University of Alberta

Rural as Translocal

An Alternative to National Identity in Canadian Theatre

by

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Abstract

Canada possesses a culture of many interconnected voices, but this diversity is not represented in the major commercial enterprises of Canadian theatre. This thesis will question the existence of a national Canadian identity and through the framework of rural Canadian theatre posit an alternative to centralizing the nation. Historically examining attempts of creating a national stage, the trope of the North, and regionalism will problematize issues of centralization and the "safe" and innocuous multiculturalism currently ingrained in Canadian theatre. The cultural history and manifestations of rural Canadian theatre will be defined and criticized through the lens of social and cultural theory to determine its place within the framework of Canadian culture. Using rural Canadian theatre as a base for analysis, the benefits of localism, translocalism and "telling our stories to ourselves" will be examined in the way it reconfigures Canada's national and cultural identity in a complex geopolitical and multicultural landscape.

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INTRODUCTION: When is Canada Not Canadian?

If one were to look for the seat of Canadian theatre in the twenty-first century, the Great Canadian Theatre Company, located in the nation's capital and mandated to produce and create theatre strictly by Canadians, would seem to be the appropriate place. However, Canada is the world's second largest country, and the sheer spread of the nation's population makes it difficult to accept a single urban outlet as the centre for a division of its cultural activity. Canadian culture has been described as a mosaic with people as culturally diverse as the environments found across its landscape. Cultural diversity expands the notion of cultural exception, that cultural products have intrinsic value beyond their economic worth. Diversity speaks to a wider usage beyond cultural production encompassing among other things shared ideological conception, societal organization and is useful when considering national identity formation. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) views cultural diversity as a common heritage to humanity and recognizes the importance of difference within the seemingly homogenous organization of a nation. Canada's support of this notion of diversity differs from, for instance, the 'melting pot' interpretation of cultural intersection found in the United States of America. In this scenario, the USA seeks at a federal level, as well as the level of ideology, rhetoric and media, the assumption of greater homogeneity in its people. From a standpoint of cultural

representation, the melting pot leads to each of its citizens identifying as an American imbued with the patriotic and dogmatic values and beliefs associated with the nation's federal charters and declarations. The crucial difference is that the melting pot requires homogenization despite social or ethnic factors that may impact identity formation, whereas the mosaic revels in the difference between each diverse sub-culture. Since diversity is resistant to the homogenization created by singular expressions, representation in Canada tends to be much more complex, since mosaic pieces often show the seams between them rather than their unity.

Canada shares the longest unprotected border with its neighbour to the south and is continuously bombarded by American popular media and entertainment. The difference in population compounds the problem because many Canadians see as much or more American cultural creation than Canadian, and are rarely able to identify Canadian artistic products beyond popular culture icons. Furthermore, though the era of colonialism has (mostly) passed, the connection to the British Empire continues to influence how we are governed and which moral and life-values are considered positive or negative. Canada is also a land of immigration, especially since 1971, when official Canadian multiculturalism policy was enacted under the Liberal Government of Prime Minister Pierre-Elliott Trudeau[1]. For decades, significant numbers of immigrants

[1] "In 1971, Canada was the first country in the world to adopt multiculturalism as an official policy. By so doing, Canada affirmed the value and dignity of all Canadian citizens regardless of their racial or ethnic origins, their language, or their religious affiliation. The 1971

and visible minorities have settled in Canada (Balakrishnan 313); as a result, the idea of a national heritage is different from person to person depending on how and when they made Canada their home. Canada's multicultural policy is not without challenges. It may not come as a surprise that the Multiculturalism Act came after the Québec October crisis (1970), which underscored the difficult relationship between Québec nationalism and Canadian federalism. Critics of multicultural policy point out how it creates ghettoization and further segregation of minorities by promoting culture as an ethnic artifact. The combination of all these influences leaves little room for the development of a distinctly Canadian national identity.

Despite the complexity of the terms multiculturalism or Canadian cultural identity, the designation of "Canadian" is clearly delimited in some contexts. Only recently (1996) has the ethnicity designation "Canadian" been added to the federal census, yet a high percentage of the population identifies as such, sometimes without specifying any previous heritage connection. The 2001 Canadian census places the response of "Canadian" as the sole ethnicity at 23% and an additional 16% list themselves as a Canadian "hyphenated" ethnicity (Balakrishnan 314). While a demographic study does not give a complete view

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Multiculturalism Policy of Canada also confirmed the rights of Aboriginal peoples and the status of Canada's two official languages. […] Multiculturalism ensures that all citizens can keep their identities, can take pride in their ancestry and have a sense of belonging. […] The Canadian experience has shown that multiculturalism encourages racial and ethnic harmony and cross-cultural understanding." http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/multiculturalism/citizenship.asp

into the minds of the people surveyed, it does confirm that Canada as a nation is not a convenient holding area of many different peoples. The obvious desire to belong to a culture on a national level suggests there must be a resultant Canadian cultural matrix created by the interaction of its many diverse voices. The question remains: can Canada create a singular yet heterogeneous expression of these voices and can there be a centralized national identity?

A nation's identity can be influenced, reflected, displayed and challenged by its arts. Canadian theatre as a reflection of national identity developed in complex ways despite the fact that, as dramatic historian Alexander Leggatt said, in the mid-twentieth century, "Canadian drama and theatre existed, but without deep roots and with little continuity of achievement." (Leggatt 15). This sentiment is echoed by early cultural nationalists and is likely why Canada's artistic development has progressed to the point where the representation of what a "Canadian" signifies has become at best problematic. While solutions to the problem of Canada's artistic and by extension theatrical identity have been put forward, and some in particular have become dominant tropes, they remain incomplete, and lack the evolutionary traction necessary to keep pace with what I would call modern "Canadianization".

While previous attempts at centralization fail to address the diverse and evolving nature of Canadian-ness, theatre in rural Canada is being developed under a framework that could be applied nationally. In effect, to find a new seat for Canadian-ness in theatre, I am proposing we look towards rurality as an

example of identity formation, not to stand in for the entire nation but to problematize the centralized view of Canada's artistic production. This choice may seem odd if we consider Canada's population inhabits for the most part urban areas where diverse Canadians conglomerate. Theatre in rural Canada, and particularly rural Canadian theatre (as we will strive to define it in what follows) presents a useful and practical view of how a Canadian could be represented without the adherence to a dated and ultimately deceptive mythos.

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate how rural Canadian theatre acts as a challenge to a Canadian identity that is not based upon national centralization. I will be using rural Canadian theatre as an example of a translocal node to showcase how a translocal identity, as opposed to a national identity, is potentially more valuable to the development of Canadian culture and cultural production. For the purpose of this discussion, I am borrowing Donia Mounsef's definition of the "translocal" as "the convergence of various social and cultural networks that emphasize locality in a globalized and networked context." Further, "the local is no longer isolated from the global mainstream; on the contrary, translocal forces flow between centers and margins where cultural economies and politics of other localities are part of our world without losing their local specificity" (Mounsef 2013). The local in this case is represented by the community – the developmental focus of rural Canadian theatre.

Rural studies have shown the positive impact self-reflective and representative art such as theatre can have on rural communities. To properly

delve into rural theatre, a small but representative corpus of plays will be analyzed and contrasted with established rural cultural production theory. The end result will show the elements of story and production that are important in representing contemporary Canada. While rural theatre cannot ultimately stand in for Canada's entire national art identity, as we shall see in the issues surrounding its conception and production, it does point towards a more useful and fluid framework that theatres and artists could use in future development.

Rurality seeks a common denominator among what could be many different communities, and this commonality will be explored primarily through the works of the Blyth Festival theatre – both because of its success and the sheer volume of work it has produced. Other theatres, the Caravan Farm Theatre and Mulgrave Road Theatre, will be involved in determining the effect of rural theatre on the community.

Canada's identity crisis will not be solved simply by playing rural theatre on every stage, but the configuration and production style of a few rural Canadian theatres points us towards the practical application of locality which also affects urban theatre. By using rural Canadian theatre as a prime example of Mounsef's "translocal," it becomes one translocal node among many within the nation, not necessarily precluding any of the various configurations of the Canadian voice. The dynamic dialogic natures of these nodes would shift the

position of Canada's identity from the centralized, safe, and stagnant national; to the diverse, potentially critical, and ultimately evolving translocal.

CHAPTER ONE: Centralization and Rural Theatre

Theatre in Canada has developed in a short period of time with a number of important influences. Aboriginal history notwithstanding, we have a relatively young settler history, with continued colonial ties. Our country prides itself on its mosaic-style multicultural heritage which plays out on Canadian stages in different ways. While large commercial theatre empires such as the Mirvish Productions enterprise in Toronto seem to dominate the market, creating theatre that is commercially successful, but not necessarily indicative of Canada's identity, there are small-house theatres and festivals across the country devoted to producing culture that speaks to a more diverse audience, if looked at as an interconnected whole. Against an oppressive commercial theatre, does Canada have a signature theatre to call its own? With a problematic historical foundation backing it, Canadian-ness is a fragile thing, and art that represents it can offer much towards solidifying an identity that is not composed solely of geographic distinction. However, the mere creation of theatre in the country is not always as much "Canadian theatre," as it is "theatre in Canada." How, then, do we reconcile the difference, and what needs to be considered and included in the creation process for a theatrical work to be considered "Canadian?" Diane Bessai in "Regionalism of Canadian Drama" suggests that Canada's national art identity is a fragile and tenuous entity: "Neither modern Canadian theatre nor modern Canadian dramatic literature is so well established that one can pronounce on them absolutely at this stage of development" (Bessai, "Regionalism" 1).

However, although there are issues with the manner in which Canada is represented and how that representation is perceived throughout the nation, I would suggest that that statement has become outdated. An analysis of national identity should no longer ignore the complex effect of the country's ever increasing mass internal and external migration, hybridity, multiculturalism, and the fundamentally transient (rural or urban) imaginary. When looked at in this light, the Canadian-ness of Canadian theatre questions the very notion of unified nationalism and national identity and points to a "reality" that is diasporic, hyphenated and cross-cultural. As Homi Bhabha wrote in *The Location of Culture*, "The very concepts of homogenous national cultures, the consensual or contiguous transmission of historical traditions, or 'organic' ethnic communities – *as the grounds of cultural comparativism* – are in a profound process of redefinition" (5). The constant way Canadian theatre continues to define and redefine itself is, in a way, part of its definition.

