled to Canada Council funding. The Council assumed that this process would sustain amateur groups in their climb to 'quality.' But by 1970-71, municipal governments -- the primary source for these 'local' groups -- were giving 80% of their funding to the same groups as the Canada Council, and "this discovery destroys the old assumption that amateur cultural activity will be supported by local governments and that a national agency should only concern itself with professional excellence. To overcome the "professional" bias, a higher degree of communication and coordination is required between the various levels of government" (Pasquill, *Wooden* 50). One of the principal assumptions upon which Canada Council funding to theatre groups was based turned out to have been in error.

What are the consequences of this pattern of funding? Some of them are obvious and some less so. The pattern leads to bigness on the part of those organizations which receive the funding and bigness leads to complacency. It also, in the words of Jack Poggi, "turns theatres into Institutions," and institutions tend not to be led by vibrant, creatively maverick people; they are run by administrators, experts in funding, lobbying and grant applications. "Getting subsidies," becomes a vitally important (perhaps the most important) job of someone running a large theatre and it is, as Poggi says,

a difficult and time-consuming task, requiring skillful maneuvering and artful persuasion. Sometimes a founder stops directing and gives over most of his time to this job. Sometimes a person with special skills takes over the role -- and with it, the power. The larger and more complex the operation, the more likely a theater is to shift its emphasis from putting on plays to insuring its growth and survival as an institution. (Poggi 234-5)

Magnitude also leads to less economy. Shows at large theatres are enormously more expensive than shows at small theatres. The study, *Economic Aspects of the Arts in Ontario*, shows that:

While the average cost per performance at Stratford Shakespearean Festival, O'Keefe Centre, Royal Alexandra Theatre, or the St. Lawrence Centre is between \$1,000 and \$10,000, the average cost per performance of our small theatre company is only \$400. Average cost per person in attendance at large theatres varies between \$6 and \$8; cost per person attending for the average small theatre is \$2. Low average cost of performances enables small theatres to earn at the box office 70% of total annual operating expenditure while charging relatively low ticket prices. (Book 34)

Productions invariably cost much more to the large theatres, therefore the theatres charged more, therefore appealed to a narrower range of audience, ran higher deficits and needed larger grants: a vicious spiral that does not take place in smaller theatres unless they are encouraged (or they desired) to grow. For the price of one large regional, a modest number of small theatres could be run with fewer deficit problems featuring a variety of types of

seasons; for bigness leads to sameness: the 'safe' successful season year after year, formulaic and inevitably repetitious.

The other major result of this pattern is that if the money was going in such large percentages to professional theatres -- like the regional system and the Festival theatres -- it was obviously not going to the small theatres and individuals. Individual creators, in general, suffered from this neglect, and George Woodcock offers an estimate that 12 per cent (\$5 million) of the total (\$44 million) that the Canada Council spent up until 1981 was given to individual artists, and of the \$7 million writing and publication budget, "most of that was spent on recently instituted subsidies to publishers, and only \$878,000 was being used to buy writers time to devote themselves to the works they felt were important" (Woodcock 59). However, this is less significant (although still troubling as a pattern) to playwrights for reasons discussed above. More serious is the lack of money spent on small groups and companies who were not regionals and (at least at first) didn't wish to become regionals.

Pasquill's studies (there are actually two over-lapping studies and an article based on them), not only drew attention to and confirmed the Canada Council's funding pattern, heavily favouring established regional theatres, they also pointed out some of the organizations who were suffering from almost total exclusion:

Recent changes in cultural activity in Canada indicate that both within performing arts organizations and among audiences there is a growing interest in innovative and indigenous forms of expression in the performing arts. It is recommended that The Canada Council undertake an extensive examination of this interest in innovative and Canadian experimental works

and consider the feasibility of allocating special funds for these purposes.

(Pasquill, "Subsidy" 6)

By "recent changes in cultural activity" Pasquill was referring to, among other things, the alternative theatre movement that was growing across Canada, most prominently in Toronto. And Pasquill was not the only one beginning to analyze the statistics and the patterns emerging from them. Tom Hendry -- formerly co-founder of the flagship of the regional movement -- was now one of the main movers of the alternative movement and, as a former administrator, he knew how the numbers worked. His response, based on the studies and the Canada Council's own figures, was more direct:

During the past 1971-72 season approximately 180 productions received Canada Council subsidies and of these approximately 50 were Canadian. This paper takes note that approximately 80-90 per cent of all Canada Council subsidies to theatre in English Canada have gone to theatres presenting on their main stages only *one* Canadian play (Playhouse Theatre Company, Theatre Calgary, Citadel Theatre, St. Lawrence Centre and Manitoba Theatre Centre) or *no* Canadian plays whatsoever (National Arts Centre, Neptune Theatre, Theatre New Brunswick, Bastion Theatre, Saidye Bronfman Centre, Newfoundland Arts Centre). This paper also recognizes that only a very tiny percentage of the grants have gone to those few theatres presenting 50 per cent or more Canadian plays as part of their seasons. Between them, Factory Theatre Lab, Theatre Passe-Muraille, Tarragon Theatre and Le Theatre d'aujourd'hui have presented more than 30 of the 50 Canadian plays to be done last season, thanks to aggregate amounts of

Council subsidies not exceeding in total \$35,000. Thus, four theatres committed to the production of Canadian work have received, on the average, a per-play subsidy of approximately \$1,000. Contrast this with the situation of 32 theatres not committed to the production of Canadian work, many of them producing *no* Canadian work whatsoever; these fortunate 32 theatres have received more than \$1,950,000 for their 148 productions -- a per-play subsidy of more than \$13,000. It is abundantly clear where priorities lie. (Hendry, "Theatre" 267)

It is also abundantly clear that the Canada Council was not about to change those priorities, built up (as we have seen) since 1957. In addition, the Council could not simply abandon the regionals and swing all its money overnight to the alternate theatres¹¹ nor could it increase funding, since it was at that time begging for more government money and pleading with the "29" to watch their budgets more carefully.

Beyond this, the Canada Council had always had a 'hands-off' relationship with experimental theatre in general. Considering it 'un-professional' (how useful that term can be) it had avoided funding it -- except in minor ways. Throughout the 60s, for example, the Council had consistently deflected grant requests from Toronto Workshop Productions, or had made only minor grants to the organization. Yet TWP had been developing or producing new Canadian plays at the rate of about one a year since the late 50s. By 1970, the alternative theatre movement was spreading across Toronto and, from Toronto, across the country. It rapidly became both the focus of the attack on the Canada Council and served as an illustration of how much the policies of the Canada Council had failed cultural nationalism and the Canadian playwright. In the meantime, the playwrights themselves were

becoming increasingly disenchanted with being shut out of the regional system into which such wealth was being poured.

Funding in Québec

Pasquill's study includes the figures for the funding of the performance arts (including theatre) in Québec but does not view them separately and there were some major differences worth looking at if only to contrast the situation there with that of English Canada. The most important difference in Québec was the (small at first but rapidly growing) supply of funding from the Greater Montréal Arts Council (from 1957), the Ministère des Affaires culturelles (from 1961) and the creation within that ministry of a theatre section (from 1963). These bodies, from modest beginnings, rapidly became major players in the area of theatre funding. By 1962, the Canada Council was only providing about 33% of the total subsidy to French-Canadian theatre while 42% was coming from the provincial body and 25% from the city's Conseil des Arts (W. Whittaker 272-3). This was a situation unlike anywhere else in Canada at the time. Federally, as of 1962, provincial grants to arts and cultural activities ran as follows: Québec, \$815,000; Saskatchewan, \$252,000; Nova Scotia, \$163,438; Ontario, \$21,250 (other provinces did not show separate figures for this category). Ontario began to rapidly expand its grants in the late 1960's, following the lead of the Canada Council in its dispersion pattern. But in 1962 Québec was contributing 65% of the aid to arts given by all Canadian provinces and Montréal 41% of the aid given by all Canadian municipalities (W. Whittaker 273-4).

In 1963 the budget for the theatre department of the Ministry of Culture was about \$500,000 annually while the Canada Council's allocation was only \$275,000. (W. Whittaker

281). While a number of critics have complained that, for instance, Québec's contribution to culture was too small, never exceeding .6% of the provincial budget until 1975 (Gruslin 90-1) it is clear that the Québec funding agencies (particularly the province) exercised greater sway in Québec theatre than did the Council, especially since theatre was always given a priority within the domain of cultural affairs (Gruslin 93). Indeed, the statement that, in 1961, "le gouvernement du Québec mettaient fin au quasi monopole du fédéral en matière culturelle sur son propre territoire" (Gruslin 86) is entirely accurate. As a result of this the patterns of funding in regards to institutions in Québec, while remaining similar to that of English Canada in the area of repertoire, were less swayed by the policies of the Canada Council and more by the Ministère des Affaires culturelles of Québec.¹² However, the funding policies of the Council and their results, as outlined by Pasquill, remained a major force and continued to exert their influence, particularly in the regional (institutional) theatres.

The other, co-related, factor at play in Québec was the rapidly developing nationalism that was to lead to the victory of the Parti Québécois in 1976. Because of the focus, within the French cultural realm, on theatre, it rapidly became an even more hotly contested arena than in the rest of Canada. The different funding bodies had different objectives and priorities that often came into conflict particularly in areas of federalism versus sovereignty (Gruslin 21). The new professional and political elite ushered into power by the "quiet revolution" tended to favour the imported culture of France (Weiss 148) and, because the Ministry of Culture was not an arms-length body, sometimes intervened directly. For example, one of the more experimental companies, Les Saltimbanques, which was one of the earliest companies in Québec to begin producing Québécois plays, had its

funding withdrawn after a production of *Equation pour un homme actuel* by Pierre Moretti. was closed by the morality squad at Expo '67, dooming the company to closure (Nardocchio 51-2). And in 1970 the Québec Ministry of Cultural Affairs refused to finance a Paris engagement for Michel Tremblay's *Les Belles-Sœurs* because it was written in *joual* (Nardocchio xi).¹³

On the other hand, a new, and even more nationalist, cultural elite ("students, professors, and progressive professionals") began to agitate for more funding for 'popular' culture including indigenous drama (Weiss 148). Québec nationalist critics made the argument that the close linkage of theatre and society necessitated the direct intervention of the state in order to make theatre "un levier culturel, didactique et/ou politique" (Gruslin 14) and insisted that "the act of artistic creation in French in Québec is of itself an assertion of independence from English Canada" (Weiss 2). These critics strongly promoted the development and production of didactic plays such as Françoise Loranger's *Médium saignant* (Hébert 32) and were, in general, strong supporters of the new generation of Québec playwrights. All of these particular developments made the area of French-Canadian playwrighting different and more complex than that in English Canada despite the playwrights' considerable commonality of purpose with their English counterparts. But, as we have seen in the case of Théâtre du Nouveau Monde, there remained great similarities in the area of the repertoire of the regionals.

Gaspé to Ottawa

After the salvoes fired across the Canada Council's bow by the Secretary of State, calling into question the Council's funding policies in the arts, the major attack against the

Council was launched by the playwrights themselves. Various calls for more productions of Canadian plays by theatres funded by the Council had been made by various theatre artists, critics and playwrights, such as a very vocal John Palmer, who asked publicly in an article entitled "Canadian Playwright Crisis":

Why do Canadian theatres right across the country produce so incredibly few Canadian plays? Why do the artistic directors of Canadian theatres claim that there aren't enough Canadian plays when evidence to the contrary is as obvious as pollution? Why is the Canadian theatre so sick with lack of self-respect and so determined to remain that way that it deliberately excludes the elements that could give it life and originality and could make it a unique institution in the world? Where does this paranoia, distrust and neglect of the Canadian genius come from? (Palmer 6)

What helped the playwrights get their message across was support from within the Council in the person of David Gardner, the new theatre officer (1971-72) whose career as an actor, adjudicator and director¹⁴ had apparently made him more sensitive than other members of the Council on the issue of Canadian content. As Gardner later put it:

I conceived the idea of an intimate week-long conference on Canadian playwrighting at the Council's Stanley House property in the Gaspé. . . . I gathered together all the hot-heads and the prickly pears from coast to coast It was the summer of 1971 and the purpose was to bitch and then construct realistic recommendations for the theatre in general and the Council in particular, which I would do my best to implement. By the end of the week several directions emerged. The need for publishing plays . . . and,

of course, increasing the subsidies and renewing the subsidies to writers, and of course the one attention-grabbing resolution of 50% Canadian content. Jack Gray composed the final communiqué calling it a 'strange enterprise' after the Molière phrase, 'The entertainment of decent people is a strange enterprise.' And it was released to the press with a bomb-shell effect.

(Kilbourn 175-6)

The Conference took place from July 19th to 23rd, 1971 and the final document was released as *A Strange Enterprise: The Dilemma of the Canadian Playwright in Canada*, although it has long since been referred to as the "Gaspé Manifesto."

A Strange Enterprise is an interesting document which covered more ground than simply its (famous) demand for a 50% Canadian content quota. It began by attempting to convince the public of the sheer anomaly of the status of the playwright in Canada compared with other countries:

What is striking when one examines the condition of the playwright in Canada is the abnormality of the situation in which he works. In most countries and most cultures those who create original material are prized and valued members of the creative community. Really successful theatres demand new work and in fact depend on it for their existence. In the normal situation what people ask for are new novels, new films, new poems, new comic strips, new television programs -- and strange as it may seem -- new plays. Theatres that matter are based on their own new work, work that speaks to its initial audience in accents that are immediately relevant. The normal situation is that there are new plays, and lots of them. (*Strange* 1)

It laid out the playwrights' position on the contemporary theatre network of the time by saying, unequivocally, “we believe there is no meaningful Canadian theatre except where our playwrights take a major role in it” and made it clear that what had been done by the “Canada Council, the other funding agencies and the regional theatres created by them was unacceptable and shameful. The lack of Canadian content within the regional system was deemed “a scandal and a disgrace” (*Strange* 1). They warned the Council that there were two sides to the problem, writing and being produced:

Another point that has emerged clearly from our deliberations is that there are no easy ways to get this new work. Playwrights must be encouraged in every possible way to write their plays, and theatres must be encouraged in every possible way to produce these works. It is essential, as well, that it be clearly understood by the writers, the producers, the audiences, the critics, and all who support the theatre, that support of the playwright, however generous it is, will not produce instant masterpieces. Indeed, it may not produce masterpieces at all. We can anticipate, however, that if we do as many plays as we can, as well as we can, we are more likely to turn up the occasional masterpiece. Quality will grow from quantity. (*Strange* 1)

The last lines might have seemed self-serving had they not been an absolutely accurate description of what was about to take place in the alternative theatres of Toronto in the next few years. The regional theatres were reminded (something that had been repeatedly stated from the *Report* of the Massey/Levésque Commission onward) that “no play lives until it is produced for the audience” and, therefore, “it is essential that there now be a clearly stated

policy that establishes that public funds be used, first, to make sure our writers are writing, second, that our theatres are enabled to present those works to our audience” (*Strange 1*).

