NATIVE PEOPLE IN ENGLISH-CANADIAN DRAMA

STRUGGLE AGAINST THE STEREOTYPE:
NATIVE PEOPLE
IN
ENGLISH-CANADIAN DRAMA

By

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Abstract

Until quite recently, native people in English-Canadian drama have been portrayed by non-native playwrights. Stereotypes such as the Indian maiden and the noble savage were the early result of this white perspective. In the liberal climate prevailing after 1950, non-native dramatists perceived the native as a doomed figure struggling to survive in an alien culture. This tragic but static view has gradually given way to a more positive depiction of a people who, although badly wounded, have nevertheless endured. This new perception owes a great deal to the work of native playwrights, who are finding their own voice and celebrating their own culture and traditions.

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CONTENTS

Introduction

This study of the native in Canadian drama focuses on two groups of plays. The first, and largest, category is composed of works by non-native playwrights. The second comprises what I have called "native theatre", and includes works by native dramatists as well as plays written and produced on a co-operative basis between white and native playwrights and theatre groups.

A comprehensive bibliography of plays on native subjects has yet to be formulated; meanwhile, the Brock Bibliography of Published Canadian Plays in English, 1766-1978 and A Bibliography of Canadian Theatre History 1583-1975 and Supplement 1975-1976 have been useful guides in the location of a number of works. Leslie Monkman's A Native Heritage: Images of the Indian in English Canadian Literature, Rota Lister's article "Canada's Indians and Canadian Drama", the Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature, and current publishers' catalogues have yielded other titles, as has some serendipitous browsing in library stacks. In the field of television, Turn Up The Contrast, Mary Jane Miller's survey of CBC television drama, has been a rich source of information.

Plays by native playwrights have not been as easy

to find as those by non-native dramatists. Consequently, the section devoted to native-authored drama in this dissertation is smaller than I would have wished. The power and significance of these plays, however, is far greater than their number might suggest.

Indigenous drama per se, in its ritual and ceremonial forms, has not been treated in this dissertation, partly because it is a separate area of research, and partly because, paradoxically, it cannot easily be related to contemporary plays on native subjects, which are almost always concerned with the situation of the indigene as he or she relates to a white, alien and dominant culture. Ritual drama, which is an internal, intimate manifestation of deep tribal beliefs and concerns, is not visibly reflected in plays "about" native people, although it is possible that it may be in the future, as more and more native dramatists find their own voices. The absence of the ceremonial forms does not, however, preclude the introduction of themes and characters which are central to native beliefs and traditions. These can be seen in the shamans and various supernatural and legendary figures to be found in a number of plays on native themes, especially in the post-1950 period.

Until quite recently, the portrait of native people in Canadian drama has been created almost entirely by white playwrights. Beginning with the first printed play which has come down to us, and continuing until the present day, the

vast majority of plays which concern themselves with native subjects are written from a white point of view.

One result of this unvarying perspective has been an almost unavoidable distancing of the playwright from his or her subject. No matter how committed, perceptive and sympathetic a white writer may be, he or she writes from the outside looking in. Monkman makes this point well:

> All the white Canadian writers who have written about the Indian approach Indian culture as outsiders. The anthropological accuracy of each work varies greatly according to direct experience, personal study, and the acceptance or rejection of prevailing social stereotypes, but no white author writes as a red man. Direct descriptions of the North American Indian experience must come from the rapidly growing body of works by red artists defining their own culture, past and present (4).

The white dramatist's view is also coloured by the social, religious and political values of the day. Thus, in the development of drama on native subjects, the patriotic and Christian ideals emphasized in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century plays give way to a more sceptical and cynical attitude in the thirties; finally, values based on liberal humanism prevail altogether.

Another result of the white viewpoint has been the tendency for plays about natives to take on a static, repetitive aspect. Canadian plays about native people, with few exceptions, tell the same story: the tale of their struggle to survive in a country dominated by an alien culture. This sad reality, which has come to dominate the white dramatist's imagination, has been transferred almost

intact to the stage, where it has taken on a predictable and almost ritualistic form. Plots are similar in structure; familiar themes and motifs are almost certain to appear; tragic endings abound.

This dramatically static situation has tended to inhibit the development of a wide range of three-dimensional native characters. Instead, familiar figures or stereotypes have been allowed to dominate plays on native subjects. And, as any author of such plays knows, there are many standard characters waiting eagerly in the wings, all too willing to slip onto the stage.