Canadian theatre has roots in European theatre, ties to American theatre, and a wealth of new "Multicultural" theatre. In the post-World War II era, the creation of the Massey Commission, a report that investigated the cultural growth of the nation, saw that the state of Canadian culture was far from the forefront of development. After its initial survey, there were 146 recommendations made; upon a second survey only twelve were retained and implemented (Vance 366). In fact, it was primarily the result of two major private estate donations that the Canada Council was able to fund the artists necessary

to create the art that would serve as a national foundation based on the slogan of “telling our stories to ourselves”. Within the Commission itself we see the first step that artists took in response to the government’s slow acceptance of its recommendations. The chapter in the Commission report entitled “The Theatre” begins with a description of the newly popular method for theatrical creation that is distinctly Canadian; the report states:

> Now what is the Canadian playhouse? Nine times out of ten, Fishhorn, it is a school hall, smelling of chalk and kids, and decorated in the Early Concrete style. The stage is a small, raised room at one end. And I mean room. If you step into the wings suddenly you will fracture your nose against the wall. There is no place for storing scenery, no place for the actors to dress, and the lighting is designed to warm the stage but not to illuminate it. (Marchbanks 192)

The quotation is a commentary attributed to the pseudonym Samuel Marchbanks, written by Robertson Davies about the state of Canadian theatre as investigated by the Commission. While this statement’s intent is both ironic and reductive, it reveals the importance of a discussion on the stifling effects of Canadian cultural policies. But what is specifically Canadian about that figuration of the stage? It seems to equate the status of the stage to an essential reading of Canadian-ness, which is not a new idea. Some of the most popular art in Canada, works that infuse a lot of our current cultural understanding, are inexorably tied

to a particular attribute: the landscape, specifically the “wild” North (examples of which can be found in the theatre of Sharon Pollock, Judith Thompson, and David French to name a few). But what of the nearly 80% of Canadians who do not live in this natural landscape (Government of Canada, "Population, Rural and Urban, by Province and Territory")? Put under scrutiny, the state of Canadian identity as expressed through the “North” is a fragile one at best; a false or intangible one at worst. That is not to say, however, that theatre is not or cannot be created in Canada that exemplifies a more contemporary, evolutionary view of who “we” are; indeed, there is theatre being created right now with the mandate of reaching out and strengthening a diverse view of Canada and the Canadian.

In order to build a translocally-motivated Canadian theatre scene across the nation, theatres need to produce work that forms frameworks of a shared ideology and systems of value. The distinction here is that theatres do not need to produce the same content, or conform to a particular style in order to be considered unified in their cultural output, but they do need to contribute to a process of nation-wide cultural mapping. Cultural mapping is a methodology developed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) that seeks to create cohesion amongst all of humanity by emphasizing and focusing resources upon cultural diversity and plurality. For UNESCO, the process of cultural mapping includes a social and environmental analysis of cultural products and heritages in a region, country, or larger area,

and creates a profile by which the culture of a people may be viewed. The purpose of this process is to ensure that the cultural production of a place leads to a re-affirmation of the important concerns and life-values of its corresponding people, further ensuring a diverse culture that is less controlled by the dominant ideology and more by the multiple voices and expressions that encompass it. As outlined in UNESCO's document, *The Universal Declaration of Cultural Diversity*, "as a source of exchange, innovation and creativity, cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature. In this sense, it is the common heritage of humanity and should be recognized and affirmed for the benefit of present and future generations." (62). Cultural diversity is working towards a pluralism wherein all cultures are integrated and shared, taking elements from each and reaching a point of equilibrium where "cultural diversity widens the range of options open to everyone; it is one of the roots of development, understood not simply in terms of economic growth, but also as a means to achieve a more satisfactory intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual existence" (62). Since the diverse traditions in Canadian theatre rarely interact or move towards a state of unity or unified vision and instead gravitate towards isolated regional interests, the established canon of Canadian art does not reach as much equilibrium with this plurality as it could. According to UNESCO, "creation draws on the roots of cultural tradition, but flourishes in contact with other cultures." (63); to aspire to such an ideal is noble but the reality of Canadian theatre is far different. For the purposes of this essay, the following

considerations need to be taken into account when assessing a theatre's potential for affecting the cultural map of Canada.

To avoid being conflated with regional theatre, the concerns of the work being produced by rural theatre apply to more than just the community within which the theatre is created. Theatre that is representative of a specific collection of people, while important to their development, is not indicative of a wider impact, and being local, as opposed to regional opens up the possibility for translocal communication to occur. The benefit of this distinction is that theatre created for a locality can be considered a part of the national framework, so long as it can connect on some level to the work being produced elsewhere. The Canadian theatre I am defining should also create work made as much by the people of the nation as possible. A theatre that reproduces the texts of an existing non-Canadian canon – for instance the Stratford Festival of Ontario that produces in one of its theatres strictly works by Shakespeare – problematizes Canadian culture by adding a layer of the "other" to an otherwise potentially Canadian production. While theatre creation is a process of discussion and adaptation of ideas, the added nuance of non-Canadian texts will not be a focus in this thesis. Furthermore, a theatre that employs no Canadian artists, while it might produce work that otherwise fits into the cultural framework, is ultimately a false representation of the nation's artistic expression. The idea that the theatre is being created by the people and for the people is a problematic one because it affirms a hierarchy wherein there is an assumed audience, a creator

who holds the reins, and a predictable message that needs to be transmitted. However, in the case of work being made by Canadians, it is just as important that the creative team – actors, directors, designers, etc. – be as Canadian as the text. The final and perhaps most important aspect of Canadian theatre is that it needs to speak to or resonate with the people it is created for, and it must be created for a people or a collective body. By creating theatre with a community as the focus, rural theorists such as Alexander Thomas, Paul Cloke and Jo Little argue that the community's identity is strengthened. When placed into a framework, this strength translates into a set of national identities (and not one identity), unifying but not centralizing, diverse but not splintered into pieces of an aging mosaic.

There are a few final elements that need to be touched on briefly concerning the methodology of this essay, and the framework it is working within; issues of professionalism and the place of Aboriginal and Francophone theatre within it. While amateur theatres can produce work that is meaningful, technically sound, and capable of enhancing the idea of Canadian identity, this essay will be dealing with professional theatre and theatre created by professionally designated groups. In the case of both Aboriginal and Francophone theatres, this essay will not deal with those two very important categories for obvious reasons that they each redefine and problematize the notion of national identity in the Canadian context in a way that goes beyond the scope of this analysis. Furthermore both Francophone-Canadian and Aboriginal-

Canadian theatre define and challenge the very definition of Canadian culture. Without expanding the focus to cover these two divergent and problematic aspects, I will be positing a potential approach for which the framework of Canadian national theatre could be expanded to include these important outliers, as well as others. While the corpus I am using as example is Anglo-Canadian, it does not preclude either of these theatrical traditions, and the conclusions drawn from this essay can pertain to many aspects of Canada that are not explicitly being investigated herein.

The end result of this preliminary analysis is one that gives a working definition of a theatre that could be considered uniquely Canadian – it would appeal to a Canadian sensibility and value system, and be produced "in-house" so to speak. But what sort of theatre fits this profile? As a predominantly urban institution, theatre exists in a state that is warring with other forms of expression that have become dominant such as film, television and the internet. In every major urban centre there are theatres of every size and style, delivering entertainment or provocation to an audience that is unique and distinctive. Subscription holders to the Citadel theatre of Edmonton for example (whose most recent season boasts a mass culture-friendly list from *The Christmas Carol* to *Spamalot*) are not typically going to be seen attending the latest show at the more alternative Varscona Theatre just a few blocks over, because the audience, the content, and the values of each venue are different enough to create this schism. Linking these disparate cultural manifestations together and creating

theatre that is meaningful and notably Canadian despite geographical and normative cultural differences has been attempted before.

Several theatre companies have attempted in the past to make a particular theatre representative of the nation, however most are now defunct, and their attempts occasionally succeed as regional theatre, but never as national theatre. The lack of nationally-focused theatre creation in post-War Canada is best described by the following statement of Canadian playwright Janet Amos:

> I had the opportunity to audition for the great British director Clifford Williams. He said, "You people should be doing your own plays." I did not know what he meant. Who would write these plays? What would they be about? Who would want to see them? I asked these questions not because I had a Canadian identity problem, but because such an activity had never occurred to me. (Amos 9)

Canadians needed a space to develop their work because the idea of a special division of Canadian theatre had not been a national priority. While Amos is speaking in terms of the mid-twentieth century, the question of developing distinctly Canadian theatre begins earlier. Several specific theatres in cultural centres were created in an attempt to carve out the niche of the national stage. The Dominion Drama Festival, established in 1932 was an early major attempt to establish a space for specifically Canadian theatre and to assist the network created by the Little Theatre movement (Benson 144). Eventually, the Second

World War hampered its productivity, with competition in the post-war era from a number of successful professional non-Canadian-content theatres, cutting into funding and driving it out of business**.** A similar attempt was made by the short-lived Toronto Civic Theatre Association (TCTA): founded by Roly Young, it was in operation from 1945-1949 as "a community-based professional theatre" of merged "amateur companies in the Toronto area" (Wagner 14). TCTA had to fold due to competition from other theatre and an endemic lack of funding. In trying to establish a Canadian theatre, Young was drawn towards the musical and opera as modes of presentation. "Cultural nationalists" such as Herman Voaden and John Coulter cite this as the major reason for the TCTA failing, and that "a truly indigenous Canadian theatre and drama could emerge only through genuine individual artistic self-expression and the dramatization of Canadian subject-matter, characters and themes." (Wagner 14). One thing these two organizations have in common is that they exist within major urban centres and with competition from America and Europe. While competition from the towering threat American commercialism caused the necessitation of a national theatre (Filewod 48), it reduced the fundamental spread of theatre to its urban centres. This centralized national urge resulted in the creation of generally urban, safe and non-investigative theatre at the expense of ignoring the plethora of difference developing across the nation.

Today, the Great Canadian Theatre Company exists as a large theatre space in Ottawa and is devoted to producing theatre created by Canadians.

However as an institution it is concerned with producing as much Canadian work as possible, without consideration for how the audience it serves might be impacted culturally. From Michael Healey's potentially incendiary political drama *PROUD*, to Marie Clement's questioning of the depiction of the First Nations in *The Edward Curtis Project,* the GCTC is simply a production line showcasing the populist and international notions of "the Canadian" in a relatively safe manner. It is playing in the heart of the nation's capital with an audience and a community that is as unique and diverse as the rest of the nation, but does not feature the stories of these people. Thus, a separation occurs, especially in cases like *The Edward Curtis Project,* wherein the vaguely familiar Aboriginal is othered or exoticised, because the importance of the story and its self-reflective nature does not reflect back upon people who are most concerned by this story. In other words, the GCTC can run into some pitfalls when looking at the divide between what it is producing and the audience for which it performs. The problem is obviously related to the fact that there is no such thing as a singular Canadian voice, but rather voices, and that Canada is united primarily by its difference. Simply producing any work made by Canadians does not necessarily express Canadian national views, and when divorced from local or community-oriented concerns, the translocal impact of what it is to be a Canadian does not always translate. This is not to say that the GCTC, and other companies that have attempted a centralized and all-encompassing national stage do not produce great theatre, or that they do not produce interesting and

provocative theatre at a national level, but that by labelling them as *the* national theatre causes a grave misunderstanding of what makes Canadian plays specifically resonant with Canadians. The issue calls for a multitude of theatres to deal with the multitude of difference in the nation – but the theatre created must be one that is useful and meaningful on both a personal and national level.