After this preamble the document goes on to make a series of suggestions, including a guaranteed income program, a playwright-in-residence program funded by the Canada Council, the “automatic publishing of all new plays by Canadians that have been or are about to be produced” and a much more revolutionary approach to commissioning (*Strange 3*), although the word commissioning is not used. The playwrights recommended that the Canada Council make available

short term production grants . . . on an ad hoc, short-term basis to individuals, to small companies, or to groups that are organized for a specific project, to enable them to mount or develop a single production. Such a grant could be made, for example, to a writer to enable him to fund or to organize a production of his work in a way particularly suited to his needs. It would also make it possible for the Council to give selective support to a company or group over an extended period. (*Strange 3*)

This would have, if implemented, taken the decision whether to produce or commission plays out of the hands of the regional, or ‘professional’ theatres and enabled anyone to produce a Canadian play with a Council grant. It was, of course, directly against Canada Council policy and was not implemented; but it would have removed the one form of control that the regionals exercised over publicly paid for productions of Canadian work: their blocking power. It was more revolutionary than the call for quotas and might, given the example of the alternates, have had a stronger effect.

Strange Enterprise also demanded quotas of Canadian material in the Canadian theatre system through the funding power of the granting agencies:

We recommend: . . . that all Canadian grant giving agencies stipulate that not later than the first of January, 1973, any theatre receiving funds will be required to include in its repertoire at least one Canadian work in each two works that it produces, making it clear that among the first criteria for subsidy is the question of the content of the theatre's repertoire, which is to say, what percentage in the season is Canadian work: that the minimum requirement apply to works in each category of a theatre's season (e.g. main stage, studio, workshop productions, children's plays, and so on); and that adaptations of existing stage works not be considered Canadian. (*Strange 2*)

It was indeed a bombshell, and the negative response of the regionals, and most critics, was quite definite. Some regionals, like the Manitoba Theatre Centre, remained strongly opposed to Canadian content regulations into the 1980s when, following the Applebaum/Hébert Commission, the idea seems to have been permanently dropped (Applebaum 140). It is still unclear, even today, precisely how the Canada Council reacted to the manifesto. Frank Milligan outlines what he considers to have been their dilemma:

Faced with these demands, the Council examined its public conscience and found no ready answer. On the one hand it was clear that the arts could not flourish in Canada if Canadian artists languished. . . . But it was one thing to assemble an Art Bank or to give grants for the commissioning of Canadian works for performance or for the publishing and distribution of Canadian novels and poetry; it was -- to some, at least -- quite another thing to

promote the arts of Canada by fiat, or by anti-dumping laws against the competition of the arts of other lands or of artists long since dead. (Milligan 67)

Gardner stated later, that “within a year the battle of acceptance was won. Canadian play production in the major theatres, not just the alternates, increased from 30% to 51% in one year” but then goes on to elaborate that he “argued a ‘Canadian priority’ policy in Council with the Advisory Arts Panel and . . . remembers once being rather over-emotional . . . The policy, I'm afraid, had to wait until Walter [Learning]'s era.” He states that he used his position “on many occasions to lobby directly with artistic directors for additional Canadian content in their programming” (Kilbourn 176). With no disrespect for Mr. Gardner, whose efforts appear to have been many and sincere, this is hardly an endorsement of the manifesto's position on Canadian content, nor does it indicate that the battle was won. Even Benson and Conolly state equivocally that “[t]he Council endorsed, but refused to enforce, the recommendation, and its hope that theatres would voluntarily Canadianize their repertoire was not realized.” They go on to cite the 1976 season of the Manitoba Theatre Centre filled with the works of Shakespeare, Coward, Shaffer, Steinbeck, Albee, Beckett, and Lerner; “Toronto's St. Lawrence Centre did not offer a single Canadian play in 1976 -- its *pièce-de-résistance* was *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown*” (Benson and Conolly 84).

It is difficult to see how the Canada Council could endorse a recommendation aimed at *themselves* without enforcing it. The recommendation was, after all, that “grant giving agencies” withhold funds from theatres, not a mere suggestion that the theatres should do a minimum of 50 per cent Canadian content. To transform such a demand into a suggestion for “Canadian Priority” is hardly even endorsement -- it is closer to placation of the

playwrights. It is also another example, similar to those we have seen in the 1960s, of the evident chasm between policy and practice at the Canada Council when it comes to the issue of Canadian plays. Nor were the regionals to escape criticism for their rejection of the manifesto. Tom Hendry wrote in 1974 that we would not

be so deeply mired in the colonial tradition that a proposal to limit non-Canadian content on our stages to fifty per cent is viewed as widely radical by our best-funded arts organizations. They know the tastes of the small fraction of the Canadian public they serve and feel themselves threatened by even the thought of Canadian work forming a major portion of repertoire.

(Hendry, "Canadian" 5,14)

The Gaspé Manifesto seemed to have achieved little at the time except controversy but it was, in the long run, one step towards increased Canadian content. However the Council would require a stronger example of what must be done to move it beyond rhetoric.¹⁵

Throughout the early part of 1973 the Canadian Conference of the Arts sponsored a series of regional meetings of artists to discuss the funding policies of Government agencies followed by a plenary meeting with the funding agencies in Ottawa at the beginning of April 1973 at *Direction '73*. The artists, "frustrated, angered and resentful," were in general agreement on a number of issues (including greater regional control over funding and a greater 'democratization' of the arts) and were particularly concerned with the excessive control over funding by "patrons, politicians and Ottawa bureaucrats" (Mandell 17). A great deal of the conference was concerned with the production of new works from "budding artists," (Mandell 18) who felt shut out of the 'culture industry' and unable to get their works produced and shown. It was, says Hay, "the largest cultural conference ever held in

Canada, between three levels of government in the nation's capital, and it didn't even make the National" (Hay 13) but it was highly critical of the Council:

A brief written by E. Paul Shafer, director of arts administration at York University, was the working document of the conference. This brief -- containing 51 recommendations -- was a distillation of nearly 4,000 recommendations made at the four regional conferences. It stated frankly: 'Canada has failed its artists and art organizations' and asked principally for a doubling of government funds for the next three years as well as a direct voice for the artist in development of government cultural policy and a desire for regional autonomy. (Frazer 29)

According to Shafer himself, the top priority of the list of 4,000 recommendations was: "improve the status of artists" (Shafer 47). Even with André Fortier, the new director of the Canada Council, promising that "sometime in the future" arts funding would be split 50/50 between established and new groups -- a promise that was never kept -- the meeting ended with an artists' walkout. As Tom Hendry said, "for a decade and a half the artists legitimated the lobby process by their presence at regular Conferences. With this year's walkout, the icing went off the cake" (Hendry, "Canadian" 5).

Even based only on the results of these conferences and declarations, it is clear that the split between the Canada Council and its artists was wide and growing, and the issue remained repertoire. Artists, backed by nationalists (or nationalists themselves) were no longer satisfied with the Canadian theatre system and its indifference to their work. Nor were they satisfied with the Council's protestations of support since it was unable to back those words up with action. In effect, the cultural elitism of the first decade of the Council

had put in place a new cultural elite in the form of the regional theatres and now, however much the Canada Council may have wished it, it was unable to persuade the theatres to come to grips with the dilemma of the Canadian playwright.

LIP, OFY and the “Politics of Production”

In a parallel process, in 1969, then Secretary of State, Gérard Pelletier made another speech on the issue of culture in Lethbridge: “[i]t may be necessary to transform completely the notion of culture, to replace the notion of a middle class culture with that of a mass culture. . . . When culture has become a source of alienation -- and this is increasingly the case with middle-class culture, it is high time for us to examine it. The democratization of culture will not otherwise be achieved.” (quoted in Woodcock 113). These repeated calls for ‘democratization’ were soon to have a concrete representation. In the summer of 1971 Opportunities for Youth (OFY) was established to provide summer jobs for youth; it was followed quickly (November) by the Local Initiatives Program (LIP) originally designed as a winter works program to combat seasonal unemployment. Both programs (but especially LIP) were for projects designed by the participants rather than government departments. Although neither of them was originally seen as an arts program, in the end, that is where large amounts of the funding went. OFY started with \$25 million while LIP had a budget for the first year of \$190 million to be dispensed through private groups, municipalities and social and cultural groups to create employment; \$165 million was added in the second year. Pasquill estimates that 6% of LIP and 15% of OFY ended up going directly to “cultural activity” (Pasquill, *Wooden* 57), a substantial amount when compared to Canada Council funding. In 1970-71 alone, it is estimated that theatre, or theatre-related activities,

received \$1,951,000 from LIP and \$906,000 from OFY -- compared to \$6,092,000 from all traditional funding sources (Pasquill, *Wooden* 58).¹⁶

No one is prepared, or perhaps able, to say precisely how many, or which theatre companies came into existence because of LIP and OFY; but almost everyone credits the two programs with funding the alternative theatre movement, either in terms of supplying employees in varying percentages, or funding the companies as a whole (see Edinborough 46 and Usmiani 28). It is known that Toronto Free Theatre was 'free' initially due to a \$100,000 LIP grant it received in June 1972 (Johnston 27) and the list certainly includes Alberta Theatre Projects (*Oxford* 12), Mermaid Theatre and Playwrights Co-op (*Oxford* 94), most of the collective creation theatres (*Oxford* 106), the New Play Centre (*Oxford* 160), Open Circle Theatre (*Oxford* 404) and finally the *Oxford* simply gives up and says "alternate theatre" (*Oxford* 160). The point is that of the over two and a quarter million dollars spent on theatre groups by LIP alone, only about \$34,000 went to "professional companies" (that is companies established before the initiation of the program) and the rest went to new groups, predominantly alternative. This must certainly have galled the regional theatres who had worked a number of years to reach the level of 'professionalism' required to receive a Canada Council grant (Hay 11). Renata Usmiani has no hesitation in saying that these new companies were only made viable by the advent of LIP and OFY (Usmiani 28) and this was so not only because they would not qualify for Canada Council money but also, as Tom Hendry points, because being controversial they were unable to get funding from corporate, private and municipal sources (Hendry, "Cultural" 43-4).

Since a majority of these alternate companies were nationalist in approach (see below) and dedicated much, if not all, of their energies to developing new Canadian scripts

and working with playwrights, they were both a sudden source of income and a liberation for Canadian playwrights. The LIP and OFY grants enabled, for the first time, subsidized theatres outside the hegemony of the Canada Council and other granting agencies to produce Canadian material: and the output was enormous. An entire new generation of playwrights was able to see their works from the page, through rehearsal and onto the stage, and new audiences were developed that were free from the strictures of high culture and keen for Canadian plays. Carol Bolt testifies to the sense of excitement and freedom that the new theatres brought to playwrights like herself: "I can't forget what it was like when the theatre first started here, when we had the institutionalized employment of LIP grants. . . . [and] we were encouraged to write great, sprawling epics with huge casts because you could employ more people" (quoted in Zimmerman 32).

But the entire structure rested on the continuation of the grants. Geraldine Anthony documents what happened to one such company in Halifax as an illustration. Pier One, in Halifax, opened in 1972 on a LIP grant and in the first year and a half presented 20 plays, half of which were Canadian and six of which were by local playwrights. Because of a lack of a permanent facility, but more because of a philosophy of serving the community, they toured churches, hospitals and community centres. By the third year they had lost the LIP grant (part of the gradual termination of the program) and Pier One, forced to look to the box office for income, changed its repertoire and philosophy. The new artistic director began speaking like any regional AD, with comments like: "I am against producing plays that are in bad taste simply because they are Canadian. I would like to see Canadian productions and, in fact, two out of every five plays should be Canadian but there are just not enough worthwhile Canadian plays. One has to be realistic and offer plays that will

serve the box office and bring in the audience.” (quoted in Anthony, “Pier” 121) By the end of the year the theatre had lost its loyal local audience and folded. (see Anthony, “Pier” 120-1)

Part of the importance of the LIP and OFY grant program concerns the criteria (or lack thereof) establishing who received the money. We have seen how the Canada Council developed a very stringent policy based on professionalism, quality, community support and a testing period before making most of their grants to members of “the orphanage.” But the criteria for LIP were almost diametrically opposed to those of the Council. Distribution “was controlled to help regions with high unemployment and to avoid disparities . . . in a great many locations that were previously ignored by the traditional agencies.” The “traditional criteria” were disregarded as irrelevant and the groups who received funding “did not conform to the categories and standards of traditional funding agencies” (Pasquill, *Wooden* 59). The criteria for OFY “were not -- as in the case of the Canada Council grants -- professional training or contacts within an exclusive artistic community, but inventiveness¹⁷ and the financial need of individuals in the larger context of social experimentation and participation” (Hay 11).

The result was that the funding patterns of OFY and LIP were almost identical with each other; as the funding patterns of the Canada Council, provincial, municipal and corporate funding patterns were almost identical. But the combined funding patterns of the new sources of revenue (LIP and OFY) were opposite to those of the traditional funding bodies; the money went to new, innovative, non-professional groups who eschewed the traditional high culture repertoire and opted for a focus on producing new Canadian plays; either collectively or using individual playwrights. The resultant production of a wealth of

new plays -- many of poor quality, but many more of excellent quality including some that lead the Canadian dramatic canon -- leads Pasquill (and others) to conclude that the example of LIP and OFY "helped to prove that rigidity did exist in the traditional funding system" (Pasquill, "Cultural" 20). It also strongly suggested that the Canada Council's traditional criteria which, admittedly, had created the regional theatre system had had a decidedly negative impact on Canadian playwrighting when compared to the achievements of LIP and OFY.

