

# The Trades of T.R.i.C.: There Are No Macrohistories Here

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Recently a friend, who trained as an actor at two Canadian schools and who is a former manager of an influential national theatre arts organization, asked me, “Do you have a recommendation for a solid single-volume on Canadian theatre? I’m thinking of a general survey, like the Brockett [*History of the Theatre*] but specifically for Canada.” By coincidence, a few weeks later, a student of mine asked me the same question: “Where can I find a history of Canadian theatre?”

The answer, of course, is that you can’t. There is no recent book-length study to offer. There is no up-to-date single volume written in the past quarter century that is not a collection of essays or encyclopedia entries. Of course, there are influential edited collections such as Eugene Benson and L. W. Conolly’s *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Theatre*, and the Canada section in Don Rubin’s *World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre: The Americas*, Rubin’s *Canadian Theatre History* (a collection of primary source documents), Ann Saddlemeyer’s and Ann Saddlemeyer and Richard Plant’s *Early Stages* and *Later Stages*, and the critical introductions to Jerry Wasserman’s *Modern Canadian Theatre* anthologies and Brian Kennedy’s *The Baron Bold and the Beauteous Maid*, which gather past theatrical events and practices; and there is Benson and Conolly’s 1987 *English-Canadian Theatre*, which merges four hundred years of theatre into a seven-millimeter-thick paperback binding. Taken together (as one must), these and other utterances form a set of Canadian theatre histories. They are gathered traces that underpin discussion, but do not adequately model narrative-making, macrohistoric, long-view critical thinking.

A particularly acute example of the ways in which macrohistories of Canadian theatre have been treated can be found in Alan Filewod’s reverberating piece “Naming the Movement: Recapitalizing Popular Theatre,” published in 2003. Here, to conjure the inherited orthodoxy of what he has repeatedly argued is a non-constitutive narrative history of “Canadian Theatre,” Filewod ends his opening paragraph with a footnote comprised of a meta-critique on the “accumulated contents” of “meta-texts” (241) like those listed above. These, he argues, are the beneficiaries of a “genealogical sequencing of movements” (241) that are modulated to a degree that is defined by a series of publications riffing off the topic of “Canadian Theatre.” This meta-critique emerges in his choice of how he provides his evidence: Filewod lists ten canonizing offenders—those that take as foregone conclusions the anthropomorphic view that one “movement” leads to the next. He collects these as a “canon.” They exist in their plurality, in absence of a single narrativized volume. And while he takes exception to the positivist “movement theory” as a basis for connecting diverse events and practices, Filewod does not specifically argue for the demise of metahistorical research.

We know how we arrived here. As readers of this special issue of *TRIC* are aware, the absence of Canadian macrohistory is a product of long, extended, hard fought, and ongoing efforts to erase the act of narrativizing historical events in our increasingly pluralistic, polyvo-

cal, fragmented discipline. For decades the “story” was the nationalizing, professionalizing project of Anglophile Canadians. To tell the story, even *a* story, of Canadian theatre is a dated notion that, for some, threatens to monologize the plurality of voices engaged in the practice and research of drama, theatre, and performance. The thought of writing a lucid primer on “Canadian theatre” that could cover thousands of years of performance, both ‘professional’ and ‘nonprofessionalizing’, on this land could be construed as antithetical to a scholar’s disciplinary preoccupation with framing a “manageable” (post-dissertation-length) field of study and defining that field.

In this country our discipline remains preoccupied with the poststructural ‘isms of the 1980s and 1990s, as is evident in many of our syllabi and recent publications. Our objects of criticism are cordoned off into slots, or “fields of inquiry,” like “interculturalism,” “feminism,” “aboriginal studies,” and “*history*.” Two recent series from Playwrights Canada Press, the second just underway, are examining an array of other hyper-focused identity topics. There are also focused biographies about Canadian theatre luminaries such as Dora Mavor Moore, Mavor Moore, and George Luscombe, among others. And there are dozens of histories of influential Canadian theatre companies, including Toronto Workshop Productions, One Yellow Rabbit, Nightwood Theatre, and the Toronto alternative theatres of the 1970s. But nowhere, in one place, can we find a “long view” history that accounts for Canadian theatre “then” through “now” (or at least post-1987). Like any study, such a history could still be relevant and impactful while foregrounding its particular choices and exclusions.