Diane Bessai locates the urban-normative sentiment at the regional rather than the national level when she writes: “the late-developing arts of the modern theatre in Canada have little dependence for their vitality on influences radiating from a particular centre.” (Bessai, “Regionalism” 7). Although she posits that regionalism is the most productive way of looking at Canadian theatre, the issue is significantly more complex. Regionalism holds isolationist connotations, and while centralization is not useful for the figuration of Canadian identity, some level of cross-community or interculturalism must be present, with an active dialogue that joins regions together, as opposed to leaving each to develop on its own in multiple, splintered solitudes. A national identity cannot be formed in simultaneous isolation. The question to ask is not “how can a play from Lockeport, Nova Scotia be a representative of the nation?”, but “what connects a play from rural Nova Scotia with a small play produced in the back of an art gallery in East Vancouver?” Although a singular centre for the national stage might not be possible, historical occurrences in Canada have set up a manner of creating theatre nationally, by looking locally.

Along with the population and economic booms that were a defining feature of post 1950-60s North America, an issue dealing primarily with financing theatres arose in urban centres. A deluge of new artists met with an absence of space, forcing them to go elsewhere to create. In the span of seven years, between 1971 and 1978, theatre artists shot outward from the crowded cities to seed across the rural landscape, creating theatres in town halls, churches, and derelict farms, even going as far as to revive the mountebank (or the "travelling repertory") tradition and taking their shows on the road. The theatre created here was by necessity tailored to its audience – and the smaller and generally more inaccessible audiences required a certain flavour of theatre in order for the creators to remain successful. This rural theatre, owing to explicit communication between artist and community for its existence exhibited a number of the traits mentioned that define a national theatre. In addition, as we shall see, many theatres working in isolation developed along similar paths that work towards similar goals. There are, from coast to coast, theatres that produce professional work done in significant part, if not in totality, by Canadian artists inspired by issues and concerns to create work that speaks in their voice. Further, a rural theatre satisfies another condition by having a documented strengthening effect on the cultural identity of the community. Rural theatre not only reflects the stories and concerns of rural people, it also gives strength to the positive and attractive aspects of rural life, ensuring its continued existence against the devastation of urban sprawl.

A brief caveat that is necessary before any discussion begins as to the validity of rural theatre as a national cultural framework is that a limit needs to be placed on the range of what is considered rural Canadian theatre. Any theatre produced in rural areas is not necessarily "rural theatre". For the purposes of this essay, rural Canadian theatre is produced in a community that identifies as rural according to the federal definition: an area containing a population density of 400 persons or less per square kilometre, or less than 1000 persons in the population centre (Government of Canada, "Population, Rural and Urban, by Province and Territory*")*. Generally the major industry within the community would also be specialized towards production; in this case farming, maritime or isolated production as well as tourism. Furthermore, as the criticism of the Great Canadian Theatre Company touches on, an urban theatre producing a rural work is not considered rural theatre as it is removed from important contextualization. Rural theatre in urban spaces might benefit intercultural dialogue, but also runs the risk of being seen as "quaint," by an urban audience not aware of the significance of certain themes or issues. I will also be focusing on theatres that produce new work by Canadian artists at least semi-regularly, if not in totality. This avoids issues of rural theatres producing Shakespeare or Shaw, such as the Stratford Festival of Ontario or the Shaw Festival of Niagara-on-the-Lake, which do not necessarily add anything to the discussion of national identity. Rural Canadian theatre, although not a perfect answer to the original questions posed in this essay, takes great steps towards the formulation of the answer. By

examining what it can do as well as the challenges faced in its production, a new way at looking at Canada's national cultural identity as a translocal identity may arise. If rural Canada is part of the answer to the question "what is Canadian Theatre?" then a closer look must be taken into what these theatres are, what they create, and how they interact with their communities. For this to be possible, I will be using several major theatre companies as primary examples of the "rural experience", and determining how their work affects both the community and theatre nationally.

The Blyth Festival (Blyth, Ontario) and Caravan Farm Theatre **(**Armstrong, British Columbia), and Mulgrave Road (Guysborough, Nova Scotia) are three moderately sized theatres that produce new work, with mandates that require the production of work to exemplify the "rural experience" of their geographic area. There is a vast difference in geography between the two theatres, isolating them while at the same time highlighting the similar development path each has taken and the resultant impact on their respective communities. This development is what sets these theatres and similar companies across the country, as a distinct and cohesive group – despite difference in population demographics, geography, industry, and cultural saturation. These companies tackle issues of Canadian identity and create a space where the community is self-reflected, stimulating cultural growth and controlling that growth in a way that emphasizes the "Canadian-ness" of Canadians. In order to properly see how

and what these theatres create, investigation into what is being created and how these theatres were formed will need to be contrasted with rural culture theory.

Because of the isolation and geographically instigated differences between the theatres, one would think that it would create a very broad and generally region-specific selection of work. Each theatre possesses a wholly unique makeup, with different methods of economic production and levels of affluence, and producing work explicitly for the associated community would classify these theatres as regional, rather than working towards translocality. However, as we look into the intentions of these theatres, we shall see that there are remarkable similarities between them, linking them together within a greater frame of nationally translocal identity formation. In Blyth, the theatre emphasizes its area of the province and professional status: "founded in 1975 to produce professional repertory theatre that reflects the culture and concerns for the people of southwestern Ontario and beyond" ("About Us," 2013). Meanwhile Caravan Theatre focuses on the audience it serves specifically:

> Caravan's artistic mission is to create meaningful, popular theatre for a broad and diverse family audience. We make our theatre meaningful by creating original works that explore political and social issues, and whose settings, characters and language are a reflection of the contemporary rural British Columbian experience ("History," 2013)

Similarly, in Nova Scotia, Mulgrave Road Theatre company links back to the community: “a pioneer of new play development, Mulgrave Road Theatre initiates and seeks out theatrical works that stimulate empathy, human connection and reflection, and that reveal the soul within the socio-cultural context of rural and historical Nova Scotia.” (“About,” 2011-2013). The emphasis on new play development ensures that as the “soul” of Mulgrave’s community changes, so will the focus of the work.

These three theatres are examples of a larger trend that, although using different description, seeks to accomplish two objectives. First they are all looking for theatre that is reflective of the community, speaking to the experience, context, or concerns of that community. The second objective is stated outright by Blyth, but can be seen in the production histories of the other two. They are all driven to create meaningful theatre for those “beyond” the strictly geographical boundaries their communities reside within.

There is an emphasis on a potentially national level in each mandate, showing a drive to create work that is meaningful to a larger body than simply the region and immediate community. By looking at the country as a whole, we begin to see a pattern developing, despite geographical difference and isolation, of theatres creating work that is important to Canadians, by Canadians. Theatre developing in rural areas provides a base by which rural Canadians can see their own society represented and reflected on the stage, unifying local concerns, and

allowing for a translocal exchange to develop. While rural theatre as translocal is the focus of this thesis, the majority of Canada can also benefit from this community-minded theatre, creating translocal nodes within urban, sub-urban and other non-agrarian spaces.

The use of a "unified" (but not centralized) national vision of Canada's theatrical identity is manifold. First, it would allow for the field of Canadian theatre studies to advance under terms not steeped in American and British colonialism; Canada is its own entity and while it claims to have its own art and identity, there is a notable lack of representation of many different facets of the Canadian voice outside of small-venue and transient festivals. The imbalance of representation that still exists in the Canadian mainstream speaks to the colonial influence Canada is functioning under. Simply defining ourselves with what we are not creates a space for anxiety that does not exist when a solid understanding of who we are is possible. Furthermore, a strong understanding of theatrical identity would allow for the creation of theatre that is free from the regime of restraint seen in many of Canada's most prolific theatre makers such as Robert Lepage, Sharon Pollock and Judith Thompson. This regime is visible in mainstream Canadian theatre, where a form of idyllicism exists that prevents dialogue regarding sensitive issues to be discussed on our larger stages, and its existence hurts the formation of national identity by reducing or ignoring its negative aspects while homogenizing it through a lack of concerns. Amos once again locates the underlying issue of identity in Canada in the fact that our arts

are late comers when it comes to forming our identity. She writes in her memoirs, *Rural Roots:*

> Until fairly recently our sense of ourselves as Canadians has come to us through our politics, our social institutions, and through sports and military history. The reflection of our culture through the arts has taken longer to develop, but it has given us confidence and confirmed our individuality. (Amos 10)

If Canada wants to keep the ideological structure of the multicultural mosaic that permeates our popular imaginary, a theatre and a culture that unify as a nation but value the individual is equally necessary. Commercial and international theatre that is concerned with the tropes of the lumberjack, the cold, and the spectacle of the Canadian without delving into the diversity within the nation is short-sighted in terms of cultural production because it ultimately essentializes what is otherwise a complex society. By creating a blanket of attributes that is "the Canadian" we lose the individual pieces while trying to look at the whole, and similarly, by creating work that only touches the community, and seeks to go no further, we are left with regional theatre as Bessai defined it. Two other popular modes of creation also negate some of the cultural mosaic - colonial theatre by its nature privileges dominant ideology at the expense of others, and theatre of discrete ethnicities, while it certainly has value, does not bridge cultural gaps to create a true hybrid culture. By shifting the focus of the nation from the landscape and the stereotypes indicative of it, to

a people that are diverse yet united on a few fundamental levels, a larger and more complex picture of national identity emerges, one to which more unique voices can contribute.

CHAPTER TWO: Constructing the Theatrical Nation: The North, the Regions, and the Local

While rural Canada boasts many theatres that fit the criteria established in the first chapter for producing rural Canadian theatre, we will be focusing on one in particular, the Blyth Festival of Ontario, due to its long history of successful creation and relatively high profile. Blyth represents a premiere example of the interaction between rural theatre and rurality but is not confined strictly by its communities' stories. Other companies, such as the Caravan Farm theatre and Mulgrave Road theatre will also be analyzed to demonstrate the simultaneous correlation of rural theatre mandate in different locations.

Before delving into the particularities of rural theatre and its potential representation of the nation, it is necessary to clear some terrain in terms of the unifying trope that defines Canadian art in general, and theatre in particular, namely the idea of the North. On first appearance, the Great White North defines us in practical, historical and cultural ways as a place where all Canadians can envision a common value in a mythical, largely-untouched natural landscape. Sherrill Grace identifies the North in her book *Canada and the Idea of North* as an Orientalized series of tropes and themes that depict Canada as a wild, desolate and beautiful land. It avoids mention of the people and places, and emphasises instead the pioneer-evoking sense of conquest that is tied into the colonial settling of the nation. The North presupposes a blanket set of attributes structured in a way that prevents evolution from matching the growth and

cultural transformation occurring constantly on national and regional levels, potentially misrepresenting the audience it seeks to define.