The negative reaction of the Canada Council to the Local Initiatives Program and Opportunities For Youth cannot be over-emphasized. At first the Council attempted to defuse the rising criticism of its funding policies by 'modifying' its emphasis on professionalism and it made "a token gesture towards the Sunday artist and the amateur . . . by initiating the Canadian Horizons Program, which two years later became known as Explorations" (Woodcock 116). Soon a serious power struggle erupted between the Council and the agencies involved in the new funding programs and at one point, "the Council put forward desperate bids to secure administrative control over cultural grants from OFY and LIP. Pressure from the same sources spilled over into an ideological objection against such attempts at "equalization and democratization" as the true meaning of these phrases were becoming abundantly clear" (Hay 10). David Gardner, theatre officer from 1971-72, confessed that these "sad and turbulent events . . . threatened the very existence and fabric of the Council" (Kilbourn 174) and things had become so bitter that Gardner had to get 'permission' to talk to the theatre officer at the LIP program (Kilbourn 176).

The Canada Council expressed its deep concern for the 'wastage' involved in a program that would give \$90,000 to the Sudbury Little Theatre for one production with "no real merit considerations at all" while the Council had to struggle to find the cash to give Festival Lennoxville \$11,000 and also to try to catch up in funding with some of the more successful alternatives like Tarragon (Kilbourn 176). Gardner estimated that at the height of the two programs, LIP and OFY were spending the equal of Council's theatre budget (\$4,000,000) on theatre. Gardner admits that the Council was being upstaged (Kilbourn 176) in the fiscal arena, but what was not seen until a few years later was that the Council was being left far behind in the area of developing Canadian playwrights and plays. The final blow to the Council, or so they felt at the time, was that since the two new programs had time limits, as they began to fade away, the new alternative theatre organizations, now with a professional track record, qualified for the traditional Canada Council funding and had to be supported by the Council or they would go under. Gardner called this the "double whammy" of LIP and OFY (Kilbourn 176).

Gradually the Council began to recover its equilibrium from the effects of LIP and OFY. It also began to discover (at least partially) that there were lessons to be learned from the experience. Gardner admitted that by the end of his mandate the Council had realized that, "the federal 'make-work' programs did point out . . . a great Council weakness -- the lack of funding available to respond to new initiatives" (Kilbourn 176-7). Peter Dwyer asked Gardner to begin the process of taking on the alternative theatres as they were disengaged from their other funding. Tarragon Theatre, Factory Lab and Theatre Three in Edmonton were added to Canada Council funding lists and a regional theatre, the Bastion Theatre in Victoria (now defunct) was also added. In 1972, David Peacock, theatre officer

from 1972-78, added many more, going from 49 theatre companies when he started to 115, with 32 more on special project funding and knocking at the door. The budget for the Council as a whole also expanded dramatically during this period and the theatre budget grew from \$4,000,000 in 1972 to \$9,500,000 in 1978 (Kilbourn 179). After that the period of expansion ended and the Council entered a prolonged period of cutbacks that continues today.

Peacock, who was also sensitive to the needs of Canadian playwrights, recalls the troubles involved with integrating alternate theatres into the Canada Council's granting system:

So you had the constantly recurring problem of activities started (perhaps for the wrong reasons) appearing and remaining for the right reason because they were good. And then the Council being incapable of giving them the moneys they needed when LIP withdrew the money because they were professional and on-going. So you had companies going from \$90,000 from LIP to \$12,000 from Council for equivalent work and equivalent seasons.

(Kilbourn 178-9)

This problem was, of course, eased by the major inflow of cash in 1975-76 plus a considerable increase in theatre's proportion of the budget -- from 4.8 to 7.2 per cent (Kilbourn 179).

All of this activity, however, could not mask the fact that the power struggle between the Council and the government had ended in 1973. OFY and LIP began to wind down in that year, amid rumours that "the Secretary of State might supply Canada Council with a special earmarked emergency fund designed to enable the Council to begin

immediately funding LIP-spawned groups meeting Canada Council criteria” (Hendry, “Canadian” 3) and the rumours proved substantially true. The Canada Council received, within two years, an enormous increase (particularly in theatre) and began taking on the new groups. To make it absolutely clear who had won the power struggle, André Fortier was appointed the new director of the Council. As Hay puts it,

As Under-Secretary of State under Pelletier, Fortier was the Council's “enemy” -- trying every means within the government's power to pressure a nominally independent crown agency into a new direction which it was resisting. His appointment resolved the conflict with a bloodless *coup d'état* of classic simplicity. this mutual co-optation meant that the government got its way and the Canada Council in losing an enemy also acquired a strong director with direct access to the government and therefore a chance to influence future policy. (Hay 11)

That the whole process, from LIP to Fortier's appointment -- and the transfer (essentially) of much of the LIP and OFY money to the Council -- was part of an overall plan to push the Council towards a new policy of ‘democratization’ on the part of the Liberal government, is an opinion held by many, including the current theatre officer of the Council and the author.

This is not to suggest that this was the sole purpose of LIP and OFY -- job creation is a common enough political tool. But certainly the opportunity was there to push and maneuver the Council into policies and practices more appealing to nationalist voters. The Council's privileging of high culture through the regional theatre system no longer gratified the nationalist forces -- growing in power and generally Liberal supporters -- and the

strident demands of Canadian artists and playwrights were beginning to be clearly heard. It is certainly unfortunate that the 'arms-length' status of the Canada Council had to be violated in order to move them on the issue of Canadian content (something the Liberals had instituted in broadcasting in 1968), but as Pasquill observed:

Considering the difficult political process involved in renewing the existing funding channels, it is perhaps fortunate that the recent federal programmes effectively bi-passed the old blockages. Otherwise, it would have taken years to develop along the new geographic, artistic and social dimensions opened up by this funding discontinuity. (Pasquill, *Wooden* 71)

The long-term effects of this exercise in the "politics of production," a phrase coined by Cynthia Zimmerman, must be left for elsewhere, but the short-term effects cannot be judged by political changes and the acceptance of new funding initiatives at the Canada Council. They can only be judged by the effect of these measures on the production of a new and vibrant Canadian theatre; that is, Canadian plays produced by Canadian theatre artists. As a result, we must look to the rise of the alternative theatres to see whether these measures, with their concomitant disruptions, had a positive effect.

The Alternative Theatre Movement

The alternative (or alternate; both terms are used) theatre movement is one area of Canadian theatre history that has been well documented, particularly by Usmani (*Second Stage: The Alternative Theatre Movement In Canada*) and Denis Johnston (*Up the Mainstream: The Rise of Toronto's Alternative Theatre, 1968-1975*). While these studies have proven invaluable, my focus is both narrower -- aimed at their impact on the

development of Canadian playwrights -- and broader -- attempting to fit the alternative theatre into the overall pattern of Canada Council funding, the regional theatres and the development of Canadian drama. Although I shall be referring to the alternative theatre *movement*, it was not really a comprehensive movement; some of the theatres in Toronto (principally Toronto Free Theatre and Passe-Muraille) acted together in public debate over funding concerns, but others (like Toronto Workshop Productions and Tarragon Theatre) resolutely pursued their own courses. Some specialized in collective creations (Passe-Muraille) while others (Tarragon) focused on more traditional forms of author-based script development. Also, it should be remembered that the alternative theatre movement was not exclusive to Toronto and although a number of other alternative theatres were spawned out of Toronto, others, like John Juliani's theatre Savage God, began independently. Yet there are a number of things that can be said, generally, about the alternative theatre movement that apply, more or less, to all of them. A certain amount of theatre-specific information will also be given where warranted.

Usmiani has suggested three possible dates to be considered for the beginnings of the alternative theatre movement: the 1959 founding of Toronto Workshop productions, 1970 -- the first year of the Underground Theatre Festival in Toronto when the term 'alternate theatre' came into usage -- and 1971, with the publication of the Gaspé Manifesto (Usmiani 27). Usmiani opts for 1970, since it was at that moment that the 'alternate theatre' (term coined by Tom Hendry) saw *itself* as a movement (Usmiani 28) and I would concur with her, in so far as English Canada is concerned, although TWP must be acknowledged as a prototype. The movement has a number of origins: it has roots in the European theatre avant-garde (Usmiani 4) where a number of its founders studied (principally Jim Garrard

and Paul Thompson) but its more direct artistic origins lie in the the radical theatre movement of the United States in the 1960s:

All the major American groups left their mark on the Canadian theatre scene: The Living Theatre; The Performance Group; The Open Theatre; The San Francisco Mime Company; The Bread and Puppet Theatre; and Teatro Campesino. However, the two single most important factors in the evolution of the Canadian movement were The Living Theatre and the concept of “environmental theatre” as developed by Richard Schechner, founder of The Performance Group. (Usmiani 4)

There was certainly a generational factor in the development of the alternative theatre movement and a large number of the original theatre practitioners in the movement were attached to universities or had recently left. In the case of Garrard and Juliani there is a close connection with the counter-culture and ‘radical’ university movements at Rochedale and Simon Fraser University. While the artistic approach (particularly collective creation) of the alternate theatres had its roots in all of these areas, the forces that drove all of these theatre groups were Canadian nationalism and the lack of access -- particularly in the form of Canadian plays -- to the regional system. (see Zimmerman 16)

There was clearly a space available for these alternative theatres in Canada. After only two years (1972) the four major alternates “exerted a national influence” (Johnston 27) and by 1975, “*Canada on Stage* lists no less than twenty alternate theatres in Toronto alone; and similar movements occurred, on a smaller scale, all across the country” (Usmiani 28). Unquestionably the style of production had a great deal to do with the sudden popularity and influence of these theatres. But styles fade and change and it is for their

impact on the development of Canadian plays that these theatres own their chief claim for importance (Johnston x). When Nathan Cohen, in 1951, analyzed the need of Canadian theatre he wrote:

The basic need is the writing and staging of Canadian plays . . . preferably with Canadian themes and settings . . . but at least by Canadians. . . . Some of them will be bad, but that is the risk you always take. The playwrights will learn from their mistakes and, given the right encouragement, will try again. Some of the plays will be good; by having them produced the playwrights will be encouraged to write better ones. The playwright, the crucial member of the drama, is the most neglected member in this country. As long as he is blocked, stifled, and not allowed to be productive, the Canadian theatre will be insignificant. The day he is recognized as the life blood of a real drama, and his plays are enacted, on that day the Canadian theatre will come of age.
(quoted in Edmonstone 98)

As we have seen, until the rise of the alternative theatre movement these needs had not been fulfilled and the plays created by the alternates began the first steps of creating a Canadian “national tradition” of theatre that had as its centre Canadian plays and not the cultural productions of other countries (Usmiani vii). Canadian cultural products had been largely excluded from the regional theatre system created by the Canada Council; what needs to be examined now is how it came to be that Canadian theatre -- that is Canadian theatres producing Canadian plays -- came to be constituted by un-funded, or under-funded alternative theatres, made up largely of self-started university students and recent graduates, in gutted warehouses and factories.

If there is one issue on which all critics agree, it is that one of the main driving forces behind the alternative theatre movement in Canada was the rising nationalism of the era. In every study we are reminded that the energy of the movement came from the “wave of cultural nationalism which swept Canada” (Johnston 6) and that the “one ‘cause’ common to alternative theatre groups from coast to coast” was “its nationalist commitment” (Usmiani 27). As we have seen, nationalism was never monolithic and so the motivation for alternate theatres came in various avatars: as a protest against “the perceived domination of an imperial model” (Filewood 9) represented by the regional theatre system, as a demand for a “national and popular theatre” (Usmiani 2), as part of a “current nationalism intent on de-mythologizing habitual Canadian self-images as well as aggressively introducing new sources of native dramatic interest” (Bessai 10) or as “just one part of a nationalist surge in economics, politics and culture” (Salutin 50). This appears to have been a shared commitment with many of the critics (Johnston 6-7) like Herbert Whittaker and Urjio Kareda who helped to spread a positive word on the activities of the new theatre groups and their goals. They were also facilitated in their goals by the nationalist cultural policies of the early Trudeau government by means of grants through the Secretary of State (Filewood 30). This nationalism added to whatever aesthetic and/or political motivation drove each individual group, propelled almost every alternative theatre group to take as a common cause, the “commitment to indigenous talent” (Usmiani 27).

Concomitant to the enormous nationalism of the alternative theatres and their resultant privileging of indigenous works, was a reaction against the regional theatre system. Part of the difference was, of course, aesthetic. Ken Gass (co-founder of Factory Theatre Lab) wrote:

Regional playhouses were (and largely still are) shaping their seasons to reflect fashions of Broadway and the West End, and young directors like myself in Studio or University companies were modeling our work after the Tulane Drama Review descriptions of Off-Off-Broadway and Eastern Europe. By limiting the Factory to only new Canadian plays, we were forced to abandon the security blanket of our colonial upbringing. We found ourselves in a vacuum, without roots and, indeed, without playwrights. The plays soon surfaced. (quoted in Usmiani 32-3)

John Juliani wanted alternative theatre to replace the “exorbitance, elitism and museum theatre” of the establishment with “poverty, democratization, contemporaneity.” (quoted in Usmiani 26) But for most of the young artists involved in the alternative theatre movement, it was simply a “dissatisfaction with the regional theatres ‘balanced’ seasons” (Wallace 72):

They attributed the emergence of art centres from coast to coast to a kind of collective “edifice complex,” rather than to a genuine understanding of the cultural needs of the country, and they soon rose up in rebellion against this newly created “concrete establishment” and the social and cultural value system which it represented. The main accusation was that cultural colonialism not only persisted, but was even being reinforced by these new developments. Nationalists pointed out the irony of placing Canada's “national theatre” in a town named Stratford, rather than in the nation's capital, and of running that theatre as a Shakespearean company, rather than as a showcase for Canadian playwrights, directors, and actors. Regional

theatres were accused of being unduly under foreign influence and totally unreceptive to Canadian work. (Usmiani 24-5)

Of course it was not always stated as a negative motivation and the new theatres each had their particular philosophies, usually relating to a more popular form of theatre than that presented by the regionals. Ken Gass, in particular, wanted theatre to be more “indigenous. It must be organic. . . . The professional artist is ruining the theatre. It's important to get out . . . into the streets, into schools and parks, into prisons and apartment buildings. We need a guerrilla theatre front.” (quoted in Usmiani 25) But on the whole they saw themselves as what the name implied: alternative. And what they were alternative to, was the existing regional system. As Tom Hendry said, “In a way we're behaving like people kept out of golf clubs. We're building our own.” (quoted in Johnston 5)

What theatres comprised this alternative theatre movement that did so much to redefine “Canadian theatre to mean Canadian artists producing Canadian plays” (Johnston 11). A complete list may never be available since many theatres rose and fell based on a single production and others quarrel with the categorization. The principal and longer lasting ones can be listed although there is some disagreement among critics and historians.