It seems to me that this discursive omission is a result of trends in a discipline that have streamed scholarship into fields through “representative” undergraduate course outlines, graduate “comprehensive” (though increasingly highly specified) exams and “field” exams, dissertation topics, journal publication “subjects,” ’ism-specialized association awards and, in particular, job postings that hire to fill department needs defined by objects of study arranged to fill course offerings that generate undergraduate syllabi, graduate comprehensive exams and field exams...and so on. A discourse of micro-discourses is both thorough and replicable.

We have poststructuralized our research into fragmented landscapes that speak only to their own marginalizations and an increasingly glaring absence of Canadian theatre *through* history. Are we unwilling, whether individually or collectively, to stake our professional reputations on a narrative, any narrative, of Canadian theatre history? If we ever had a Canadian theatre history dartboard at which to throw our critical darts, its construction (or renovation) was arrested at a time when Benson and Conolly could list, in their forward-looking closing section titled “New Beginnings,” initiatives such as Tarragon’s “Extra Space” (1983- ), the emergence of the Mirvish Theatres and their hit production of *Cats* (1985), the Edmonton Fringe Festival (1982- ), and David French’s play *Jitters* (1987). A discourse comprised only of disparate, particularized, and happenstantially arranged events or practices is a safe discourse that dares not look back to relate its constitutive parts to past emergences; it dares not open itself to debate.

You would think that it would be difficult to work in a discipline like Canadian drama, theatre, and performance studies without being the beneficiary of repeated attempts to narrativize the “long view” of the field. It is indelibly disappointing to not have a compendium on hand to offer an inquiring student of Canadian theatre, or a practitioner or

administrator. On the one hand, perhaps this polyvocality is a strength of our highly specialized, and specializing, discourse. But it is also, surely, a shortcoming that needlessly perpetuates its inaccessibility. To refuse to offer a metahistory of “our discipline” is to refuse to let non-specialists in on the narrative. This is a dangerous elitism against which, I know, so many theatre scholar-practitioners otherwise labour.

The macrohistoricization of Canadian theatre has lain dormant for more than twenty-five years. We would do well to remember that histories must be told, retold, reframed, and redoubled or they cease to be known and embodied. Past performances and the essential practices of diachronic meaning-making live only in their retelling.

## Applied Theatre and Performance Research in Canada?

BARRY FREEMAN

In the last decade, Canadian theatre researchers have taken interest in Applied Theatre and Performance practices, that is, practices with an explicit pedagogical, social, political or therapeutic aim that take place in educational, community, activist or health care contexts. Examples include theatrical elements of the sprawling Montreal Life Stories project reported on in recent years by Ted Little and Rahul Varma among others, and *Are We There Yet*, a participatory play by Edmonton-based playwright Jane Heather that toured extensively across the country educating young audiences about sexuality. I find it curious, however, that while these practices are being discussed using the term ‘Applied’ in international contexts, they seem to be taken up in more methodology- or discipline-specific conversations here in Canada such as drama- or theatre-in-education, ethnography, community theatre, theatre for development, art therapy, or practice-based research (to name some common possibilities). While I wouldn’t dispense with any of these specific conversations, I have wondered: why has the term ‘Applied research’ been less enthusiastically embraced in Canada than it has elsewhere? And is there reason to give it a warmer reception?

Indulging for a moment in that unfortunate Canadian habit of comparing ourselves to others, our lack of a professional association or a refereed journal focused on Applied Theatre and Performance research stands out. The UK journal *Research in Drama Education: The Applied Journal of Theatre and Performance* publishes an impressive four issues of refereed articles per year (and is loosely associated with the triennial International Drama-in-Education Research Institute, or IDIERI). Though Australia has a lower population than Canada and half as many universities, it punches above its weight on this subject with two refereed journals: *Applied Theatre Research* (affiliated with the International Drama-in-Education Association, or IDEA) and the online journal *N7* (affiliated with Drama Australia). The US has the Association for Theatre in Higher Education’s journal *Theatre Topics*, more pedagogical in focus than these others, but which does publish on Applied research topics.

Canada has no comparable organizations or journals, with the partial exception of