The local emphasis of rural theatre presents a flexibility that the North does not provide. By focusing on local concerns, rural Canadian theatre benefits by evolving along with its associated community. Obviously the society of urban Canada is different than that of rural Canada and the aesthetic and stories reflected there are by necessity different as well. However, when viewing community or local focus as central to understanding the translocal framework that is potentially accessible nationwide, rural and urban theatre become prime candidates as translocal nodes. By beginning with the intentions, then moving to the practical application of this local focus, the value of these theatres as examples of translocality becomes clearer.

Located in Blyth, Ontario, The Blyth Festival theatre is a 444 seat auditorium featuring a proscenium stage. The Blyth Memorial Hall, within which the theatre is situated, was slated for demolition in 1973, but was saved and repurposed for its current use by director James Roy and members of the local community (Muir 30). It re-opened in 1975 and boasts the production of Canadian plays exclusively. From its inception until the present, Blyth has been the site of at least 112 world premieres from both established and new artists. The theatre is funded primarily through private and government sponsorship and benefits from a strong cadre of volunteers. It has enjoyed a (relatively) successful campaign of seasons, aside from the period between the 1992 to 1994 seasons.

During this period, an attempt was made to draw the festival away from its roots and start producing work that would "extend the theatre's demographic line to include younger audiences" (Muir 31). This included doing work that strayed in both content and form, as well as stopping the focus on local concerns.

Blyth's mandate has been expressed in many derivations of the same thought: "a community based theatre that endeavours to enrich the lives of its audience by producing and developing plays that give voice to both the region and the country" (Muir 30), or "theatre that reflects the culture and concerns for the people of southwestern Ontario and beyond." ("About Us" 2013). Important to this essay is the second "and" in both statements. Indeed, several plays that feature specific local issues also key into larger-reaching concerns of safety, family, and loss. Some of the most successful work at Blyth taps into these more universal ideas by taking local stories and endowing them with the aforementioned thematic content. *The Outdoor Donnellys* (Blyth Festival Company, 2001), for instance, is an historical play about an infamous family from Southern Ontario that was brutally murdered. There were a number of accused persons but no arrests were ever made. This story is of obvious local concern because it deals with an embarrassing omission of justice and religious persecution within this particular community (the Donnellys were reviled in large part because they were Catholics living in close proximity to more wealthy Protestants). It becomes connected to a larger discourse when considered within the timeframe it was produced. After 2001, when the play was first performed, a

curator of a museum in the family's hometown of Lucan was interviewed about the significance of the piece, and located its importance nationally: "Because immigration happens all of the time...it's the same issue Muslims face – the persecution. How does a group of 30 decide to kill an entire family? They can't all be bad people" (Scott 2010). Viewed within the context of rural society, *The Outdoor Donnellys* transforms from a local tragedy into a commentary on the misconceptions and bigotry that continue to exist when viewing religious, ethnic, or cultural difference. While the issues facing many immigrants are different than those found in 1880, the essential tragedy remains resonant. However, by taking a regional docudrama as the basis for a more national construction of identity, one runs the risk of making the part stand in for the whole, and questions the very need of defining a whole at a time where identities are splintered by nomadism, hybridity, migration, and ethnic, regional and class disparities. In some ways, searching for a national identity may be complicit with neoliberal attitudes that only create the façade of a cultural evolution that covers up degeneration. The claim of multiculturalism potentially remains non-threatening so long as it is governed by capitalism's market forces that give us a false sense of security within a framework of commercialization of ethnicity. Seyla Benhabib among others warned that multiculturalism turns culture into property, even commodity, allowing for the systematic maltreatment of individuals within a multi-culture under the guise of cultural equity. For multiculturalism to function within a democratic setting, Benhabib advocates the

necessity of a “complex multicultural dialogue,” (102) as opposed to the current standard model of equal and isolated representation. This is the primary reason why previously discussed prolific Canadian theatre-makers, whose success should entitle them to more leverage, are constrained to only dealing with negative or controversial Canadian cultural artifacts peripherally, if at all.

As problematic as “the regional versus national” paradigm is, it is important to acknowledge that it provides a lens to look at Canadian cultural production in a complex geo-political landscape. This complexity is evident in another play produced at Blyth, *Quiet in the Land* (1981 and 1997). Written by Anne Chislett, a playwright and former artistic director at Blyth, *Quiet in the Land* deals with the difficulty of youth within Mennonite society in Canada, especially those who wish to leave their community. Locally, this speaks directly to the attrition of youth in rural life, but nationally it touches on the importance of family, the need for self-discovery and patriotism or pride, and the tendency to view difference as negative. Important to this discussion is the distinction that *Quiet*, unlike for instance the more popular and “safe” *Wingfield Cycle* series by Dan Needles that idyllicises rurality, showcases the fallacy in viewing difference as negative. This refusal to side with the xenophobic, isolationist tendencies of the rural community while simultaneously speaking to that community demonstrates how self-reflection through theatre can work to question the dominant ideology without disrupting the process of identity formation.

By careful work selection, the Blyth Festival shows how it can appeal to a local audience and be reflective of their beliefs and culture while remaining important to a wider-reaching dialogue in Canada. Blyth opens up a space of reflection by adapting local stories to a larger framework and making the important and meaningful subtext within the works produced apply to the community. Particularly important is that the work is not so much about the Blyth community, in that the pieces are not necessarily about the area, but they are about "them," cognizant of the concerns and issues being faced by the community. Looking towards another theatre of note, it becomes apparent that Blyth is not unique in its mission.

The Caravan Farm Theatre, in the Okanagan region near Armstrong, British Columbia, was originally founded in 1978 as the Caravan Stage Company. At the time, it was an actual caravan-style mode of performance; the artists would travel the country in a self-contained theatre unit, performing to venues both rural and urban. In 1983, the company split in two, with one iteration remaining in Ontario as the Caravan Stage Company, and the other settling on a rural property in British Columbia under the name Caravan Farm theatre. The theatre created at Caravan is not a conventionally staged theatre, but rather an "open-air" platform, with performances taking place at numerous locations around the property, both indoors and outdoors. The concept of "open-air" performance is integral to the production style and mandate of Caravan, and

shows another particularity of Canadian theatre – a connection to the physical, natural world:

> Open-air theatre means theatre without walls. It is the removal of walls - whether between parts of one's self, fellow performers, actor and technician, actor and audience, or between human being and the natural world - that is at the heart of how and why the Caravan Farm Theatre works. A shared belief in our interconnectedness with the land and its inhabitants influences the form, content, and method of working at the Caravan Farm Theatre. (Anderson 8)

The theatre houses a majority of its artists on-site: a staff of approximately forty members during the summer season, with around a dozen members year-round. Unlike the Blyth Festival, Caravan produces throughout the year, although its peak activity occurs during the summer months. It is also more than simply a theatre: Caravan has created an entire small community around it, including a farmer's market and a Clydesdale breeding program (Anderson 9). These Clydesdale horses are both practical and performative, and are employed as both stage characters and farm workhorses. This aspect solidly cements Caravan as a rural space complete with its flora and fauna. The theatre is both artistic and practical, and the dual nature of its creations can be seen reflected in the rural community it serves. By not simply being a theatre, but a cultural hub with a central art form, Caravan has an incredible potential effect on the perception of the audience, shaping both their views of the art, and of themselves. Caravan's

mandate echoes Blyth's, despite being thousands of kilometers away and using a wildly different method of creation. Caravan is able to reflect its audience in a way that strengthens their image of themselves while offering a representation of the rural experience that serves a touring audience. Unlike the GCTC, Caravan's first loyalty is to the representation of its community. As a result it can produce works showcasing less idealized depictions of Canadian history, such as Linz Kenyon's *I.O.U. Land* (2005), which deals explicitly and unforgivingly with the usurpation of land by "Canadian" settlers, and comments on the fallout of that practice.

It should also be clarified that these few theatres already mentioned are not the only examples of this "here and beyond" mentality: a repetition of these intentions can be found elsewhere. When these rural theatres are taken and looked at from strictly an issue of mandate, a pattern begins to form that describes theatre created in Canada, by Canadians, about Canadian issues and concerns. While intention does not necessarily equal action, these theatres have continued to uphold their mandates through the production of locally-focused work. This reinforces the confidence that, despite deviating from the formula of musical, spectacle and safety that heavily commercialized theatre exploits, these theatres will continue to embody their local concerns.

It is important to remember here that regional theatre is not national theatre, and it could be argued that many of these theatres are advertising

regional interests. However, when one looks at the concerns these theatres are translating into performance, a style and method emerge that reach across the country, despite geographic differences. As we look at the use of rural theatre to rural communities, this super-regional quality becomes clearer. There are problems inherent with isolating Canadian theatre in a purely regional manner, and leaving the evolution of cultural identity at a regional figuration. To adhere to a national framework, the potential for communication to occur between communities is necessary. Furthermore, if Canada is represented wholly by regionalism, it cannot benefit from the distinction of being a multicultural mosaic.

Diane Bessai points out many issues with the current view of Canadian theatre in her article "Regionalism of Canadian Drama." Regionalism, in Bessai's view, is normally thought of as a dividing factor, and often given the negative connotations "narrow, limited, parochial, backward, out-dated or isolationist" (Bessai, "Regionalism" 7). However, in the case of Canadian theatre, she suggests that it is actually the opposite result that occurs, taking from Northrop Frye the idea of Canadian culture as a "'decentralizing movement,' finding genuine unity the opposite of conformity" (11). The implications are that a more specific piece of theatre, one that appeals to a specific region is actually indicative of a wider phenomenon, due to the nature of growth in the country from isolated population pockets to a more connect, globalized society. When this ideal of decentralization in Canadian theatre is applied to rural theatre, we begin to see

that discrepancies in production style, or actual content performed matter less and that the necessity for creating content that is self-reflective of the locality becomes the focus of importance.

