

Theatre? Research? In? Canada?

Editor's Note¹

The authors gathered here explore what theatre research in Canada means today, what it has meant to past generations, and what it could mean for future ones. Most of the authors have written in response to the prompt: Theatre? Research? in? Canada? Several pieces also emerged from a special panel on “The State of Performance Research in Québec,” a joint session hosted by the Canadian Association for Theatre Research and the Société québécoise d'études théâtrales at the 2013 Congress of the Humanities meeting in Victoria, BC. I was delighted to read such a rich and diverse range of papers and hope that *TRIC*'s readers will share my enthusiasm, even if you disagree with some of the perspectives. I invite your responses and will aim to provide room in *TRIC*'s pages to allow the conversation to continue. [Please note: to preserve flow, all Endnotes and Works Cited have been placed at the end of the Forum section.]

What Are We Doing? From History to Research

SUSAN BENNETT

This is a proposal for a genealogical project that takes up the more than thirty years of this journal's print life. I start, then, with Michel Foucault's explanation of genealogy, or, at least, with his account of what it is not: “Genealogy does not pretend to go back in time to restore an unbroken continuity that operates beyond the dispersion of forgotten things; its duty is not to demonstrate that the past actively exists in the present, that it continues secretly to animate the present [. . .]. Genealogy does not resemble the evolution of a species and does not map the destiny of a people” (Bouchard 146). So it is with these precepts in mind that I want to argue for a particular kind of critical stocktaking not just of the journal, but also of the field and of “us.”

In an editorial to the first issue of *Theatre History in Canada/Histoire du Théâtre au Canada* (Spring 1980), Ann Saddlemyer—who had been the inaugural President of the Association for Canadian Theatre History/Association d'Histoire du Théâtre au Canada (ACTH/AHTC) (1976-79) and who in 2013 was recipient of the Canadian Association for Theatre Research's Lifetime Achievement Award—and Richard Plant—who would become President of ACTH/AHTC a few years later—declare that the journal has been “founded to meet a need for a scholarly publication devoted to the theatrical and dramatic history of Canada.” The journal's readership was, according to their editorial, “scholars, critics, teachers, students and to all individuals concerned with the tradition of theatre in Canada.” Thirty-four years later, the journal through its own history represents a scholarly archive, implicated in the production and dissemination of “the theatrical and dramatic history of Canada,” and thus

I suggest the merits and timeliness of a genealogical analysis not just of the elaboration, in the journal and elsewhere, of a tradition of theatre in Canada, but also as a way to think through how theatrical and dramatic histories been created, affirmed, challenged and perhaps even forgotten. In Foucault's terms, genealogy attends to "the accidents, the minute deviations [. . .] the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us" (146). It is a definition that asks us collectively to answer the question, as an interrogation of both methodology and research subject, what are we doing with/for the tradition of theatre (history) studies in Canada?

The first issues of *Theatre History in Canada/Histoire du Théâtre au Canada* illustrated a field that was concerned, for the most part, with describing a history of nineteenth- and twentieth-century theatres and theatre practices in the country with an emphasis on the more remote historical past. As well, analyses of specific plays, typically from more recent years on the Canadian stage, filled out the tables of contents. Today the scope and ambition of *Theatre Research in Canada/Recherches théâtrales au Canada* is significantly broader: it "[e]xplores theatre in Canada from theoretical and/or historical perspectives, and reviews books dealing with all aspects of Canadian theatre" ("Home") (a definition that I'd respectfully suggest that almost every issue exceeds!). The first issue of the 2013 publication year, themed as "Canadian Performances/Global Redefinitions" (edited by Reid Gilbert and Marc Maufort), ably illustrates this expanded mandate. Equally, field methodologies — once largely positivist historicisms and close readings of dramatic texts — are remarkably diverse and palpably interdisciplinary. But how did we get from there to here, from history to research, and how has this trajectory met (or not, or rewritten) the "need" that inspired Saddlemyer and Plant to launch a scholarly journal?