For English-Canada, Benson and Conolly give the following names:

Vancouver's New Play Centre (founded in 1970) and Tamahnous Theatre (1971); Calgary's Alberta Theatre Projects (1972); Edmonton's Theatre 3 (1970) and Theatre Network (1975); Saskatoon's 25th Street Theatre (1971); Halifax's Pier One (1971); Newfoundland's Mummer's Troupe (1972) and Codco (1973); and several in Toronto, including Theatre Passe

Muraille (1968), Factory Theatre Lab (1970), Tarragon Theatre (1971) and Toronto Free Theatre (1972). (Benson and Conolly 85)

To this list I would add (at least) Toronto Workshop Productions as well as Savage God but there was also a host of theatres in Québec that fell into roughly the same categorization.

Québec experienced a similar split between the established theatres (regionals) and a new, young theatre that expressed its nationalism by denouncing its “French-Canadian status the better to affirm its *québécois* identity” (Hébert 28). Like many Toronto alterenative theatres, the new Québec theatres not only explored collective creation but also “denounced the preponderance of classical and foreign writers . . . in Québec’s official culture” (Nardocchio 83). The movement began slightly earlier in Québec (1967 is the date most frequently given) and grew at an astonishing rate through to the end of the 1970s. In Montréal alone, fifteen new theatres were converted or constructed between 1967 and 1980 (Hébert 28) and between 1974 and 1979 the number of francophone professional theatre companies grew from 26 to 120 (Colbert 17). Some of the earlier companies from the 1960s were Les Saltimbanques (1962), the Nouvelle Compagnie Théâtrale (1964), the Théâtre du Vieux-Québec (1967), Le Grand Cirque Ordinaire (1969), and Le Trident (1969) (Hébert 28) and continued in the 1970s with the addition of such groups as the Théâtre Euh! (1970-78), the Omnibus group of Jean Asselin (1970), Eskabel (1971), Gilles Maheu’s Carbone 14 (1975), Théâtre Parminou (1974) La Veillée (1973) and the Nouveau Théâtre Expérimental (1975), founded as the Théâtre Expérimental de Montréal (Hébert 34). Companies such as Le Trident, the Théâtre du Vieux Québec and a number of other

small companies operated out of the new Le Grand Théâtre in Québec City (Nardocchio 78-9) while others had no permanent homes or shared facilities.

Not all of these companies could definitively be called alternative since the distinction is more difficult to make in Québec because of the different funding structure, but a large number focused on collective creation (particularly the Théâtre du Vieux Québec, Le Grand Cirque Ordinaire, Les Saltimbanques, the Nouveau Théâtre Expérimental, Théâtre du Même Nom and Théâtre de Quat'sous) and many like their English counterparts looked to "Labor and Social Welfare Ministries" for their funding; in other words, LIP and OFY. In fact, a number of the most radical groups actually refused subsidy from the provincial cultural ministry (Nardocchio 82) in order to evade any cultural control. Occasionally their revolutionary zeal got them in trouble with the Ministry of Cultural Affairs which closed one show down in 1971 for its "potentially subversive nature" (Nardocchio 85).

One of the many theatres that emerged in the 1960s dedicated to producing Québec plays were Théâtre de Quat'sous (1964), which was instrumental in introducing the plays of Michel Tremblay. Another was Le Théâtre Populaire du Québec (1963) which began as a touring company with a traditional and classical repertoire but after several transitions and amalgamations emerged under Jean-Guy Sabourin (1972-6) as a powerful producer of Québec drama, featuring -- often commissioning -- the works of Jean Barbeau, Marcel Dubé, Roch Carrier, André Major and others. In addition, Théâtre d'Aujourd'hui (itself an amalgamation of three companies in 1968) presented an exclusively Québec repertory, offering productions by dozens of Québec playwrights, often parodies of works from the classical repertoire (Oxford 529). These companies were often fluid and changable,

collaborating with each other and co-producing productions; even with Toronto alternative theatres. Groups like Théâtre du Même Nom and Le Grand Cirque Ordinaire (along with affiliates) loosely comprised more than 1500 actor/writers and over one hundred amateur and professional groups (Nardocchio 82). The growth was explosive and largely a reaction to the perceived inadequacies of the established theatres and their standard repertoires; and their repertoires were similar in style to the alternative theatres in English-Canada.

The alternative theatres, as a group, created, in the words of playwright John Gray, “a renaissance of Canadian culture that was taking place primarily in arts institutions with budgets that wouldn't buy you lunch. Almost single-handedly they helped to produce a generation of artists, writers, directors and composers unequalled in our history” (Gray 11). While some worked almost entirely in the form of collective creation, most used a playwright at some level in their developmental work and some, like Tarragon and Factory Lab, were totally devoted to producing the work of English-Canadian playwrights. As a result, in 1974, “104 new Canadian plays were professionally produced in Toronto alone” (Salutin 50). It is certainly not possible, here, to examine each of them in detail, but, as in the case of the regional theatres, a few representative examples will illustrate their contributions to Canadian drama outside the regional system.

Factory Theatre Lab was founded in 1970 by Ken Gass to train actors and directors but most importantly to present the work of English-Canadian playwrights who had been shut out of the regional system. The nationalist position was clearly proclaimed by the sign over the door which read “Don't wait for the Yanks to discover Canada.” Within a year the Factory had produced eight full-length and nine one-act Canadian plays and within four years (1974) they had published an anthology of plays. The number of Canadian plays

premiered by the Factory had risen to fifty by 1979 (Usmiani 32). Among the authors developed by this company were David Freeman (whose *Creeps* and *Battering Ram* went on to second productions at Tarragon before making their way to second stage productions at a few of the regionals) and Gass' own *The Boy Bishop* which Usmiani credits as being one of their most successful productions (Usmiani 33).

They also produced Herschel Hardin's *Esker Mike and His Wife, Agiluk*, whose history as a play is illustrative of the fate of a Canadian playwright before the advent of the alternative theatre movement:

Hardin wrote *Esker Mike and His Wife, Agiluk* in 1967. The play was published in the prestigious *Drama Review* of New York in 1969, but it was not brought before a Canadian public until Factory Theatre Lab premiered it in 1971; it was not published here until 1973. According to Hay, the reason given for its rejection by establishment theatre directors was its “epic scope” and “large cast of characters” which made it expensive to perform. (Usmiani 33)

However, as Hardin himself points out, the theatre that originally rejected *Esker Mike* and, later, *The Great Wave of Civilization* (Vancouver Playhouse) produced *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* shortly afterwards (which has a larger cast) while *The Great Wave of Civilization* went on to a production at Festival Lennoxville. Factory Theatre Lab also helped developed George Walker as a playwright, producing his early *The Prince of Naples*. While Tarragon, the other theatre dedicated exclusively to single-author scripts, mainly stayed within the convention of realism, the Factory explored other conventions. Thus,

The efforts of Factory Theatre Lab to create a home and a showcase for new Canadian playwrights in the 1970's . . . made it possible for young dramatists to experiment widely, to learn the potential of the instrument which is the stage, and to see their work exposed to audiences, occasionally even published. The existence of Factory Lab and other alternative theatres also enabled Canadian dramatists to break with the realistic tradition -- fail-safe from the commercial point of view -- and finally to join the modern avant-garde in all its theatrical manifestations. (Usmiani 41)

Gass' belief that simply restricting the theatre to Canadian plays and then waiting for them to arrive was clearly a successful gamble.

Theatre Passe Muraille was conceived as a militant radical theatre by its first artistic director Jim Garrard. He was inspired by productions he had seen by New York's La Mama Experimental Theatre Club of *Tom Paine* and *Futz*, both of which he chose to re-stage with his fledgling company in 1968 and 1969 (respectively) out of their temporary home in Rochedale College (Johnston 31). The new company gained instant notoriety with *Futz* since they, and their producer, were brought up on obscenity charges. However, despite the original choice of material from the American repertoire, Garrard proclaimed his commitment to Canadian material and his desire to "make theatre as popular as bowling" (Usmiani 44). When Paul Thompson succeeded as artistic director, Passe Muraille became "one of the leading nationalist theatres in Canada" (Johnston 29) dedicated to collective creation -- although Thompson did use playwrights for a number of important shows. The first of these was Carol Bolt's *Buffalo Jump* (re-written for Passe Muraille under this title)

and was followed by shows such as *Them Donnellys* with Frank McEnany (1973), Bolt's *Pauline* (1973) and *The Horsburgh Scandal* (1976) with Betty Jane Wylie (Johnston 69).

1837: The Farmers' Revolt, written collectively with Rick Salutin was an enormous success as was the more questionable *Baby Blue* (1975), which had a twelve week run and an estimated audience of 26,000 (Usmiani 54). Although *Passe Muraille* was accused of exploitation, the charge has been consistently denied by the theatre. Whatever the truth, by 1975 *Passe Muraille* had achieved a popularity that, while not rivaling bowling, was putting it at the forefront of Toronto theatre: and all with original Canadian material. *The Farm Show* sealed that popularity and playwright John Coulter likened its appeal to that of the early Abbey Theatre in its revelation of the Canadian rural identity (Usmiani 48). With or without authors, *Passe Muraille* was in the process of helping to develop an alternative canon that rapidly became *the* Canadian theatre canon by exploring the details of Canadian life both historically and in a contemporary setting. And, in addition to this, *Passe Muraille* was one of the most active alternates in encouraging the spread of the movement and helping establish Codco in Newfoundland, 25th Street House in Saskatoon and Theatre Network in Edmonton (Usmiani 44).

Toronto Workshop Productions is the oldest of the alternative theatres and its history of being refused grants by the Canada Council has already been illustrated earlier. In fact, George Luscombe's *Hey Rube!* was the first of the collective creations (Usmiani 3). Luscombe's training had been with the famous Littlewood company and his company's philosophy was based on "producing social drama for a 'popular' audience." By 1976, the company had produced about fifty "original works," says Usmiani, who includes adaptations of classics in her count (Usmiani 29). Luscombe's works were only partially

collective in that “he usually based his exploratory improvisational rehearsals on a written text, working toward strong structures for new plays and imaginative approaches for older ones” (Johnston 64).

Many of these scripts were largely, or in part, the work of playwright Jack Winter who was writer-in-residence from 1961 to 1976.¹⁸ While with TWP, Winter wrote, among others *Before Compiègne* (1963), *The Mechanic* (1964), and *The Golem of Venice* (1967), each of which was “revised and restaged several times” (Johnston 20). *Ten Lost Years* in which Winter played a large part was the theatre's greatest success -- arguably the greatest success among the alternatives -- since it also toured nationally and internationally (Johnston 22). Luscombe always insisted that his goal was achieving a popular audience, “bypassing existing audiences, going into areas where people are totally unconverted and thereby creating new awareness. . . . The aim of popular theatre is not only to entertain, but to show that entertainment is, above all, saying something worthwhile, and saying it well” (quoted in Usmiani 30) and *Ten Lost Years* achieved this goal, bringing the Canadian depression years to thousands who had never attended a theatre, or even heard of the Depression.

Other theatres could be mentioned as well, both in Toronto and across the country. Alberta Theatre Projects in Calgary produced, from 1972 to 1976 only Canadian plays, “most of them commissioned from local writers” (Bessai, “Regionalism” 17). Toronto Free Theatre developed and produced the plays of Hendry, Kinch, Palmer (its founders) as well as Hollingsworth, Walker and others and made its bid for a popular audience by charging no admission, until its LIP grant ran out (Usmiani 41). In Vancouver, Tamahnous Theatre,

founded by John Gray in 1971, produced twenty-one original plays (either collectives or with playwright-in-residence Jeremy Long) in ten years (Usmiani 68).

In 1971, John Juliani, founder of Savage God (Vancouver) was prepared not only to present alternate theatre but to challenge the existing regional system and the Canada Council funding policies that supported it. In a pilot project, PACET (Pilot Alternative Complement to Existing Theatre) Juliani not only presented a three-week non-stop sequence of theatrical events across the city of Vancouver, but also wrote a report on it as a case study, which he submitted to the Council (Usmiani 81). In it he states that “the most startling feature of the theatrical landscape is the virtually faceless nature, at home and abroad, of Canadian drama and of the Canadian dramatist.” (quoted in Usmiani 81) His conclusion was that the problem was caused by policies which attempted to make the regional theatre commercially viable, a statement that may have surprised the Council. What would have caught their eyes, however, was another statement asking the Council to put forward a new arts policy based on “democratization, decentralization, experimentation” -- the first two words were too much like the speeches a Secretary of State had been making recently. When the politicians, at one end, and the experimental theatre artists, at the other end, were making the same kind of criticisms, the Council knew it was in for trouble.

What had, then, the alternative theatres accomplished for Canadian playwrights. Certainly they had, as Usmiani says, served as a “launching pad” for them and for their plays and as well the alternates had achieved their end of “creating a showplace for new writers” (Usmiani 151). They had also served as a paradigm and a weapon for Canadian nationalists and Canadian playwrights in their battle to have Canadian plays featured more prominently in the regionals. One nationalist critic, at the time, wrote:

In 1971, while the seven major tax-supported English-language theatres offered the Canadian public a total of two Canadian plays, and Leon Major, director of the St. Lawrence Centre in Toronto, declared in defense of his all-imports season that if there were any good Canadian playwrights they would be parked on his doorstep, three theatres in his neighbourhood did nothing but Canadian work. (Crean 166)

While the facts may have been stretched the underlying truth was undeniable. The alternate theatre was producing Canadian plays at an extraordinary rate, with some of them being very good indeed.