An important distinction about regionalism is that geography is not the main issue at work, that self-reflective theatre is not limited to stories about the community or region. If it were, then the issue of appealing to a wider audience, or tapping into a national ideology would be negated. Looking historically at theatre created in rural Canada, the issue becomes one of finding the importance in the social and cultural concerns of the people, not simply the area they occupy. In a piece about the theatre development of Paul Thompson in rural Ontario, Bessai argues that in around 1971 a major shift in regional theatre development occurred: "Thompson has already begun to shift from his 'it happened here' stance […] to the more immediate interest of 'this is about us.'" (Bessai, *Canadian Dramatist* 64). The importance of this shift is that it occurred almost immediately before the explosion of theatres in rural Canada (Blyth being an earlier example and Caravan coming later into the movement). The realization that theatre can be about a people, but not specifically cater to their locality, allows the theatre to remain meaningful and reinforces the rural life-system that differs significantly from the urban lifestyle. *The Farm Show*, a collective creation by Paul Thompson that began in southern Ontario but found audiences all over the country, is nominally about the people from Clinton, but speaks to a more general life. *The Farm Show* evokes the anxiety of change and the consequences

that come along with it: a familiar issue facing rural communities across the nation, but particularly in those areas where urban sprawl has created the pressure to move. The story of the Tebbutt family giving away their farm to a younger and more tenacious family (Johns 25) would strike a chord with any landowner being offered a payment to replace their land with a new highway, as had happened in many places throughout Ontario in the late 1990s. Indeed, the people currently living in Clinton may not even have any connection to the original production, but the issues and concerns brought up within in it persist, as evidenced by Blyth's continued success in portraying the rural community. Blyth continues to create work that deals with issues surrounding farming, globalization, and the impact change has on community, all of which concerned the people of Clinton in the 1970s. The stories are now no longer specifically about the community, yet financially and critically the Blyth Festival still enjoys a similar amount of success. Theatre becomes the ideal vehicle for creating a kind of pan-national thought when its stories are transferable beyond the direct community like *The Farm Show's*, because it allows for a particular type of self-reflective work, one that "give[s] the community its own history back to them in the form of a heroic myth" (Bessai, *Canadian Dramatist* 77). When looked at as a piece of a cultural mapping, regionalism is a useful aspect in the formulation of Canadian theatre, but a new term needs to be determined, one that avoids the negative connotations associated with it, and one that does not negate the ability for our national theatre to be local without being isolationist, and wider-

reaching without being hegemonic. By taking the groundwork of regionalism's focus on the local and adding to it an element of communication between these local communities, a new artistic identity can be created. This identity will ideally lead to a theatre more representative of the people it claims to support, and more inclusive of voices that might not otherwise be heard.

Although there has been evidence against it, several groups have proposed ways to express the nation as a whole – the Dominion Drama Festival and Toronto Civic Theatre Association discussed earlier are two unfortunately unsuccessful examples of this attempt, stemming in part from their need to centralize a fundamentally de-centered nation. However, another method of creating national art is still ongoing, and adherence to its aesthetic has resulted in some of Canada's most well-known artists.

Looking into the issues and traps of representation, Sherrill Grace has aptly warned us that "we are not, neither as individuals nor as members of groups… free to represent ourselves or anything or anyone just as we wish" (Grace, *Idea of North* 24). To create a national representation, what socially and concretely constitutes that nation must be incorporated into that representation. Grace also recognizes the potential trap of representation, that if it is produced or received incorrectly it can "block the real by replacing it and directing our attention or desire away from complex lived experience of a heterogeneous reality towards a simulacrum" (24). Grace is referring to

Baudrillard's concept of the simulacrum, an object or process whereby the original is lost in an endless repetition of simulation. Interaction with simulacra creates a hyperreality, a place of synthesis without reference. This is a dangerous situation when dealing with identity formation because the hyperreal "no longer needs to be rational, because it no longer measures itself against either an ideal or negative instance. It is no longer anything but operational" (Baudrillard 1). Art that emphasizes the simulacrum satisfies the need for simulation, but at the cost of reducing and detaching the difference between true and false from the art. This absence of difference, Baudrillard says, creates an absence of meaning (2), which is the ultimate point of representation of identity. Theatre's live nature already removes the original and emphasizes simulation. Due to the temporal separation from its origin, a historically motivated trope such as the North is doubly dangerous.

The North, as Grace reports, is a trope that has been reproduced in Canadian art, from paintings to performance and music, as a tool for Canadians and the world at large to see what Canada stands for based on its obvious geographical location. The North is an entity as well as a thematic scheme by which a lot of famous Canadian art abides. The most prevalent, and likely well-known example of what the North *is* can be seen in the work of the Group of Seven. Their artwork depicts a sprawling, untouched landscape, where the audience is given to know that Canada is as beautiful as it is wild, cold, and desolate. This in turn conveys that the people who would tame the North must

be willing to explore and conquer its beauty and desolation. This colonial representation of the nation is problematic in that the pioneering aspect of Canada's growth has long since passed and has often come at the expense of ignoring Aboriginal history and their legitimate claims to sovereignty. As a theme claiming representational abilities, the North is largely inaccurate since most Canadians cluster along the southern border with the USA, primarily in developed urban centres and fertile rural areas that have nothing to do with the wild and desolate landscape of the Group of Seven. Although the North as a trope labours under a problematic, colonial and ultimately self-exoticizing position, some artists continue to delve into other aspects of it, and in so doing continue to commodify Canada's "wild" appeal to the world. Leoš Janácek, a Czech composer, recreates this very appeal by tapping into the "starkness of the North" (124), while Rudy Wiebe attempts to showcase the strength of the North by comparing it to the weakness inherent in Southern beaches (138). The North can embody the representation of inner psychological turmoil in the form of storms and blizzards, or in the isolation one feels. The North can be many things, as Grace puts it, it simply "depends on our position" (75). As a symbolic framework for a national culture, however, the North becomes problematic when looked at from the perspective of diversity and heterogeneity that is Canadian society and culture. Is the story of urban decay, gang violence, and ignorance (rural or urban) any less Canadian than that of "Man against nature" braving the elements courageously to "find himself"? The North can be an apt

trope to use within Canadian art. However, when used as the sole or primary structure under which art is developed, its problematic status can lead to stagnation, preventing our identity from growing or changing beyond strictly mystical, organic and ecological concerns.

The Canadian, as represented by the art of the North, is a stoic being, one that can endure hardships of life and nature and seeks to persevere against all obstacles. The "Canadians" of the North are strong, quiet, but prideful and "pure," in the sense of being both untouched by the corruptions of a decadent society. This pioneering element fosters a strong community spirit. And while this depiction is a noble, grand and flattering to some, it is built on a foundation that, in contemporary Canada, is very problematic.

The problem with the figuration of Canada-as-North, as Grace judiciously points out, is that it is a false one. Canada is predominately "South", a majority of its population lives along the borderline, and shares more in common culturally with the United States than the intrepid cold-weather adventurers portrayed in Northern art. The Northern Canadian is a myth, and some artists see this as a sign of hopelessness. When speaking about Murray Schafer's music, which attempts a national representation through depictions of the North, Grace reveals that even within the work of nationalists, the hope of Canada-as-North surviving is in danger: "Schafer sees no hope for *Canadian* art, which is 'an art of the North,' unless Canadians stop going, stop *being* South and become once

more, 'the unpainted observer in a Group of Seven painting'" (Grace, *Idea of North* 39). By holding onto the idea that Canadian art *is* an art of the North, the representations of Canada begin to stray from an actual representation of our society and culture. They are replaced with a false representation by reproducing the same Northern simulacra, the same ideas in our art and not adapting to a changing Canadian culture. Canada cannot help but be South, as Schafer calls it, because that is where its population is located. Actually, the natural landscapes of the Group of Seven, the great tundra and taiga expanse, are realities encountered by very few Canadians. Despite population growth over the last half-century, urban and rural development has pulled the concentration of its population steadily south. Furthermore, the days of settling are long over, Canada is a settled land, and the remaining bulk that is untouched will likely remain as such for a long time. While there may be a percentage of the population that does encounter the North as a fact of life, it remains that on a national scale, the North on its own is not able to support the myriad directions in which Canadian culture extends.

Historically, in theatre, the North seems to have come about as a resistance to what Alan Filewod in *Between Empires: Post-Imperialism and Canadian Theatre* calls the "penetration" of the Canadian stage by American capital (46). Theatre's development in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Canada went through major paradigm shifts, resulting in the separation of the Dominion of Canada as its own entity. It became recognized as separate by the

British Empire, and subsequently resistant to American influence. As Canada became a post-imperial nation acknowledging the colonial traditions and ties to the British monarchy, but being separate from it– it required a theatre that was distinct from the British Victorian drama that held a monopoly when it was a colony. Into this vacuum stepped American melodrama, and "by the end of the 19th century, theater in English-speaking Canada was largely an American enterprise." (46). This was viewed as a problem, both from an economic and social-development standpoint, as Canadian nationalists pointed out that social growth could be stunted or curbed towards American values that were considered "'alien' to the Canadian mind"(47). What came next was a resistance to this American influence, with Canadian artists striving to produce the essential defining quality of the nation's identity through art. Filewod views the need to define ourselves as proof of our separation from both the British Empire and American expansionism. Despite a lack of evidence supporting the unique outcome of this separation: "The search for 'true Canadianism' has always been an imperative project of Canadian theatre, and the continued failure to 'find' an essential national principle suggests one of the defining conditions of a post-colonial nationhood." (45). Filewod is suggesting that the then uncommon qualities of our nation (the diversity of race, religion, and class, and the assumed equal standing of said difference) were integral in developing our cultural identity, and the problems arose in reconciling a never-before encountered issue of *what* exactly Canadians are. This led to artists such as Herman Voaden

publishing *Six Canadian Plays* (1930) in the early twentieth-century and dedicating it to the North, pushing Canadians to write "Canadian plays about Canadian subjects and *places* [my emphasis]" (Grace, *Degrees of North* 124). From here, the connection to the land, and everything that the North signifies became linked to the definition of Canadian culture. However, this definition, while it served well to remove Canada from the miasmatic status of being neither British nor American, did not necessarily metonymically represent its people.

Despite the problems of the North, namely that culturally it does not truly exist, there is an element of its formation that is useful to consider when one tries to see the potential framework of Canadian theatre. Louis-Edmond Hamelin suggests that the North, if it is going to continue to be the resonant representation of the nation, needs to be bound within reality: "'reality' is, in part, the product of the interpretation put on things. The Canadian North is not exempt from this mental evolution." (qtd in Grace, *Idea of North* 49). Grace applies this notion of evolution to the mystical nature of the North and our desire to domesticate it: "the desire to know, name, identify, represent North persists" (Grace, *Idea of North* 49). This suggests that although the landscape on which Canada-as-North is based is not indicative of reality, there is something in the subtext or the content of Canada-as-North that is of importance to Canadian identity. But what if Thompson's idea, discussed earlier, that art in Canada cannot be about "here," but instead must be about "us", is more accurate? What

if what defines us is more about who we are and how we connect rather than where we live and how we tame the savage land? The basis for this shift may be more valuable to Canadian culture as we transition from the alien and detached landscape to a more recognizably important connector: the community.