As a genealogical project, we should invest in an account of "the tradition of theatre in Canada" that reveals the contours of methodology and especially so when competing narratives and approaches strained our capacities — as perhaps they do today — to describe what this work might be. How would we chart the changes in, and growth of, the field since the founding of ACTH/AHTC and first publication of *Theatre History in Canada/Histoire du Théâtre au Canada* in order to pry open the relationships that have constructed and determined both "the tradition of theatre in Canada" and the field of theatre studies here? The Canadian Association for Theatre Research/Association Canadienne de la Recherche Théâtrale's website (catract.ca) offers no substantive history of the organization, only a list of past presidents and honorary members. Digitally archived newsletters go back only to Fall 1998 (issue 22.2). A two-sentence description on the homepage suggests that the Association is "a non-profit organization founded in 1976 to support and encourage research in theatre and performance studies in Canada, with a special interest in Canadian work" — a gloss that certainly occludes the original emphasis on making Canadian theatre history. Rather the mission statement reflects what we do now, research across the broad vistas of theatre and performance studies, inclusive and diverse in its interests and its constituency alike. Of course, this reflects an expansion within theatre studies generally and shows how scholars here have been influenced by, and have contributed to, "the differently emergent and partially overlapping fields of theatre and performance studies," as Shannon Jackson describes it in her study of the knowledge formation of the field in the United States (3). We have come to understand the tradition of theatre (studies) in Canada as a global as well as national enterprise.

At the same time, in this expansion of what comprises the field as well as the methodologies with which we undertake its description and analysis, we appear—figuratively and sometimes literally—to have forgotten history. Again, this is a refrain that might be heard from theatre studies organizations in many countries, but, in the absence of a book like Jackson's that might address the specific conditions of emergence for Canadian theatre studies, we find it harder to remember or discover the decisions that shifted the mandate so emphatically from theatre history to theatre and performance research. A genealogical project would be a reminder, too, that the "need" that Saddlemeyer and Plant identified was profoundly national; they sought to record and understand theatre within the country, in contexts that were not over-determined by Anglo-American practices on stage and in scholarship. Their inaugural editorial looked for a "history of resident and touring companies and their impact on Canadian theatre and audiences," as well as a full range of "studies of individuals who have contributed to the craft of theatre, records and calendars of performance, and analyses of the social and artistic conditions which give rise to theatre in any particular time and place,"—how much of this do we now know? What has been done and what left undone, and how do we understand this in terms of the ongoing ambitions of our field? We might remember, too, that the process of cultural forgetting is, as Paul Connerton has shown, endemic to modernity and an "informational capitalism," mobile and international, that deletes as quickly as it creates (133); in other words, the more we know the sooner we have forgotten it.

In 2016, our scholarly association will celebrate its fortieth anniversary: this might be just the occasion for public recognition of our genealogy. We might celebrate the commitment to "the tradition of theatre in Canada" that initiated the field to which we belong as well as remember—critically and in its valuable complexity—what we have been doing for the four decades since then.

Disciplinaryity and Dissolution

ALAN FILEWOD

Canadian: Theatre: Research: three words plastered together in a tenuous conjunction that promises solidity but dissolves under scrutiny. Forty years ago, the proposition of a disciplinary field organized around research into theatre in Canada seemed like a self-evident attribute of nationhood, despite the wuffling of an older generation of academics who were scandalized at the thought of it. ("How," I was asked by a donnish professor at the University of Toronto in 1982 when interviewed for a teaching assistantship, "can you justify a thesis on *Canadian* theatre?" I returned the sneer—"all theatre is local and all things deserve study"—and left, pride intact but jobless.)

By the time I entered doctoral studies, the discipline of Canadian theatre research had emerged into an organization around historical recuperation, and was exactly four years old. It had been formed by a loose alliance of enthusiasts and amateurs, many of whom were moonlighting professors of English literature, and it was in part a result of the great schism of the late 1960s, when the university system was awash in visionary optimism and money,