And it is the fact that they were being produced, not their quality, that is important. The regionals' approach of doing an occasional Canadian piece and (essentially) waiting for the 'masterpieces' had achieved little. The day to day theatre of any country in the world -- even with a strong writing tradition -- does not turn out 'masterpieces' on a regular basis; why should the still nascent Canadian theatre be expected to do it? What the alternate theatres had shown was that if you do enough plays, give playwrights enough opportunity, access, practice and training in the theatre with actors, designers and directors; spend enough time, expertise and energy on them; do these things that, with some exceptions, the regional system was unwilling to do, and you will begin to get very good plays. You can worry about the masterpieces later.¹⁹

It is often remarked that the sudden arrival of Canadian plays on the stages of the alternates had an enormous impact on audiences. It is seldom noticed that it had a similar impact on the playwrights. Their commitment to these theatres was enormous because their

work was being valued, but it went further than that. Playwright John Gray spoke about the impact that it had on him:

I suppose there are cultures in the world where they take for granted the ability to see something in a book or play and then to see it corroborated in life. I suppose there are cultures where they don't assume unfamiliarity and alienness as part of the nature of art itself. And it would be difficult for them to understand what it's like to touch something you read about or saw in a play, for the first time, in your own country. All I can tell you is that it transforms the object in question, and it transforms your life as well. I felt as though for twenty years I had been going around in a body cast. (Gray 10-1)

So great was the impact of these few years of alternate theatre on Canadian theatre that the playwright, basically ignored up until this time, began to assume the leading role in the theatre of the country. This was the conclusion of the Ontario Arts Council (in its official history) which regarded the early 1970s as the period of,

the emergence of the Canadian playwright; that in turn has depended upon the existence of theatres prepared to stage original works by initially little-known authors. In the early seventies, virtually all new play development occurred in Toronto, in theatres such as Toronto Workshop Productions, Tarragon, Factory Theatre Lab, Theatre Passe Muraille and Toronto Free Theatre. . . . In the process a new generation of gifted playwrights is reaching audiences. (MacSkimming 51-2)

In the oddest of ways, as Alan Filewood has suggested, it was the alternate theatres that “finally realized the vision of the Massey Commission by establishing a network of civic

companies that balanced obligations to the ‘world’ repertoire (still largely British and American) with a proven commitment to Canadian playwrights” (Filewood 10).²⁰

There is another aspect of the impact of the alternative theatres on Canadian plays to be considered. Merrill Denison (known for never writing a play without a commission) once wrote: “[n]o great play was ever written for publication. It was created to be played, and until this consummation, it is still a chrysalis. The playwright writes for a definite theatre unless, of course, he is practicing or amusing himself” (Denison 67-8). This is not a philosophy but a critical evaluation; playwrights writing plays they wish to be successes shape them to suit the theatre that they are to be (initially) produced in. They must suit the company, the audience, the budget and the philosophy of the producing company. This is important in evaluating Canadian drama because, as Richard Knowles points out,

in a country in which the mainstream of theatre has long been dominated by imported plays and foreign directors, Canadian drama has been shaped by the fact that it has always occupied alternative spaces and played an alternative role culturally: for reasons of size and budget its treatment of historical subjects has *required* non-illusionistic devices such as the use of doubling, of modern dress, and of rudimentary props as stage metaphors. Moreover its tendency has under the circumstances quite naturally been toward both politically alternative deconstructions of main-stream national myths, and metatheatrical questionings of main-stream dramatic forms that it views as oppressive or colonial in impact. (Knowles, “Replaying” 229)

As an example of this, Usmani sees *1837: The Farmers' Revolt* as both an historical play and a reflection of “the contemporary issues of nationalism as opposed to colonial

dependence on the mother country; the revolt of 1837 becomes the archetypal Canadian insurrection against oppression from outside forces as well as from within the country itself' (Usmiani 58). Given the precise circumstances of its staging in relation to the regionals and the Canada Council, I would not consider it stretching a point too much to suggest that there are aspects of the regionals and the Council in the "Family Compact" of 1837.

This awareness of the importance of the theatrical origin of plays even applies to the technique of collective creation as a surviving palimpsest within current Canadian writing, since "the assimilation of collective methods and styles in Canadian playwrighting is now so familiar that we scarcely notice it. In recent years, we have seen a trend away from the improvised text and toward more scripted plays. In this trend, however, collective methods developed in the 1970s are still prominent" (Johnston 72). And where it is tempting to look at the doubling or tripling of roles in a play such as Hardin's *Great Wave of Civilization* as an example of Brechtian alienation, it is also important to remember that it was based on economics (see Usmiani 31) but also on the philosophy and approach of the alternate theatres. A regional theatre would simply reject a 'good' large cast show on the basis of economics; an alternate theatre would choose to do it *because* it had no money. Since the alternate could not afford to do fully costumed, propped, lit production of anything, it didn't matter, fiscally, which plays it chose to produce; therefore it chose the plays it liked, doubled and tripled roles, mimed expensive props and wore jeans and a piece of cloth as a cravat for a nineteenth century costume. They were aware of Brecht and Brecht gave them justification (if needed) for it, but it wasn't done to emulate Brecht.

It is impossible to fully establish who and how many attended these performances. Since there were no surveys done and alternates rose and fell on an irregular basis, any

attempt at statistical analysis of the many alternate companies (around twenty by 1976) would soon break down. But there is some information available and the attempt is worth it, if only to answer a number of key questions: 1) Were the alternates, in general, popular; 2) If so, who made up their audience and why did this audience go in large numbers to see Canadian plays, normally considered box office poison.

That the alternates wished to be popular, we know. The one philosophical approach they all shared (besides nationalism) was a desire to reach a popular audience -- to become "as popular as bowling." They also seemed to feel that the audience they sought was *not* the same audience as the regionals. As Paul Thompson said, "I'm interested in discovering the audience. I think the really interesting people are the ones who don't go to theatres." (quoted in Wallace 78) While this may have been posturing, there are quite a number of suggestions that the alternate theatres were very popular. Firstly, many of them survived, and that requires strong audience support -- especially at the box office. Secondly, everyone who speaks about them testifies to the large audiences; although, of course, numbers will vary wildly from show to show. Thirdly, the truly popular shows (*Baby Blue*, *The Farm Show*, *Of the Fields Lately*, *Ten Lost Years* etc.) did *very* well indeed, often being held over or going on tour. Fourthly, everyone who was contacted, and was there at the time (including myself) can testify to the packed houses.

In addition we do have a small number of statistics, although what their original sources are is unknown. Dorothy Thomas, member of the Toronto Council and strong supporter of the alternates, states that the alternate theatres were averaging by 1974, "70%-80% houses in their converted garages and warehouses" and that while the St Lawrence theatre saw a yearly house of 90,000, the alternates were catering to in excess of 200,000

people per annum (Thomas 24). Tom Hendry, likewise, insisted at the time that the alternates were drawing audiences considerably larger than the regional theatres:

the Canadian public, whenever it gets a reasonable chance, is voting with its feet and wallet for Canadian work. . . . the great mass of Canadians, particularly young Canadians, wish access to artistic manifestations of a culture which may have been a poor thing, but is demonstrably their own. When the audience for Canadian stage plays grows to almost a quarter of a million in three years in Toronto alone, during a period when the audience for 'museum' theatre remains static, governments begin to listen to those crazy artists. (Hendry, "Canadian" 14)

Whatever the statistics actually are, "the essential popular thrust of alternative theatre remains undeniable" (Usmiani 149) and no-one has attempted to suggest that the alternates were not successful in developing their own, significantly, large audience.

We have seen in Chapter Four the demographic makeup of audiences attending performing arts presentations and noted that they have strongly tended to be made up of the elite, either in terms of wealth or of cultural capital: principally in the form of education. The Canada Council was aware of this fact and, at times, was concerned about it. They noted that while audiences (for the most part) continued to expand, they generally did so laterally, that is, within the same demographics, rather than vertically in order to bring in other social classes and groups that were not previously exposed to theatre. This was troubling, since part of what the Massey/Levésque Commission hoped for, after the creation of accessibility to theatre through the growth of a professional theatre system, was just such

a vertical expansion. In a letter to the Council, tabled in the *Minutes* of April 4-5, 1966, Council member Dorothy L. Dowhan wrote:

The loyal core of audience in most places is very small and is easily observable in Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Winnipeg. In Toronto and Montréal this might not be so noticeable but if the percentage of people in each city were worked out it might be shown to be low also. For several years I have spent as much time watching audiences as I have spent looking at the pictures or the plays and I see the same faces over and over. (*Minutes* 4-5/4/1966)

In descriptive phrases that speak volumes about underlying social codes and the elitist position, Dowhan calls for a (modified) vertical expansion of the audience through further awards, advertising slogans, membership drives and raffles. In order to achieve this expansion: “[I]t is the little mink jacket and little mink wrap group, not the full length sables, that make up our major audiences and more than likely we need to make a drive for the full length mink-dyed muskrat” (*Minutes* 4-5/4/1966). The idea that a change in repertoire might be needed to draw a larger, more broadly-based audience seems not to have occurred to Dowhan. The letter was tabled without comment.

If the new alternates were drawing an expanded audience, what was its makeup? Again, somewhat dubious statistics backed up only by word of mouth testimony are all that we have to go on. Thomas asserts (and with a precision which suggests that she did have some kind of database to draw on) that the audience for the alternative theatres was “young -- 72% are under 30; not affluent -- 51% earn less than \$5,000 a year; 41% are students, 36% are teachers and professionals, and 20% are skilled and unskilled industrial and clerical

workers -- people who do not traditionally go to the theatre” (Thomas 24). In other words, the audience for the alternates and their largely Canadian repertoire is a new audience, not drawn from the traditional elite audience base of the regional theatres. If this is true in general, and I see no reason to doubt it, the alternative theatres were accomplishing what the regional theatre could not -- and what the Massey/Levésque Commission called for as one of the *basic* justifications for the principle of government subsidies to the arts -- a popular audience drawn from those who have had no exposure to the theatre. And this seems to have been achieved largely because the alternates were producing Canadian material.

The cause (or causes) of this growing and new audience base has been suggested by a number of critics. Robert Wallace suggests that (particularly in the case of *Passe Muraille*) it was the “constant search for the ‘authentic’ and ‘alive’ experience for both audience and performers” (Wallace 76) while for Usmiani it was the fact that “[a]lternative theatre companies tend to have strong roots in their communities” (Usmiani 150), but it is certainly possible to be more specific. Many of the regionals, for instance, had strong roots in their communities; the question is, precisely *which* communities. If elitist boards were rejecting “killer Canadiana” as inappropriate fair for the regionals, the communities which supported the alternates, embraced it. Neil Carson's suggestion that “[t]he most successful Canadian drama of the seventies was that which reflected the audience's own experiences on the stage and the great popularity of docudrama and collective creations during the period attests to this widespread hunger for recognition and identification” (Carson, “Luscombe” 156) comes closer to the truth. So does Wallace's comment on David French's *Leaving Home*: “*Leaving Home* was hailed as a minor masterpiece not because of its theatrical daring,

which is all but non-existent, but because of the identification it allowed the audience with its characters” (Wallace 73). The new audiences, not encumbered with preconceived ideas of what theatrical culture should be, were responding to Canadian material because it spoke to them directly, about themselves and their own lives, histories and concerns; and because it satisfied their sense of nationalism and pride. Robert Nunn's account of reactions to the paintings of the Group of Seven describes it well:

A colleague of mine has overheard people looking at paintings by the Group of Seven and saying ‘I know where that is; I was there,’ and suggests that documentary plays offer Canadian audiences that elementary satisfaction of recognizing real places and real people -- perhaps satisfying the deep need which Northrop Frye has spoken of, to find answers to the question ‘where is here?’ (Nunn 51)

Audiences were seeing themselves placed “there,” on the stage, and discovering that it was an engrossing experience, in many ways the true theatrical experience.

The fact that these new audiences were making popular successes of Canadian plays otherwise considered ‘box-office poison’ may have much to do with the fact that the audiences were new. Susan Bennet has suggested that spectators come to the theatre “as a member of an already-constituted interpretive community” bringing their own “horizon of expectations shaped by pre-performance elements” (Bennett 149) such as “cultural and ideological expectations” (Bennett 107). These form what Bennet call “overcoding” and vary, depending on the way in which past experiences have constructed expectations. The two audiences -- the traditional audience at the regionals, and the newly developed audiences at the alternates -- differed in two substantial ways. The alternates’ audience

came from a younger (generational) and financially less affluent section of the public, although the educational level was reasonably high, while the traditional audience was older and more affluent. Also, the traditional audience, as fairly regular theatre-goers, had considerable overcoding, in everything from intermission drinks in the lobby to an established bias, based on experience and inherited habitus, for a repertoire of high culture built up over up twelve years (in some cases more) of theatrical experience. The new audiences had little overcoding (from lack of experience) but, based on their choice of theatre to attend, a predilection towards a nationalist orientation, unsatisfied by the product of the regional or 'professional' theatres. They were, in fact, a new interpretive community whose strategies prepared them for the experience of, and enjoyment of, Canadian material in theatre structures (warehouses etc.) that carried none of the imperatives of high culture. They were the perfect milieu for the introduction and cultivation of what has been called the 'golden age' of Canadian theatre (Zimmerman 16).

The so-called 'golden age,' did not have a long life. By 1975, most of the alternative theatres were in trouble of some kind or another. Largely this was due to the disappearance of LIP and OFY grants and the assumption of support for the theatre by the Canada Council, usually with diminished funding. It was also due to the fact that after three, four, or five years (depending on the theatre) of frenetic energy and extraordinary output and self-sacrifice, many of the theatres were "suffering not only financial problems but artistic uncertainty and creative fatigue" (Wallace 81). By 1978, when money generally became tight once again among the funding bodies, "a gradual decline set in. . . . Ken Gass is probably correct when he suggests that 'alternate' (with reference to Toronto, anyway) should now be considered a historical term" (Usmiani 28).