In effect, the difficulty with Canada-as-North is related to tying the people intrinsically to the land at the expense of connecting to the people. The North privileges a particular figuration of identity that is not useful or transferable when looking at a community that is not necessarily defined by its surroundings. That is not to say that the landscape and natural environment are not important, however, indeed the North as a trope does have metaphorical value, so long as it is not the only trope by which Canadian-ness is identified. In order to define the community in a way that is not geographically, but rather locally based, a more translocally active figuration of the community is needed. Pierre Bourdieu offers a useful definition for a particular method of viewing a community in his version of the *habitus*. Habitus, originally conceptualized in Antiquity and more recently extrapolated by Mauss, Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu, are:

> 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).

Adapted to the fields of art and culture, the habitus becomes a cultural milieu that structures a particular group or community founded upon experience and history (54); and while it does not necessarily have a planned outcome, one arrives nonetheless by the interaction of the various elements of culture at play. By being an historical vehicle for creating more representative configurations (54), a habitus becomes the method by which a community solidifies its traditions and value systems. By viewing a rural community – or indeed all rural communities – as participating in the same or similar habitus (rather than landscape), the value of rural theatre as a cultural structure becomes all the more important. The self-reflective quality that allows rural theatre to become an external force enacting upon the habitus and its focus on community-oriented creation can be expanded and applied to other habitus as well. Urban centres, although generally more complex due to the increase in population density, also belong to a habitus, or are a collection of habitus. By creating work that speaks to these other habitus in the same practical manner that rural theatre speaks to its own, the solidification of urban tradition and value can also take place.

The North, although a useful element for unifying Canada, falls prey to time as its representation is dated by the contemporary lives its people are leading. Furthermore, the primacy of the North alienates a large section of the

country, suggesting their lives are somehow less “real”, a more exotic and wild one than the reality depicts. This process is called urbanormativity and creates an intra-national Othering by equating rurality, or anything outside urban life as uncivilized, rejecting the cultural significance of those people and collectives (Thomas 152). In effect, the North is urbanormative towards itself, creating a self-othering to maintain its legendary status. For the North to remain a mythological entity, it must create a wild area, and to many Canadians that area becomes anything that is not urban. It becomes a reachable North, one that could potentially exist and as such remains valid on the surface of the national mind. As Canada grows in its South, and indeed stops settling and pioneering entirely, a new method of representation must be found to replace the dated notions of the North. Beyond its inability to truly represent all (or at least most) of the people it needs to represent, the North becomes a less flexible trope the more settled Canada becomes. By looking in greater depth at the mechanisms by which rural theatre impacts its surrounding community, and the greater habitus of rural life in Canada, we shall see how its framework can be used to create a place for continued growth and evolution of contemporary Canadian culture.

CHAPTER THREE: The Uses and Abuses of Rural Theatre

Drawing on the field of rural studies, in this chapter I will be looking at the work produced by rural theatre in Canada and its effect on the moral, political or social value it creates. Important to this discussion are the function of theatre in a rural environment and the use of creating the self-reflective theatre that sits at the intersection of local and translocal representation. For the purpose of this discussion, I am borrowing Donia Mounsef's definition of the "translocal" as "the convergence of various social and cultural networks that emphasize locality in a globalized and networked context." Further, "the local is no longer isolated from the global mainstream; on the contrary, translocal forces flow between centers and margins where cultural economies and politics of other localities are part of our world without losing their local specificity" (Mounsef 2013).

While the land and landscape are central to rural life, as it is the method by which much of economic production occurs, rural theatre seeks to avoid the issues with connecting theatre to a landscape by focusing instead on the family, the community and the people. While ostensibly about a specific type of people – those that inhabit rural areas – rural theatre of the type I have described earlier, could easily translate to manifold audience types, and could indeed be transposed into different locales without losing the innate resonance that makes them 'Canadian.' This speaks to the rural habitus or locality: a space that is not

necessarily geographically bound, but recognizable and reflective of a specific group or groups. While my original delimitation of rural Canada is primarily geographically bound, the issue of what constitutes a rural community and what issues and concerns are linked to that community are not strictly geographically oriented. Rural Canadian theatre cannot simply be theatre about a particular place, but rather the people who could inhabit that place. Unlike urban theatre, rural theatre is judged by its function to the community as much as its artistic content. In an era of mass migration, internal displacement and suburban sprawl, a rural community is not necessarily conditioned by its relationship to geography.

In order to properly examine the local, and by extension the translocal, applications of rural Canadian theatre, David S. Craig's *Having Hope at Home* will be analyzed in conjunction with rural theory. Commissioned by Blyth and developed at the Lighthouse Theatre in Port Dover, Ontario, the play first premiered in 2003. It was later re-mounted at Blyth (2012), and at other venues including Richmond, B.C. (2007) and Hudson, Quebec (2009). Hope, the namesake of the play, is the soon-to-be-born child of Carolyn and Michel. These two are the primary signifiers of rural life, a young unmarried couple living in rural Canada with Carolyn's very rurally-stereotyped grandfather Russell.

The conflict and primary plot line of the play centers around Carolyn's attempt to appear as a successful, independent adult in front of her parents who

are from the City (intentionally unnamed), in the form of hosting a dinner party. Plans go awry when her water breaks shortly after the parents arrive, while issues of familial dysfunctionality arise as her labour is stopped by stress. Despite a seemingly dark content, the issues of the play are unearthed and resolved through a dry and sarcastic comic tone. The comedic value of the piece is what allows it to address issues surrounding the value of independence and isolation in rural life. Further, the overwhelming influence of technology in contemporary time, as well as the problems with accepting progress as inherently good or evil, and the importance of family ties over personal pride come to the forefront. The reach of *Hope*'s message is foregrounded by Eric Coates in a foreword to the script where he writes: "the time-honoured blend of celebration and strife within a squabbling family is simultaneously universal and specific to our place and time" (Craig 1). In this context, rural theatre relates to its communities' habitus, fulfilling its role as both a structuring structure, and as a vehicle for historical generation, as the community integrates the value systems touted by urban and rural life.

The issue visited most by the production of *Having Hope at Home* is that of the inexorable march of progress, which in rural communities is often paralleled with the intrusion of urbanity on rural life, or urban sprawl as a corrupting force destroying the quaint perfection and "purity" of rurality. In the play it is made manifest through the interactions between Carolyn's father, Bill, a pediatric doctor from the City Hospital, and Dawn, the midwife contracted by

Carolyn and Michael to aid in a home birth. By continually pointing out the risks associated with home birth, Bill sees this choice as a strategy that puts the child at risk. Beyond pragmatism, this reveals a dependence on technology as all of Bill's objections are phrased around the technology missing. Bill questions Dawn's lack of a portable ultra sound, wondering "how [she] can be sure of the presentation" (Craig 57). His defense regarding the use of a hospital is framed in technological terms as well: "A modern, well-equipped, professionally staffed hospital. It's an easy choice to make, isn't it?" (Craig 38). Technology then becomes the coveted piece missing from the equation of rural life or what Bill sees as ontologically imperative to the functioning of birth (and by extension the survival of the human race), and holds any other recourse in disdain.

Rural studies theorist, Marilyn Aronoff, referencing an earlier "dire" prediction about the disappearance of the rural community, posits that technology and the interrelation to it is an important issue in the foundation of a rural community. She states that although innovations in the fields such as transportation and communication have allowed for increased interdependence between rural isolation and urban economy, "it is important to determine what local strategies help rural residents remain a viable community" (Aronoff 204). Particularly, it is important for rural communities to be aware of the resources they do not possess. In her words, rural communities envelope "local values of survival and pragmatism [to] become foundations for constructing an economic development logic" (216). In the case of the community of *Hope*, the City

Hospital is the only referenced medical centre, and the depiction of the play's setting suggests a high level of isolation from this unnamed City (Craig 1). If there are inadequate resources available, the community must adapt, as in the character of the midwife Dawn. Dawn becomes an engine of economic development that makes up for a missing resource in a manner that does not compromise the rural identity of the community, or require the intrusion of an urban environment to make up for the lack. The issue of resources seems to conflict with earlier notions of urbanormativity – namely that the rural community is a "wild" place, lacking the creature comforts of urban life. However, the play settles beyond this surface dichotomy, proving once again the danger of normativity by producing a more complex relationship with technological and urban expanse.

Craig does not simply rest this issue of technological encroachment as a matter of rural resistance. Aronoff also argues that simply superseding urban enterprise with local strategies is not the key to successful development. Interdependence, as opposed to independence, is necessary for contemporary society. Craig explores this necessity following the ultimate confrontation between Dawn and Bill. As they settle differences and prepare for the home birth, Dawn admits to a shortcoming in her medical experience: "My mothers very, very rarely have tears but if there is one, I'm not very proud of my sutures" (Craig 76). This lack of technical skill is made up for through Bill's urban training which aids in the eventual birth. The conflict between Bill and Dawn that spreads

through the bulk of the production illustrates Aronoff's argument of rural development, suggesting that rural communities may require, but do not need to be ruled by societal progression, and benefit from interaction with it. In fact, through their communication and interdependence, both are reinforced, as Bill learns a number of "simple" methods of observing pregnancy from Dawn through observation.

When looking back to the potential for theatre to be a regime of restraint that affirms and entrenches the community's view of itself, it appears in the case of *Hope* that it has the potential to relegate rural ideology to a disdainful place with the initial damning reactions by Bill towards Dawn. However, it is also used to illustrate the importance of pragmatic adaptation in rural areas and the value of non-progressive technique over technology. Thus the contradictory forces manifest in theatre become appositional to each other, instead of working in strict opposition and the play begins to move beyond the regime by being willing to criticize the community's own views. The State Apparatus is satisfied by introducing the opportunity present in Bill's urban skill, but is problematized (and not negated!) by the introduction of Dawn. This apposition is seen again in a subtler manner when considering the characters of Russell, Carolyn's grandfather and housemate, and Jane, Carolyn's mother.