Ironically, success also played a part in the change in status of the alternative theatres. As early as 1974, Tarragon's phenomenal success had led to the 'hit syndrome' and Jane Glassco (theatre publicist) had said in an interview: "[w]e've been programmed into becoming an institution. You don't gamble anymore when you're programmed. . . . If a new David Freeman came along with a play that called for a cast of eight or nine, we couldn't do it. We couldn't take the risk on a new play, but we'd have to wait until his second or third." (quoted in Wallace 73) The result was that after a short period of closure, Tarragon added to its repertoire in 1977, Chekhov's *The Seagull*, Frank Wedekind's *Lulu*, and Strindberg's *A Dream Play*. By that time Glassco's goal had become, "to test ourselves against established work from the rest of the world," (quoted in Wallace 74) and by the end of the seventies Tarragon's seasons resembled nothing so much as those of Toronto Arts Productions in the St Lawrence Centre. (see Wallace 72-4) Toronto, once the focus and the home of the alternative theatres, was on its way to creating a new Broadway. But the impetus of the movement towards Canadian plays had not been lost, it had simply been absorbed into the regional theatres where it struggled (but survived) and into the plays of the next generation of playwrights on whom it had a great deal of influence in style and content.

Endnotes for Chapter Six

¹ For details on the politics behind the St Lawrence Centre, see Johnston, 12. In addition, the Guelph archives has a wealth of material relating to this issue, that deserves some serious study.

² It was particularly bold since, in 1970, it predated much of the work of the alternates.

³ Moore had, like his mother, long been an ardent exponent of indigenous drama and had written in the 1950s of the need for Canadian plays and playwrights. Ironically, one of his statements made in 1956 must have come back to haunt him in 1970:

The excuse that is usually given for repeating the successes of other lands and for bringing in outsiders to show how these things are done in the best circles is that the public is pre-sold on them; that whether we like it or not Canadian audiences are in tune with the British or American product and its standard. This belief is not quite supported by the facts. (Moore, "Theatre" 13)

⁴ Languirand's *Man, Inc.*, the opening show of the season, was not only avowedly counter-cultural but also presented part of the show in the form of "living film" provided by the National Film Board.

⁵ In fairness to Major, it should be pointed out that he did have a track record of supporting Canadian work, at Neptune and at the Centre. No other artistic director was subject to such consistent attacks over such a long period of time, "enduring criticism that would have

wilted a lesser man” (Johnston 16). Nor is it surprising, perhaps, that today he makes his career in the U.S. directing opera, his other passion.

⁶ In Gruslin’s opinion, the Canada Council “choisissait de privilégier le TNM et le Rideau-vert qui, pendant les huit années suivantes, allaient recevoir 70% des fonds au Théâtre institutionnel.” This continued until the two theatres had their budgets frozen in 1979 (Gruslin 145-6).

⁷ A great deal of imported material was also appearing on the second stages, but as it made up the majority of the material on the main stage, the effect was quite different.

⁸ The study’s exegesis in *CTR* is replete with phrases such as “a nation without an indigenous culture can lose its national unity, fall prey to foreign domination and lose the opportunity for unique cultural expression” (Pasquill, “Cultural” 51).

⁹ It should surprise no-one that in the area of private and corporate funding where both individuals and companies tend to be conservative in their choices and look for clients whose prestige will enhance the donors, corporations inevitably fund organizations that deal with high culture. The surprise is the repetition of patterns among the other government agencies.

¹⁰ Expenditures on professional (vs. amateur) performing arts organizations by the Canada Council:

Year	1961/2	62/3	63/4	64/5	65/6	66/7	67/8	68/9	69/70	70/71
Prof.	62%	67%	70%	76%	76%	74%	80%	81%	82%	81%

(Pasquill, *Wooden* “Table K”)

¹¹ One suggestion made by Pasquill (thought radical at the time) was to declare some of the largest and most expensive of the arts organizations of Canada, such as the National Ballet, ‘national assets,’ take them off the Council's books and place them in a separate category or another department and have their funding increased and made permanent. (see Pasquill, “Subsidy” 5-6) The money thus freed from the Council would provide funding for the newer companies. The idea was not taken seriously at the time -- there was no ‘extra money’ being the reason given -- but it has been applied recently (but without the extra money) in the case of the National Theatre School.

¹² For a breakdown of funding in Québec from the Canada Council, the Ministère des Affaires culturelles and Montréal’s Conseil des Arts, see Gruslin, Annexe 1.

¹³ W. Whittaker suggests that “[b]y being able to provide a heavy subsidy for theatre the provincial government was able to exert considerably more authority than the Canada Council had attempted.” The provincial government also closed the Théâtre Club at end of its 1963 season and appointed a business manager to straighten out the theatre’s finances (W. Whittaker 281).

¹⁴ David Gardner had come to the Canada Council fresh from the artistic director position at the Vancouver Playhouse. He also came direct from an enormous controversy, in which the Board of Governors there -- at the instigation of a Board member who was the chief Liberal fund-raiser for British Columbia -- refused to allow Gardner to direct the premiere of George Ryga's *Captives of the Faceless Drummer*. The Liberal VIP had threatened that he would ensure that the Canada Council would never fund the Vancouver Playhouse again (Robert Allan, Private Conversation).

¹⁵ The Gaspé Conference, and the follow-up at Niagara-on-the-Lake did have one concrete result: the founding by the playwrights themselves of The Playwrights' Circle (soon to be renamed the Playwrights Co-op). Besides publishing new Canadian plays which had been unavailable "beyond the pages of *Curtain Call* or Samuel French's catalogue of plays for amateurs" (Plant 11), the Co-op was founded specifically for the purpose of getting Canadian plays produced: partially by lobbying and partially by making them "both visible and available" (McCaughna 140). The playwrights were certainly aware that the battle was not over.

¹⁶ Pasquill's study, *Wooden Pennies: A Report on Cultural Funding Patterns in Canada*, was complete before the LIP program ran out. Even then he claimed that "the total amount supplied by the LIP and OFY programmes is over half that provided by the traditional agencies and therefore represents a sharp discontinuity in the usual arts funding pattern. The figures shown for LIP do not reflect any extensions beyond the original May 31, 1972 deadline, so are about 40% less than actual" (Pasquill, *Wooden* 59).

¹⁷ Peter Hay has pointed out that many of those who gained employment under LIP were "qualified professionals who were either out of work or who were disenchanted by the established theatres." The regionals had been in the habit of assuming that 'professionals' were those theatre artists who worked for *them*. LIP and OFY caused "a justified insecurity on the part of the profession about the ambiguities of its own professionalism" (Hay 11) by somewhat redefining the term.

¹⁸ Sometimes the actual ownership of a script developed collectively with an author created a dispute between the theatre and the author over performance rights, as happened with *Ten Lost Years* (personal experience).

¹⁹ A reasonable parallel could be made with American “alternate” groups. For example, the Provincetown Players of 1915, in many ways (with the prominent exception of Canadian nationalism) fit the profile. Jack Poggi writes:

The Player's existed, as [founder] Cook kept saying, “to *cause* better American plays to be written;” because their budget was low, they could afford to give hearings to many new works, even the unpolished work of a beginning playwright. A great deal of the writing may be worthless. But if potential playwrights were aware that a new kind of theatre was available to them . . . they might be stimulated to write new kinds of plays. And through seeing these plays in performance, they could learn their craft. (Poggi 111-2)

He could have been describing an alternate.

²⁰ John Coulter has written about how the success of *The Farm Show* had reminded him of the Abbey Theatre history. In an article written in 1922, the young Vincent Massey used the example of the Abbey to demonstrate what Canadian theatre could do. “From 1900 to 1910,” Massey wrote, “sixty-two original plays were produced by the Irish Players, many of which have won an assured place as classics.” Even more stirring for Massey was the Gaiety Theatre in Manchester, where, “in three years twenty-eight new plays were produced . . . and a school of playwrights called into being which has exerted a lasting influence on the modern English drama.” The reason for these successes, in Massey's opinion, was that

playwrights were suddenly being given access to the means of production: “the playwright can hardly be expected to produce good plays unless he has had some actual experience of stagecraft. The last place to gain this experience is from the stalls . . . an apprenticeship ‘behind stage’ -- at any work . . . is of value to the playwright's technique” (Massey, “Prospects” 199-200). Massey's descriptions fit the alternative theatres extremely well and there is a certain justification for comparing the two eras in both theatrical and post-colonial ways.

Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to trace the narrow fault lines between the elitist support for high culture and Canadian nationalism, and between the Canada Council and the developing regional theatre system (1957 to 1975), in order to answer a simple question: Is it true, as it is so often bruited, that the Canada Council in its development of the regional theatre system has privileged a European-American repertoire at the expense of promoting and developing indigenous English-Canadian drama and, if so, why and how did this take place and what were the consequences? If, indeed, “before the 1980s few Canadian scripts received a second production; little scholarly work was devoted to Canadian drama and theatre; and the publishing and teaching of Canadian plays were quixotic and unpredictable” (Knowles, “Voices” 90), was that a direct consequence of the actions (and inaction) of the Council during that period? The simple question ended up having a complex answer, but that answer appears to have been affirmative and the consequences varied and significant.

Post-war Canadian theatre existed in two different forms: amateur theatre, mostly under the aegis of the Dominion Drama Festival and a small but dedicated professional theatre (mostly located in Eastern Canada) started and subsidized almost entirely by the efforts of professional and semi-professional actors themselves. Even at this early stage, divisions were clearly perceptible. The Dominion Drama Festival, on the whole and despite occasional protestations to the contrary, devoted itself almost exclusively to a repertoire of European (particularly British) and American works and placed (perhaps unconscious) obstacles in the way of Canadian works in the way it judged and adjudicated entries into the competitions. Even at the later stage, when it made an attempt to force its members into an engagement with indigenous works, outside of one Festival final, it failed. The cultural baggage of the participants themselves as well as that of the institution of the DDF, made it

virtually impossible to make the necessary change. In addition, the initial need for the DDF, the encouragement of the production of theatre in Canada, was made redundant by the rise of the regional theatres. As Canadian society and theatre evolved past the turmoil of the early seventies, the DDF was doomed to extinction.

On the other hand, the early professional and semi-professional companies discovered to their pleasant surprise that Canadian material -- which they approached almost on the level of a responsibility -- was surprisingly popular. Some of their best selling shows during the 1950s were Canadian plays and reviews and they found that there were writers available (particularly from radio shows like Andrew Allan's *Stage* series) who were at least competent to write for the stage and capable of learning quickly to excel. These were, it is true, few in number, but the nucleus was there. But the economics of theatre, the total lack of proper facilities and trained personnel, made these ventures extremely precarious and one by one (except for the Crest) they went under. By that time, however, an alliance had been cobbled together of two distinct groups with a shared interest in the performing arts in general and the theatre in particular. The most powerful group at the time (not because of numbers but because of personal wealth and political power) were those who, like Vincent Massey, saw that the economic threat from the United States was rapidly -- with the advent of radio and, later, television -- becoming a cultural threat as well. Because of their class habitus they placed their faith in high culture as a bulwark against encroaching American cultural imperialism.

For them, "high culture encompassed the refined cultural tradition of the artistic, intellectual, and social elite in Western civilization," but since it was traditionally located within their own specific class sphere it had little popular appeal. The problem was that, in

the opinion of the elite, high culture was “distinguishable from popular and mass culture by its greater degree of analysis of the human condition and by its emphasis upon quality, as determined by the exacting criteria of a discerning audience, rather than by accessibility or mass appeal. Thus an appreciation of high culture required some familiarity with the history and standards of the genre” (Litt, *Muses* 84). Despite these obstacles they determined that by allying themselves with the forces of growing, post-war, Canadian nationalism, they could overcome these obstacles. Together, the two groups, forming a powerful lobby, could force the state into realizing the need for government subsidization of the arts -- something that would benefit both sides of the alliance. The nationalist forces would bring a popular appeal to the project and they would, in turn, benefit from the first truly Canadian theatre structure -- perhaps a National Theatre. The elite saw the opportunity, not just to acquire a state subsidized repertoire that appealed only to its own class taste but also to ‘raise’ the Canadian public in its knowledge and appreciation of high culture to the point where (theoretically) everyone would reap the benefits of the results.

The alliance, through a series of lobbying efforts, succeeded in the establishment of the Massey/Levésque Commission which elegantly embodied the two objectives in what appeared, at the time, as a seamless whole. The *Report* of the Massey/Levésque Commission managed to define high culture, the ‘best of the Western tradition,’ as vital to Canada’s cultural ‘national defence’ against American cultural hegemony and, at the same time, as something that could be made easily accessible to the mass of Canadians if only the proper funding and facilities were provided by the government. After a lapse of time, the Liberal government responded with an endowment fund for the new Canada Council: a politically appointed body whose job was, essentially, to put the alliance between high

culture and Canadian nationalism into a concrete form, including some kind of a theatre structure, possibly the National Theatre so often called for.

Despite its famous 'arms-length' status, the Council was at no time totally free from the arm of the government, or the social imperatives that had put it into place. On the one hand, its board members were all political appointees -- often with little knowledge of the arts and therefore either inclined to a conservative acceptance of high culture as the totality of acceptable art or able to be pulled in that direction by the Council's officers. On the other hand, the very nature of the endowment fund (death duties of two millionaires) *reproduced* a model of wealthy individual philanthropy, as opposed to a government service to the public. As Anne Wilson has pointed out, "from its inception the council was situated within a clear class position, not because St. Laurent's government conspired to maintain the power of an elite, but because no one questioned the structure of patronage" (Wilson 5-6). Yet the Council saw itself, and wanted to project itself as culturally neutral, set in place by the state to fulfill the needs of the populace. That neutrality, however, was illusory since in any situation where there is state support for culture, "the range available for consumption will be limited by the state's conception of what constitutes (suitable) art" (Bennett 95) and, in this case, by what the Canada Council considered to be suitable art.

The Council, following the prescriptions laid down by the *Report* of the Massey/Levésque Commission, with its strong concerns with the national dangers of American popular culture,¹ continued to define (as did a great many others) suitable culture as the classics of past and modern theatre from the European (particularly British) and American stage. However, probably aware, as the Massey/Levésque Commission was aware, that this would appear to the public as elitism, it also sought to reassure the public,

nationalists and Canadian artists, that its role was also in large part to help create the conditions necessary in order to foster Canadian indigenous works of art, in our case, plays:

The health of the theatre cannot depend only on its actors, directors and designers. It is vitally dependent upon its playwrights and upon the quality of the work they produce. Playwrights of other countries and of the past can become a part of our heritage, but it was one of them who observed with his usual penetration that one of the purposes of playing was to ‘show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure.’ The Council is of the opinion that living theatre demands living playwrights and that the Canadian theatre demands Canadian playwrights. (*Annual Report 1961*, 33)

Similar statements appear throughout the early (and later) *Annual Reports*, but their rhetorical validity is challenged by the practices of the Council and the concrete results achieved.