Russell and Jane are not antagonistic forces towards each other as in the case of Bill and Dawn. However, they do have very differing opinions on the

quality of life afforded by rural tenancy, and the lens through which they view the world illustrates two very different stances that, when considered in concert, give a similar result to the previous example of the "backward" nature of rural life. Russell was born in and plans to die near the house in which he is currently living – a house Jane charitably calls "cozy," several times, displacing her disgust with condescension towards a quaint rural life. On the other side, Russell views the City and its accoutrements as unnecessary: "I was born in this house. And you [Bill] were brought up in this house. And I don't remember any germs getting us" (Craig 51). While this viewpoint seems to innocently support rural life as equal in value to urban life, when viewed in context it becomes less prosaic and more problematic. In *Anti-Idyll, Rural Horror*, David Bell discusses the problem with the idyllicisation of rural life that can occur in medial representation of rurality. He locates the issue with idyllicism in oversimplifying rurality until it is either entirely positive or negative in its connotation; however he points out that the reality is never so easily demarcated: "Newcomers to the rural have always found aspects of country life less than Edenic […] from arriviste landowners confronted by nature red in tooth and claw to 1980s commuter –villages thrown into panic […] city folk have often found the countryside positively dystopian" (Bell 94).Bell seems to be approaching this issue from the standpoint of the American horror film franchise, but the same visitation can be applied to *Hope.* When Russell embodies the opinion that his rather squalid living conditions to being adequate, and puts the City as an oppositional force of excess, he is guilty

of the same idyllicism that leads newcomers to discover that rural life is not as simple as television and the media would have them believe. Rural people holding the same views as Russell can make the mistake of self-idyllicizing their own situation and over-simplifying urban life as well. Russell may not recognize this blind spot, but it is drawn to his attention repeatedly in the production, from Russell's treatment of a wedding gift as simply a tool (Craig 35), highlighting again his disdain for all things City-made, to his ignorance toward his inability to truly cope with the loss of use in his hands (14). Because he works hard, and relates this work to his rural state, Russell becomes inured to the decaying conditions around him, and substitutes his own perception of rural-as-ideal regardless. *Hope* does not support this idyllicism, and indeed nearly kills Russell for trying to hold onto it, placing once again the onus on the rural audience to recognize their own biases while not negating their way of life.

By considering idyllicism as a problem with rural-centric viewpoints, Jane becomes an interesting character to uncover. In opposition to Russell, she holds an urban oriented view that country life is simple while viewing this simplicity in a negative light. It is revealed in an early exchange that she is uncomfortable with the home Carolyn is living in:

Carolyn: That's why we like it in here.

Jane: Where it's cozy.

Carolyn: Yes.

Jane: Well then…

They sit in silence. (Craig 20)

This awkward moment is one of several, as Jane never outwardly vocalises her distaste for the home. In the production at Blyth, however, it was made clear by actress Michelle Fisk that politeness was merely a vocal mask poorly placed for her daughter's benefit (*Having Hope at Home*). While this distaste of the backwardness of rural living might signal another two-sided apposition like that seen in the comparison of Bill and Dawn, Jane exposes another side that shows the effects of the community on the State. Jane is very traditional in her conception of family and family life events like marriage; the only outburst she makes during the course of the play's events is when she discovers the couples' plan to have an at-home impromptu wedding, and when criticized by Dawn for her reaction, Jane reveals her desire for tradition, stating "I know your type. You don't do anything properly" (64). The projection of her disappointment in her daughter's choices onto Dawn is clear in this moment, and she is later revealed to be frightened of becoming a "feminist" (66). What these outbursts show is a desire towards tradition and domesticity in women, which is nominally a rural trait. This becomes contrasted with Jane's status as a City woman, which would assume a tendency towards female empowerment. The confusion created between image and opinion here mirrors the ideological reception of these ideas. As a State Apparatus, the theatre in this case is being used to further urban power by privileging the living style of urban people, while at the same

time creating a space where an outdated stance on gender equality can be removed or put into negative light. This character, then, is an example of the collusion of theatre-as-progress and theatre-as-repression, as it is neither one nor the other, and neither category is exclusive.

While the problematization of both Russell's and Jane's viewpoints may seem to set up a zero-sum neutrality, the issue at hand is whether or not the habitus is affected in totality by the State or by theatre for change. Russell and Jane set up stances on rural life that are oppositional to each other, but neither is deemed eminently right. As a result, *Hope* offers a view whereby fundamentals of rural life are seen as viable, just as viable as urban counterpoints. To prevent the reinforcement of misguided rural superiority, the caveat remains that simply because life exists in rural areas; it is not intrinsically better than urban life and may even find value in help from outside sources.

A final example of *Hope*'s manipulation of the beliefs of the rural habitus is seen in the purpose of Carolyn and Michel, the soon-to-be parents of the play. Carolyn is stubborn and hard-working, as evidenced by her need to have the gathering even at the onset of her labour, and her constant need for independence from all assistance. While this begins as another example of the potential for *Hope* to limit rural identity as idyllic, Carolyn becomes the site for restructuring thought as her own selfishness and fear is brought out. When confronted with the idea of telling her parents about her choice of having a

home birth or simply lying to ease her troubles, Carolyn says “I can’t tell them the truth […] It’s rude. Tell them I’m sick” (48). With this declaration, Carolyn’s less desirable personality arises, questioning of the stability of rural identity as idyllic and weakening in the audience the power of rural tropes. Carolyn causes the potential audience to question their own view of their identity by removing the surface of the hard worker and revealing that underneath she is as fallible as anyone. If she remains truly identified as rural, as per her desire to stay and live in the house her mother objects to, then being rural cannot simply correlate to being preferable to those of the opposing urban society. Here, we are witnessing perhaps a reversal of Bourdieu’s “symbolic struggle” by which the dominant culture:

> produces its specific ideological effect by concealing its function of division (or distinction) under its function of communication: the culture which unites (a medium of communication) separates (an instrument of distinction), and legitimates distinctions by defining all cultures (designated as sub-cultures) in terms of their distance from the dominant culture (Bourdieu 80).

Not only is the dominant urban culture denied its ideological superiority by Carolyn’s choices, but rural culture is also reassigned symbolically as the site of possible hybridity and heterogeneity.

A similar reversal of this figuration occurs when considering the character of Michel. He is a francophone and, as a result, becomes synonymous with the

"other", the one from "away." Contact with his relatives is made during the play in French over the telephone. By foregrounding his connection to a faraway place, Michel would seem to be set up as a foil by which a rural audience could question its own Anglo-nationalism. As the ultimate intrusion on rural life, a person from, not only a City, but a "foreign" city where the "other" language is spoken, Michel would represent the urban (bilingual) State impressing itself, literally inseminating itself into rural life. Moreover, he is given the task of being the main purveyor of farcical comedy in the piece, showcased in his hurried and rambling attempt to disguise the impending at-home wedding,

> Well, the baby is not coming so we wanted to make a prayer to God for help and giving a Bible would make it a good prayer, like an amplified prayer so it would go straight to God, you know? Direct, ping, right into God's head and then… well then he has to help and we have a baby. Where's the Bible? (Craig 64).

Michel's real value as a character comes with the realization that of all the people in the household, he is likely the most positive about reaching a compromise; he supports Carolyn, but attempts to make her listen to her father, without fully collapsing to his wishes. Even though he is the most "from away" character, he becomes the champion of the "home," creating a confusing perspective that could either be seen as supporting an urban domination of ideology as he is the voice of reason, or affirming a rural order that needs little

change. Because this choice is open and ambiguous, the play does not necessarily finalize its opinion on what is right or wrong. Consequently, the moral decision-making is once again placed upon the audience.

In *Having Hope at Home*, we witness a tendency towards creating a space where the community is treated as a diverse object, not simplified by external stereotyping or folklore. It paints the picture of a family unit that is imperfect and problematic, but with tenacity and persistence which echoes some elements of the "Northern" Canadian identified by Grace but without the sentimentalism of landscape. Marked by the ignorance of commercial progression, resistance to encroachment, and the potential dangers of living in the wild Canadian expanse, the rural becomes a translocal northern space but without the idealization. By being connected to a community, the translocal rural has the potential to relate to any community or locality that has faced similar concerns. Instead of only being connected to an unchanging landscape, *Having Hope at Home* is connected to a wider range of issues dealing with and challenging the community. Hints of the North and of the settler spirit ensure *Hope* is not ignoring the past, either colonially or artistically, but the emphasis remains on the local, on the community. Future productions can take the ideas in *Hope* and adapt them as the community itself adapts to the changing world. .

Beyond being a potential framework from which a nationally motivated translocal identity can be formed, rural-as-translocal theatre serves a particular

socio-cultural purpose to the communities in which it is produced. Vassilios Ziakas and Carla Costa, speaking to the figuration of theatre as an event, locate the use of rural theatre as a constantly renewing and shifting element in the formation of rural culture. In their view "[e]vents are conceived as occasions that bring together and (re)interpret various symbolic elements of the social existence of a group or community, with the effect of re-creating social relations and the symbolic foundations underpinning everyday life" (Ziakas 9). Theatre not only creates a space for social interaction and relation, but also infuses the audience with a value system that affects their view of rural life. By creating values that suggest a positive but not oversimplified lifestyle, and emphasizing the potential for strength among those in the community, rural-themed plays have the opportunity to strengthen the actual culture they reflect. This is particularly important when one considers youth culture in rural communities. While speaking about communities in Australia, Cassidy and Watts locate a potential issue that is prevalent in rural areas in Canada as well: the problem with youth attrition. Without positive reinforcement, there is no reason for youth to stay in a rural community, or return to one after gaining the necessary skills to act as a fully-functioning member of society; "rural locales are losing a vital component of their social capital: the critical mass of young people who would provide […] dynamic energy, future-oriented ideas, leadership and cultural continuity" (Cassidy 34). This theme persists in several rural plays, *Lost Heir* by Sean Dixon being a notable one. In it, the character of Warren embodies the

desire to leave at all costs, stating that "[f]ive weeks ago all I wanted was to hitchhike to Goderich and try to hawk your cell phone. And do you know why?... to get me out of this place." (Dixon 44-45). However, as the play progresses, he becomes the focus of positive reinforcement of the value of his community. The play does not stress the issues forcing him from the community, but rather views the need for flight as a negative action. While we may be tempted to view this as a rural play ignoring the issues at hand, namely the reason Warren needs to leave, *Lost Heir* instead focuses on the relationships within the community Warren has isolated himself from, and the deficit of character he receives because of that lack (61). Rural theatre as a cultural strengthening point, along with interaction with other cultural producers such as festivals and sports seeks to persuade youths to realize what they could be leaving behind, and attempts to implant values seen as useful in rural Canada should those youth eventually leave for urban centres anyway. This could lead to a lowest-sum homogenization scenario, where eventually the rural and urban habitus are merged through continual contact with each other. That said, I choose to view it as a potential boon for multiculturalism and diversity, wherein instead of isolated groups with particular cultural notions, Canadians will be able to view their reality from several different cultural points without privileging one over the other. The communication between local nodes as youth migrate creates a translocal framework. Translocalism in this case becomes a herald of transformation as well as cultural strength, further exposing the complex potential within Canadian

culture. The hybridity inherent in this translocal dialogue can only be established if the multiple habitus across the nation are given the chance to develop and connect to one another. Such a connection is possible because of our networked societies where other places are constantly reconfigured as part of our own. Being local (or rural) in this context is a myth, since imagining and representing the here and now is crossed by the global, or the influx of information from around the world.

This global-localisation posits a major challenge to both the construction of national identity and to the very idea of the north as a unifying trope. In a changing nation like Canada, we are well past the pioneering and settler mentality reflected in our early drama. While totally dismissing these tropes is akin to removing the historiographical basis for newly created local theatre, they cannot be the primary method of generating meaning of identity. Conversely, rural theatre is bound to a people, not a landscape, and as such must evolve with its shifting population, ideology, and symbolic struggles. This evolution is fittingly evident in the reviews of a newly produced play at Blyth, *Beyond the Farm Show*. Collectively created and directed by Severn Thompson, *Beyond the Farm Show* looks at the community in a similar manner to how her father's production *The Farm Show* did decades prior. As it has only just premiered worldwide, there is no script available for consideration; however reviews of the production suggest that it is not simply treading old ground of idyllic rurality but rather actively

reflecting the contemporary community. In a local news review, the contemporary themes and concerns of the production are highlighted as follows:

> There are glimpses into modern day dairy farming, livestock auctioning that is dwindling, high tech chicken farming, the resurgence of organic traditional farming, and Mennonite families. Some local political issues are addressed too, such as a wind turbine vote at a council meeting and school closures with a young couple concerned about the two-hour bus ride their children now have. (Cox 2013)

In another review, the particular style of creation is highlighted as indicative of rural Canadian theatre and its self-reflective nature. *Beyond* "is more than a compelling snapshot of farming today. It is a double reflection of the community — the community sees itself through the eyes of actors who are not from the immediate area" (Reid 2013). The continual nature of this production, that explicitly ties itself to the cultural history of the local community, shows the dynamic way in which localism can be expressed moving forward through time. It enhances the nature of Canada's multicultural identity by presenting a unique and complex culture, but does not overstep its limitations by masquerading as a national catch-all representation. Rather, it showcases the manner in which dialogue can be translocally created where the culture of the actors of one locality represent the locality of the community. The translocal ability of rural theatre translates into a potential for the creation of a unique alternative to national identity.

As a cultural producer, theatre in rural Canada is very important, both to the people and the understanding of Canadian multiplicity. It gives strength to the positive aspects of rural culture, while attempting to reframe the negative. Rural theatre works to circumvent the tendency to view rural areas as "quaint" or "untamed," or somehow lesser than their urban counterparts. However, like regional theatre, rural theatre has limitations that prevent it from assuming the mantle of Canadian national theatre.

While rural theatre may create a national framework, there are some inherent challenges with using it solely as the focal point by which the country identifies itself as Canadian. Rurality on its own is not sufficient to forming a central Canadian theatrical form. In its current form, creating socially challenging work is difficult within rural theatre, not because of the content, but rather due to its reception. In a rural community, the theatre space is likely a shared one – theatres built within town halls and community centres or vice versa. Caravan avoids this issue by having dedicated land reserved for its use, but it remains shared with other industries (markets, horse-raising etc.), and those audience members coming for both continue to view the theatre as an additional appendage to the market. The reason behind this perhaps, as Christine Hamilton and Adrienne Scullion point out in a discussion about rural theatre in Scotland, is that "the village hall venue is 'not a neutral space like a theatre'. This is a space where, as one actor put it, the artists are the guests of the audience, the reverse of the situation in a theatre or arts centre" (72). This relationship emphasizes the

need for self-reflective theatre, but also can fall prey to the trap of creating theatre for appeasement, or reinforcement of negative rural stereotypes, as opposed to fostering growth and challenging culturally entrenched views of self and other.

Looking back at *Hope* as an example of the State Apparatus, the themes and concerns within the play could be used by the dominant ideology as a method for portraying, reinforcing, or encouraging negative morals or life-values to be associated with rural life, such as the idyllic, backward stereotypes often portrayed in popular culture. Instead, attention is paid to aspects of rural life that serve as signifiers of progression and interdependence. Actors and other theatre creators coming in large part from urban areas creates an issue whereby essentially outsiders are left to determine what exactly constitutes as positive or negative portrayal of rurality, which could lead to a conflict of interest or misunderstanding due to social idyllicisation of the rural world. Blyth and Caravan have methods of integrating the urban and rural by forcing artists into the lives of their rural patrons, through billeting and a commune-like setting respectively. Indeed, in the case of Paul Thompson's *Farm Show*, and the more recent *Beyond the Farm Show,* we can see the value of an outside eye looking perhaps more objectively at the community and allowing its strengths to be reflected back. These productions have taken sometimes banal stories about wheat fields and tractors, and imbued them with the power of the event as described by Ziakas and Costa. As a result the community is able to take notice of

the cultural value contained within, and see themselves from an outside, but sympathetic viewpoint. Regardless of this communal sharing, however, not all theatrical projects in rural Canada are based on co-creating culture, and as such fall under the danger of misrepresentation.

There is also a block put in place on the creation of local theatre at the inception level. Mulgrave Road in its earlier seasons ran into issues when attempting to promote its mandate as worthy of funding from the Canada Council:

> The Canada Council, for example, funds *artists,* and early on responded to a Mulgrave Road grant application by asking whether the company's commitment was to its art or its community, commitments which the Council read as conflicting, and one of which was outside of *its* mandate. (Knowles 1992)

Beyond a debate of Mulgrave Road's artistic merit, the structure upon which art is created in this country is reliant on a philosophy that could put the creation of community-based work in danger. There are luckily a number of private sources devoted to the creation of meaningful and socially-impacting cultural products[2].

Evidently, rural theatre by itself is not enough to support a national identity (as I have mentioned in my earlier discussion of the reasons why this essay does not deal with Aboriginal and French-Canadian theatres), just as the

[2] The LIFT Philanthropy Partners, for instance, are devoted to " not-for-profit organizations to make them sustainable and more effective at delivering measurable social impact in Canada." (http://www.liftpartners.ca).

North could not keep up with contemporary Canada, but the framework it creates has promise when considered at a national level. One constant in the analysis of rural Canadian theatre has been the reflective aspect of the community, which we have expanded into the notion of habitus and the local. Canada, as a multicultural nation and one that stretches both geographically and culturally has the power to expand the sentiments tied into regional art and create something that embodies translocality. In any major city we find locality in the centres and festivals often devoted to minorities within the community, or to groups without greater representation in more commercial theatre. The problem with Canada's national art identity is not that it requires development, but that the representation of Canadians on the national art scene is relegated to these festivals and centres, often with little or no ability to translate into a more visible or accessible venue. Without manoeuverability, communication is stunted, and the local is not able to join into the network of the translocal. The issues of funding described briefly above are as common to these "fringe" groups as they are to rural theatres. As stated earlier, the multicultural desire found in Canadian art requires an exchange among sub-cultures, whereas for the most part the current theatrical and art model in the nation does not support such an exchange. Locality or local theatre, a type of creation that puts the community at the centre, creates a space where the performance both adheres to and challenges the value system of those watching. Local theatre can happen in a rural area or an urban one, and by finding the habitus that connects

communities, the translocal communication that can occur takes the local concern and makes it nationally relevant.

In conclusion, in order to bridge the gap between the isolation of regionalism and the homogenization of the problematic Canadian national identity, rurality must be considered on a translocal level. When local interests are interconnected and viewed on an evolving and adapting continuum they take on a translocal identity, allowing for an exchange or dialogue to occur between local areas, be it urban-rural, rural-rural, or urban-urban. As a potential translocal node, rural theatre is an important part of national identity formation, but only if it works in concert with other such nodes. The effect that translocalisation has on Canadian identity is one that would not sit well with cultural nationalists. Canadians have the ability to form a national identity, but the identity formed is much more complex, and less cohesive than a simple checklist of attributes and values to match against other nations.

CONCLUSION: From Local to Translocal

Canada is a country united in its difference and diversified. Although that difference makes it difficult to take one theatre, or one type of theatrical form, and place it in the national spotlight to signify what Canada *is*, the utilization of translocal theatre allows for the focus of what we call Canadian theatre to remain on Canadians, as opposed to a dated mythology, or be hampered by our colonial ties to exclude a majority of our citizens.

Art is a reflection and producer of culture, and if one thing can be determined through this essay it is that culture as a function of a society is not an edifice that can be left to stand on its own. Revisiting the demographics that brought about the focus on a rural theatre, Jack Jedwab, Executive Director for the Association of Canadian Studies, insists that we "view 'tradition' and 'culture' not as static, 'natural,' and unchanging but as ever-evolving ideas, constantly invented and reinvented by both dominant and minority culture groups through changing historical contexts" (Jedwab 13). Canada is in an ideal position to embrace this ideology due to the problematization of national identity that I have been discussing. The Canadian tendency to define through negation leaves a very flexible core culture to be manipulated into a place where the national depiction of the Canadian is defined by the issues most important to us, regardless of how many unique definitions and exceptions that results in.

The larger-than-life icon of Canadian literature, Margaret Atwood, has identified “survival” as the dominant theme in Canadian literature in her book of the same title. However, as we have debated, Canada as “the undiscovered territory,” as a vast “North”, as a garrison mentality, or the pioneering or “survivalist” culture, is often defined in negative terms: Canada is not British, not French, and certainly not American. The seduction of defining a Canadian theatrical identity through a rubric of geography, or perhaps more properly through locality has produced a kind of regional nationalism in theatre that seems to limit diversity and simplify an otherwise complex landscape.

We have explored the follies inherent in the dated thematic construct that is the North, and the problems with associating a particular theatre company or urban centre as the central point for our theatrical growth. Where regionalism can focus on the community while leaving it isolated, locality as established through the practical framework created in rural Canadian theatre brings the importance of community to the forefront. There are obviously long goals that need to be achieved in terms of representation of minority and majority in the centres where they exist, but the success of rural theatre in Canada touching a specific and nation-spanning habitus suggests that the possibility for success exists within the framework of the translocal. Rural theatre cannot satisfy a national need for identity, and in this it is like the theatre companies that have tried in the past, like the North, and any other attempts to centralize the nation’s identity. However, its self-reflective quality and

ideologically manipulative impact leaves no doubt as to its use to the not-insignificant population it was created for, and as a translocal node that could join together with other translocal nodes across the nation to give rise to a translocal Canadian identity.

Looking forward, research into the other habitus found within Canada can only strengthen the framework suggested here – while a lot of this argument is couched in a "rural versus urban" binary, urban centres in Canada are diverse villages within themselves and could contain many translocal nodes. The intercommunication of these nodes leads to a fundamentally different set of identities contained within and between the many Canadian urban centres. Cultural hybridity and culture mapping, touched on earlier in this essay, would clarify the extent to which particular voices are not being represented in Canada.

Canada's time as simply the Great White North has long past, it was and continues to be a problematic descriptor. We are neither white, nor North, but cling to the colonial depiction of the pioneer while we search for a more appropriate representation of what we are or are not. Contemporary Canada is neither suited to centrality nor to the complete isolation of regionalism, and despite the metaphorical use of the trope, we are more than simply blizzards, untouched land, hockey and snow. Canada may not be able to have a single, centralized seat of cultural production, particularly in its theatre, but as a country that is built on difference why should it seek to have one seat when it could have many.

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