After an early period during which the Council struggled to develop policies that would lead to its ultimate goals and yet, at the same time, make use of existing theatrical enterprises such as The Canadian Players, Théâtre du Nouveau Monde and the Crest Theatre, the Canada Council settled on a basic philosophy of ‘raising’ rather than ‘spreading’ its limited funds by restricting its support to professional theatres that produced quality work. These are dangerous terms in any cultural setting since they carry with them implicit cultural assumptions; as Raymond Williams has warned, we must always beware of state use of undefined, “vague terms like ‘standards’ and ‘excellence’ which much more often than not function as ways of deflecting the argument rather than having it” (Williams

4). In the Canadian context these terms simply “ignored the possibility of developing a unique culture entirely. . . . funding agencies have simply assumed that Canadians should adopt an imported culture, and the only dispute was between raising the quality of this expression and spreading the support around to amateurs doing the same thing” (Pasquill, *Wooden* 69). The result was that, beyond various general statements of commitment to Canadian playwrights, their status remained outside the Council’s terms of reference.

Instead, the Canada Council turned most of its theatrical energies towards the development of the regional theatre system (as a new configuration of the elusive national theatre) while reassuring the nationalist elements in the coalition that this process would bring Canadians national and international prestige and that, once in place and stable, the regional theatres would be able to fulfill Canadians’ desire for indigenous theatrical works. In the meantime it offered a program of extremely limited funding for the theatres to use (if they wished to commission) and equally limited bursaries and scholarships for playwrights. At the same time they clarified their essential stance on theatre budgets -- taken initially with extremely limited knowledge of theatre economics and scarcely modified with deeper knowledge as it became available -- deficits must be avoided, eliminated or controlled. This approach often stood in stark contrast with the Council’s rhetorical stand on developing Canadian plays. As a result we have such statements as this by the first director Albert Trueman:

The production of new Canadian plays always involves theatres in certain additional expense and in particular in the risk of a poor response at the box office. It is unfortunately true that the public generally prefers to see well-known plays by well-known authors and few Canadian plays or playwrights

fall into this category. This situation is not likely to be remedied as long as Canadian plays go unproduced and playwrights have few opportunities to see their own work on the stage. (*Minutes* 25/03/1963)

If the first two statements were true, and there is considerable doubt that they were, they make the third statement unsolvable. By telling theatres they were risking their money doing Canadian plays and at the same time constantly telling them not to risk their money, a formula for failure was being institutionalized. As the regional system grew, particularly after 1963, an almost required, mixed repertoire began to emerge as standard fare at the regional theatres, that offered one, two at best, Canadian plays in a seven, eight or nine play season. By Centennial year, the nationalist part of the coalition (particularly the playwrights) was growing particularly restive with an imported theatrical culture (see Benson and Conolly 84) and their power was increasing as the old, cultural elite began to wane in political influence.

At the same time, within the regional system, the constant pressures of budget, audience expansion, grantsmanship (all stressed by the Council) and the sheer growth in size in both organization and facilities, were leading to an institutionalization of the cultural imperatives of the regionals' repertoires. Occasionally, as in the first season of the St Lawrence Centre, radical departures were attempted, but when they failed (often due to cultivated audience expectations) they only resulted in the hardening of the system's arteries. For the safety of each theatrical organization, decision-making moved more and more out of the hands of artistic direction and into the hands of administrators. As in any case where growth leads to bureaucracy,

the major areas of decision and policy making -- repertoire, casting, financing -- are manipulated so that organizational goals are minimally met, while uncertainties are controlled. . . . Such decision making reveals how efficient 'levels of production' are met by the administrator who employs techniques of rationality in arts administration. The administrator, who claims to fulfill artistic goals, is actually the person most removed from the creation of the artistic product, especially if the position is solely in management (Martorella 105-6).²

Regional theatres began to defend their repertoires as "international," "the unrestricted movement of works of art." However, it was clear that it was not international but simply European and American and even supporters of Council policy urged them to "diversify programming by increasing Canadian, non-European and non-American content to the point where it reflects a balanced and healthy diet of domestic and international fare" (Shafer 51).

It was quickly becoming clear that the vast majority of Canada Council grants to theatres (regional and festival) were going to organizations which served a "small fraction of the Canadian public" (Hendry, "Canadian" 14) whose vision of theatre was predominantly that of high culture.³ There is no doubt that the Canada Council succeeded in putting in place, in a relatively short period of time, a comprehensive regional system of theatres across the country. However, the next stage in the process, the production of Canadian plays in significant numbers and the creation of a repertoire of such plays failed to materialize. As we have seen, the strategies of the Council in the form of awards, scholarships and commissions had little impact on the propensity of the regional theatres to remain with safe, balanced seasons. And at the same time, the established, professional

regionals were consuming more of the available funding, preventing newer organizations from challenging their hegemony. The alliance between the proponents of high culture and the nationalist lobby (and particularly the Canadian playwrights) began to unravel at the end of the 1960s.

The nationalist challenge to the regional system put into place by the Canada Council came from many directions. Stratford and other theatres were excoriated for continuing to hire British artistic directors instead of using Canadians.⁴ Playwrights and their supporters, inside and outside of the theatre system, began to demand quotas on foreign material, similar to those which had already been put into place in the area of broadcasting. Cultural critics like Peter Hay pointed out the Council's failings based on its own *Annual Report*: "[t]he council is lately proud of supporting the so-called alternative theatres, which produce most of the new Canadian works, our future heritage. Its current Annual Report (1972-73) tells the real story: The Tarragon Theatre received \$7,000 to produce a season of six Canadian plays. The Stratford Festival was given in the same year \$460,000" (Hay 15). Concerns were expressed both in and out of the Council over the fact that audiences were growing but only within the narrow class limits that they began with; the expected expansion to the mass audiences (set out in the Massey/Levésque Commission *Report*) had not materialized. As a consequence it began to appear that the state supported regional theatres were, in fact, cultural welfare for the wealthy. In fact, "[t]he irony was that so many in the next generation would see the traditional high culture championed by the Massey/Levésque Commission as part of the problem rather than part of the solution" (Litt, *Muses* 254). The Liberal government of the time began to warn the Canada Council that the key word for the future was 'democratization' as it began to side with the growing power

of nationalism.⁵ When the Council failed to respond to public statements by various government members, including the Secretary of State, the government decided to take action within two already planned programmes: the Local Initiatives Program and Opportunities for Youth.

LIP and OFY scattered millions of dollars across the non-professional theatrical spectrum (as well as elsewhere) and enabled the development of what came to be known as the alternative theatre movement, which in turn became the main focus of the nationalist movement in the area of theatre. In a very short period of time, the alternative theatre movement achieved what the Council had been unable to do over twelve years, and did it outside (in fact, in opposition to) the regional theatre system: it produced a generation of new Canadian playwrights -- some of whom remain among our most important -- and produced their work for a new audience that was less class-bound and elitist, the beginnings of a more mass audience for the theatre. The LIP/OFY process brought considerable chaos to the cultural funding scene and an unseemly struggle for cultural power between the Secretary of State's office and the Canada Council. Even the Secretary of State in 1974 (Hugh Faulkner) was somewhat nonplussed by the furor, but unable to deny the political implications of LIP:

I suppose where the sense of incoherence . . . has its origins -- and I don't think this is really deniable -- is with the LIP grants. Local Initiative Programs suddenly created a largesse for theatre of any kind with budgets that make the Council's look rather small. *We had our objectives then* and some good things emerged from LIP. Our major problem now is to try to provide some sort of continuity between what LIP created in the theatre

world and what the Council can fund in an ongoing way with its budgets.

(Faulkner quoted in *CTR* 19, my italics)

In the end, the Secretary of State's office had its own way by appointing one of its own, André Fortier, as the new head of the Canada Council.

After that, the Council reversed its direction concerning the alternates -- although, to be fair, since the alternates had now become professional, technically they now qualified for Canada Council grants -- and began to take them into the fold. As Faulkner put it in an interview with *CTR* in 1974:

the Council is responding and André Fortier, the head of the Council, has made the Council's approach quite clear. It is trying to respond more generously to the new and innovative. What's going on in the smaller theatres today in Toronto and other cities is the most relevant, the most important thing that's happening theatrically in English Canada. More relevant in many ways than say Stratford. . . . Council noticed in reviewing its levels of support that more and more money in recent years was going to maintain these larger institutions, these important institutions. Last year, Council made the decision -- and because it is an independent body it has every right to do so -- that it would scale down the rate of growth of its support to the established in order to respond to the innovative more generously. And I completely concur in that. I think Council has done the correct thing. (Faulkner quoted in *CTR* 18-9)

The last sentences are, of course, exercises in political ingenuousness, since Faulkner's office, and its political superiors, were almost entirely responsible for the change.

LIP and OFY had done more than effect this change in Council direction. They had shown that the Canada Council policy and practice (outlined in Chapter Five) towards play development, while successful in developing the regional system, had been completely wrong-headed in the promotion of Canadian playwrighting. The LIP and OFY funding patterns (the complete opposite of the Council's approach) of scattering money among the interesting, energetic and innovative proposals that it received without any concern for 'track record' or professionalism, had produced not only a host of new playwrights but also a new (although smaller and more precarious) theatre system of its own -- and in only a few years. As Frank Pasquill observed,

The recent upsurge in Canadian theatre can be largely attributed to LIP and OFY funds meeting a latent cultural demand. The new money sources allowed small theatres to improve the quality of indigenous productions and gain recognition for our native playwrights. The conclusions are inescapable:

- 1) The traditional funding sources, though internally consistent, become highly selective over time.
- 2) The creative potential of Canada has not been developed by the funding system.
- 3) In order to maintain a vibrant cultural life in Canada, government must place more emphasis on innovation. (Pasquill, "Cultural" 20-1)

In theory, these new initiatives were to be pursued based on a new 'Performing Arts Policy' released in a preliminary form in 1975. This policy included

commitments to removing the economic handicaps impeding the achievements of artists; creating working conditions under which artists can

give the full measure of their talent; making the arts accessible to ever increasing numbers of Canadians; bringing ever larger audiences within the artists reach; and establishing a climate that is more conducive to the emergence of artistic talent. (Shafer 47)

A number of critics, including the editors of *CTR*, questioned why such a policy should be released by the office of the Secretary of State and not the Canada Council itself, who would certainly have to administrate it. Faulkner claimed it would be irresponsible of government not to take control of policy, after all, it was the one providing the money (Faulkner, *CTR* 23). And on the issue of the politicization of the Council, he commented,

I don't really see what's so nefarious about the Liberal Party and the Liberal Government having some views on what it feels should be its Performing Arts Policy. On the one hand, the complaint is that the government is not sensitive enough to culture -- your own distinguished journal has suggested this. But the moment we do anything to show our concern, we're admonished for politicizing the issue. You can't have it both ways.

(Faulkner, *CTR* 24)

And, in truth, the performing arts could not have it both ways. In 1976 Charles Lussier, "a Trudeau appointee," became the new director of the Council, and he made the entire process clear with his "warning" to the Canada Council and the performing arts in general:

He told performing groups to make their programs accessible to 'wider publics' (which implied a radical change in council policy towards directing rather than supporting artists) on the grounds that such a broadening of appeal was necessary if the council hoped to gain adequate funding from

Parliament. He was suggesting, in other words, that a politically required 'democratization' might become a condition for artists to continue receiving public funds. (Woodcock 106)

This government coup raised many hopes among nationalists that Canadian playwrights (and other creative artists) might at last take their appropriate place in the Canadian theatre spectrum. But inertia is powerful and the Secretary of State's office re-affirmed its continuing commitment to the festivals and the regionals. In a study published in 1976, D. Paul Shafer concluded that within the performing arts, "Canadian content averaged approximately 44 per cent in dance, 49 per cent for the major art galleries, 25 per cent in theatre and 7 per cent in music" (Shafer 50).

After the mid-1970s it becomes increasingly difficult (if not impossible) to speak of the Canada Council and its policies as separate entities from the government in power. Although the Council has fought back, from time to time against government encroachment on its prerogatives -- for instance in the case of the Art Bank -- it became difficult in the face of the fact that by 1979 more than 80% of its budget came in the form of appropriations from the Secretary of State (Robertson 104). In addition, in 1977 the government began a new policy of special appropriations in the form of 'thrust funds' and supplementary expenditure programs, or other 'earmarked' funds. For example, in 1977-78 the Secretary of State gave the Council \$1.715 million to be spent on 'national unity' (Robertson 105) and although the Council protested it went ahead even though it was launching "new forms of support for the arts which, in its own judgment, were less urgent than other need for which funds were lacking" (Milligan, "Ambiguities" 76). In 1978 \$900,000 was given for a national book festival and other funds have been earmarked for

publishers (Robertson 105) and while \$1 million was given to fund the National Arts Centre in a program of touring shows to “serve the cause of national unity” at the same time that the general fund for the arts was cut back (Woodcock 117). As a result, a Canadian Conference of the Arts survey in 1980 showed that that the Guild of Canadian Playwrights had a membership of only 88 (as compared to the League of Canadian Poets with 175) (Canadian Conference, *Strategy* 98).⁶ Recently, the Canada Council has seemed to regain some of its independence under cutbacks (which somewhat reduce the government’s authority) and continues to undergo reorganization. But only an examination of the Council’s practices and results will be able to tell the effectiveness of this.

In the course of this dissertation three essential elements have provided the focus for discussion and dispute: elite high culture, indigenous creation and nationalism. I have suggested that the central mediating force that has effected change within the Canadian theatrical arts has been the rising force of Canadian nationalism. But the debate between elite culture and populism has played a major role in other state supported art structures and has run a somewhat similar course in the United States in the late 1970s centering on the role of the National Endowment of the Arts, and a brief look at that conflict would offer some interesting and illustrative parallels and differences to the Canadian situation now that the conflict is clear.

In 1977 the funding policies of the NEA were called into public question by a number of social critics (such as Berman, Mulcahy, Swaim and Arrian) which initiated a controversy that focused on elitism vs. populism. These differences broke down as follows: proponents of elitism (although they reject the term) contend that public policy on the arts should “stress artistic quality as a criterion of support and that quality is most consistently

found in, or associated with, the established cultural institutions. This position assumes that there are “strong boundaries between performer and audience, amateur and professional”; and that art is distinct from ‘popular’ forms of creative endeavor.” Populists advocate a policy that

stresses the widest possible availability of the arts. . . . This approach tends to endorse a less traditional, more pluralistic notion of artistic merit and consciously seeks to create a policy of cultural diversity. The populist tends to emphasize the user or consumer of arts, and hence is concerned with the broad dissemination of the arts and with the promotion of cultural products that meet diverse constituent demands. (Wyszomirski 13)

Critics of populism fear that it will “dilute, homogenize, vulgarize, and popularize the arts” (Wyszomirski 14) while critics of elitism contend that its practice under a publicly funded arts agency (NEA) “subverts the democratic rationale for the expenditure of public funds: the nurturing of American creativity and the elevation of the quality of mass life. This happens because the traditional institutions, which receive the bulk of the funds, are under elite control and reflect elite values. These values include no responsibility to . . . bring artistic experience to the masses” (Arrian 8).

As in Canada, public arts funding goes largely to the large traditional institutions and therefore represents a federal subsidy of “a small, elite segment of the population whose cultural milieu . . . [is] white Western European non-contemporary art in traditional settings.” “This situation,” says Arrian, “is contrary to the rhetoric in the enabling legislation that created these programs and agencies. It spoke of bringing artistic experience to all our people and of nurturing our creative artists” and the losers are, among others, “our

indigenous creative artists” (Arrian ix). While some critics of elitism are prepared to acknowledge that to view arts audiences “as an elite is not necessarily at odds with democratic sentiments if it is a sort of open-door exclusivity” (Wyszomirski 18) (along the lines of the Massey/Levésque Commission position), more militant populists view this attitude as “form of ‘cultural imperialism’ -- an attempt to impose alien aesthetic values” (Mulcahy 305). The battle over these issues in the US was particularly exacerbated by its high profile public forum, given that the NEA was often directly implicated in presidential politics.

The debate in the US did much to discredit the standing of the NEA and is particularly interesting in that the difference between the American version and the Canadian one -- although there are clearly considerable parallels -- is the element of nationalism. The Canada Council’s position during the period under discussion in this thesis falls clearly on the elitist side of the fence and the attack on it comes from populist sentiment, *driven* and given public credibility and force by Canadian nationalism. It is a reasonable assumption that the Canada Council might have held its course, even under the pressure of dissatisfied artists and playwrights, without the increasingly powerful force of the nationalism that swept the country in the late 1960s and 1970s.

It has not been the purpose of this thesis to argue that there is no place in Canadian theatres for the work of playwrights from other countries; although international must mean precisely that, and not solely Euro-American. They do have their place in any theatre company dedicated to a specific agenda, whatever that agenda might be.⁷ But the dominance of regional and festival theatres’ repertoire by these works, especially now that there is a large and still growing body of Canadian work has called the legitimacy of the

entire regional structure into question. From studies like the *Applebaum/Hébert Report* (1982) we can see that the issues discussed in this thesis have continued to be raised and even today the Canada Council struggles with the issue of Canadian content (Sprung, Private Correspondence) although the force of nationalism has largely spent itself on that the issue. As long as an 'international' repertoire continues to dominate, the whole question of the legitimacy of public grants can be called into question as "a subsidy to the upper-middle and upper classes" (Bensman 28) and Gans' old criticism remains in effect: it is inappropriate practice "to support through public policies the welfare of the higher cultures at the expense of the lower ones" (Gans 128).

Steven Globerman has been a long-time, ultra-conservative critic of Canadian cultural policy and many of his arguments are spurious in their disregard for anything but financial profit and loss. But two of his points are well-taken. There is an overwhelming avoidance in this country of a clearly defined cultural policy that attempts to describe Canadian theatre as something other than theatre taking place in Canada, thus making it the same as theatre anywhere else except for geography. Without this kind of definition we attempt to produce 'international,' or Euro-American theatre at a distinct disadvantage from the country of origin of the material: we insist on second-rate copies into which we pour much of our efforts and funding. Perhaps, as Globerman suggests, we should narrow our focus somewhat and specialize in what we will always do best: our own indigenous drama for all Canadians. This may not be what is finally wanted by the public but the question needs to be raised, or, as in the early years of the Canada Council, we will drift into the path of least resistance: unquestioned acceptance of the high culture of other nations.

To sum up: the Canada Council failed to produce an indigenous English-Canadian drama for five specific reasons. Firstly, because the traditional Canadian social relationship to the arts in general and the performing arts in particular was one of total *laissez-faire* in regard to indigenous art while high culture received limited private patronage from the wealthy. This tradition became strongly linked to theatre through the creation and importance of the Dominion Drama Festival. The establishment of state subsidized art through the means of an endowment fund created from the death estates of two wealthy men set up a parallel structure to private patronage and helped ensure its bias towards high culture. Secondly, the Massey/Levésque Commission put into place an alliance between the forces of elite high culture and Canadian nationalism with the following goals: to establish a professional Canadian theatre system on a national/regional basis which would provide all Canadians with access to the theatre of high culture in hopes that they would avail themselves of this opportunity and that indigenous theatre would *then* grow within that established system. They were unaware that without large-scale financial encouragement this would not happen and they did not foresee that a system fed on, and built of, high culture and developed with an elite audience would become institutionalized with precisely those features and refuse to change.

Thirdly, the initial composition of the Council as politically appointed business people put into place a cultural void incapable of developing a rational policy based on a definition of what Canadian culture and Canadian theatre should be. Those members of the Council who were 'culturally aware' were already committed to high culture and their influence was paramount. The Canada Council assumed from the start that high (foreign) culture, professionally performed, was the supreme goal -- indigenous art ran a very poor

second to the creation of a delivery system. Once the system was in place the Council seemed unable to change its objectives without a great deal of outside influence.

Fourthly, because of a lack of knowledge of the specifics of theatre economics and relying on traditional free enterprise thinking, the Canada Council pushed the growing regionals to produce 'safe' seasons for their established elite audiences -- not knowing that the search for zero deficit financing in theatre was unachievable. At the same time it insisted on growth (laterally for audiences) that created even larger deficits, again, unaware that growth in theatre increases costs and deficits rather than reducing them. By insisting on growth and condemning deficits the Council succeeded in forcing the regionals even more strongly into a 'safe' foreign repertoire of 'hits' and changing their structure from one of artistic adventure and community involvement into one of budget oriented administrations, grantsmanship and institutional rigidity. As the Council struggled to contain the deficits it had helped create and at the same time tried to encourage growth of the system with its own limited budget, it began to cut grants for what small amounts it had committed to the development of indigenous theatre in the form of new (and even old) Canadian plays.

Fifth, and finally, the Canada Council underwent the same rigidification process itself. Even with the regional system mostly in place, it was unable to change its own policies to accommodate the second stage of development. Despite the vocal displeasure of Canadian playwrights at being virtually shut out of the system, despite the disintegration of the alliance with Canadian nationalism -- dismayed at the massive foreign content in the regionals' repertoire -- and despite the repeated warnings of analysts, statisticians, academics and even the government, the Council was unable to change its practices and focus on the development of indigenous talent that was supposed (in the grand scheme

assembled by the Massey/Levésque Commission *Report*) to follow. Rather, they had to be forced, grudgingly and with a loss of independent power, to move.

The result was that Canada received a superb regional theatre system, but with a powerful tradition of privileging foreign 'hit' material -- a tradition that is still difficult to change. The Canada Council became discredited in the eyes of many Canadian nationalists for its defense of this system's repertoire, its neglect of original creators and its failure to adequately support Canadian playwrights. The Canada Council lost a large part of its nationalist and artistic constituency and, because of this, it lost forever its valued independence and began to be increasingly used for the government's political agendas. The price was high, particularly since many of the Council's errors were natural ones, considering its starting point. Others were clearly sins of omission, with unforeseeable consequences. But the fact remains, that the Council's focus on constructing organizations was at the expense of aiding artists and while the elite audiences of Canada's regional theatres gained and prospered from 1957 to 1975, English-Canadian playwrights were neglected and had to find their own way.

Endnotes to Conclusion

¹ Bumsted has pointed out that even though by 1962 Marshal McLuhan, in *The Gutenberg -Galaxy*, was beginning to come to terms with popular (or mass) culture, not as an American issue but as a world-wide technological phenomenon, most Canadian intellectuals still felt that “a concentration upon popular culture as significant would simply not have been Canadian. Since popular culture was American, one sought the Canadian identity in other places. This attitude was generally shared by many in government and in the academy -- and still persists” (Bumsted 60). He illustrates this with the historian Morton’s comment that it did not “greatly matter that Americans and Canadians share the same popular culture; after reading the same comic strips, and the same periodicals, Canadians remain as distinct as they ever were. What differentiates the two people are things far deeper than the mass culture of North America which both countries share and both created” (quoted in Bumsted 59) and one of those things was the British cultural heritage.

² The specifically Canadian context for this process is outlined in Hendry’s article on “culture-brokers.” “The Canadian Conference of the Arts: Defection 73.”

³ In this sense the regional theatres followed more international patterns in the relationship between funding and repertoire: “[b]y and large, then, the dominant patterns [historically] of sponsorship and support for the arts follow the overall pattern of the dominance of classes, elites, and other social and economic institutions over society” (Bensman 25).

⁴ Very often these foreign directors did not help their own cause by reason of ignorance of the country or arrogance: “[Robin] Phillips reportedly said that one reason Canada doesn’t have a world level drama is because the country lacks any real social and cultural problems,

that “Canadians are a happy people.” One can only suggest to him an extended visit to Québec and then yet another to British Columbia and then perhaps a third to the Maritimes before he continues to so blatantly misread the country” (Rubin, “At-Large” 131).

⁵ Sharon Pollock remembers the period as one of continual conflict between playwrights and the “establishment” on all of these fronts. (see Pollock 12)

⁶ The list was as follows: Canadian Authors Association -- 900; Writer’s Union of Canada - - 320; Periodical Writers Assoc. of Canada -- 300; League of Canadian Poets -- 175; Guild of Canadian Playwrights -- 88 (Canadian Conference, *Strategy* 98).

⁷ Caution, however, is necessary. For example, the Stratford Festival has always defended its repertoire on the basis that it is a Shakespearean Festival and therefore must perform the works of Shakespeare. Yet, more and more in recent years, the repertoire has expanded to the point where almost half of Stratford’s offerings have been non-Shakespearean, yet at the same time non-Canadian -- comprised of, in large part, Gilbert and Sullivan and Broadway musicals. This constitutes an abuse of the agenda justification, particularly considering the size of Stratford’s grant from the Canada Council.

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Appendix A

Grants to Major English Canadian Theatre Companies
(based on the 1970 *Annual Report*):

Regional Theatres

Centaur	\$22,000
Citadel	\$55,000
Globe	\$25,000
MTC	\$145,000
Neptune	\$130,000
Vancouver Playhouse	\$150,000
Theatre Calgary	\$45,000
Theatre New Brunswick	\$13,500
Toronto Arts (St. Lawrence Centre)	\$140,000

Festival Theatres

Charlottetown	\$120,000
Shaw	\$35,000
Stratford	\$475,000

Other Theatres

Montréal International Theatre	\$15,000
Toronto Workshop Productions	\$50,000

Other Organizations

Canadian Theatre Centre	\$65,000
Dominion Drama Festival	\$31,000
National Theatre School	\$290,000

Miscellaneous Grants

Various	\$26,722
Commissions to theatres	\$750

Appendix B

Commissions

1958	\$5,000
(Crest \$5,000)	
1959	\$0
1960	\$12,400
(Crest \$5,000, Arts Theatre \$2,400, MTC \$5,000)	
1961	\$5,000
(Crest \$600, Actor's Theatre \$4,400)	
1962	\$0
1963	\$6,600
(MTC \$3,000, Workshop Production \$3,600)	
1964	\$8,000
(Canadian Players \$3,000, Workshop Productions \$5,000 (in reserve))	
1965	\$1,500
(Vancouver Playhouse \$1,500 (Playwright in residence))	
1966	\$8,500
(Aries Productions \$8,500)	
1967	\$1,450
(Summer Theatre \$1,450)	
1968 - 1970	\$750
(Toronto Workshop Productions \$750)	
Total spent on direct commissions 1958-1970	\$49,200

Other expenses taken from money allocated for commissioning:

Civic Theatre \$10,000, 1961

Playwright's Workshops \$20,000, 1966

Vancouver Playhouse cost over-runs \$30,000, 1967

Appendix C

Awards and Scholarships

7th Meeting, July 18-21, 1958	Ted Allan -- \$2,000
12th Meeting, Aug. 17-19, 1959	Adele Wisemen -- \$1000 Ted Allan -- \$2,000
14th Meeting, Feb. 22-3, 1960	Patricia Joudry -- \$4,500
3rd Annual Meeting, May 30-31, 1960	John Gray -- \$2,000
19th Meeting, Feb. 20-21	John Coulter -- \$2,000
5th Annual Meeting, May 14-15, 1962	Bernard Slade -- \$2,000
6th Annual Meeting, June 3-4, 1963	Peter Statner -- \$2,000
39th Meeting, March 15, 1965	John Gray -- \$4,000
44th Meeting Feb. 21-2, 1966	George Hulme -- \$5,000
45th Meeting, May 30-31, 1966	John Cunningham -- \$2,500
50th Meeting, Feb. 20-21, 1967	R. B. Huard -- \$5,500
52nd Meeting, April 4, 1967	J. R. Cruikshank -- \$3,000 G. A Gauthier -- \$2,500 T. Grainger -- \$1,875 M. Lager -- \$2,084 C. Levac -- \$2,000 M. J. Nimchuk -- \$3,000
68th Meeting, Feb 11, 1970	J. Addison -- \$750
69th Meeting, April 6-7, 1970	Peter Desbarats -- \$1,350 Lennox John Brown -- \$750 J.W. Nichol -- \$750 T.P. Gallant -- \$750 Helen French -- \$750
The list of the "22" (1969-70)	\$44,000
Total spent 1958-1970	\$88,059
(almost half of which was spent in 1969 and 1970)	