Stereotypes of native people began to emerge early in Canada's dramatic literature, with the appearance of the Noble and Cruel Savage and the Indian Maiden. A little later, the dirty and ignorant Indian came to join them. Despite the fact that the 'white' dramatic viewpoint has changed significantly since the early plays were written, the basic dramatic stereotypes have persisted in more or less recognizable form. Change has been slow to occur because the situation of the native has not been perceived to have altered. Therefore, it has been an easy slide from the noble but doomed savage of the early historical plays, for example, to the degraded but equally doomed victim figure, which, until quite recently, has tended to dominate contemporary native drama.

Every dramatist must deal with the stereotype, if only

to use it as a springboard for an opposing thesis, a character for inflection, or as material for satire. These standardized portrayals will not disappear until they are finally replaced by a new dramatic viewpoint which presents natives as fully developed individuals.

There are signs that this is beginning to happen, and that a new perception of native people is emerging, particularly in the work of contemporary native playwrights. In some of these plays, native people are portrayed as gritty and sometimes humorous survivors, rather than as doomed victims of white culture. This is accomplished by shifting the dramatic focus from the "white" experience to the "native" experience, from the societal struggle of the native to his or her inner life and everyday aspirations.

It can be argued that dramatists have a social responsibility to portray native people as victims of white society, until the social wrongs affecting native people are set right. This is not, however, the view of native playwright Thomson Highway, who, in an interview with Ray Conlogue of the Globe and Mail, stated that although he is all too aware of the "human destruction and tragedy" of Indian life, he has learned from his father to "take the most positive aspect of your culture and do what you can with it. So my brother is a dancer and I am a writer" (Mixing Spirits, Bingo and Genius", Globe and Mail, 21 November, 1987, C5). In a later personal interview, Highway applied his positive artistic beliefs to the negative dramatic stereotypes of the

native, suggesting that "if you destroy the stereotype on-stage, you help to destroy it in reality." (Highway, personal interview, 24 June 1988). In such ideas as these lies the best hope for the future of native drama.

Chapter I

The Dominant Figures - 1606-1950

In plays written prior to the second decade of the twentieth century, native people were frequently presented in a romanticized manner. It is to this period that we owe the noble savage and Indian hero, the Indian maiden and the cruel and cunning warrior. Less romantic, but no less important, was the dirty and ignorant native, who made a later appearance in the 1930's.

Opposed to this family of stereotypes are the potent and life-giving figures of the shamans, deities and elders, which can be seen in rudimentary form in some of the plays prior to 1950.

Noble Savages and Heroes

> I am as free as nature first made man,
> Ere the base laws of servitude began
> When wild in woods the noble savage ran.
> (The Conquest of Granada I.i)

In giving these lines to Almanzor, in his heroic drama of 1762, John Dryden left us a vivid description of a literary character who was already well-established in the cultural imagination of Europe. Earlier examples of the noble savage included such characters as Oroonoko in Mrs. Behn's novel of the same name (1698) and Juba in

Joseph Addison's Cato (1713). Jean-Jacques Rousseau was to further enshrine him in works such as his Discours sur l'inégalité (1754) and Emile (1762). The concept of the noble savage was based on the idea that man had a fundamental nobility of character and a natural moral sense that needed only an unspoiled and free environment in which to develop.

Not surprisingly, this character turned up early in Canada's virgin wilderness, having arrived in the literary luggage brought over by some of the first white men to have contact with the Indians in the 17th century. He quickly became a familiar figure in Canadian plays written about Indians, where he held centre stage until early in the twentieth century. He was then banished from the boards, but not before bequeathing a number of recognizable characteristics to the dominant figures which succeeded him.

Indians appeared in Marc Lescarbot's Le théâtre de Neptune en la Nouvelle-France, a pageant performed in 1606 at the mouth of the Annapolis River, and referred to by Eugene Benson and L. W. Conolly, as "The first play written and produced in North America" (English-Canadian Theatre, 2). In it, the Indian is presented, if not precisely as a noble savage, at least as a dignified gift-bearer, a peace-maker, and above all, as a friend to the French.[1]

One hundred years later, in Liberty Asserted (1704), the English playwright John Dennis put a Canadian noble savage on the London Stage. Set in Canada, the play relates

a highly improbable tale about a native hero, Ulamar, who may be the first example of a Métis in drama, being the son of a noble Indian maiden and none other than Governor Frontenac. This curious play presents Ulamar as a compendium of all the virtues: he is "heroick" and "Godlike" (45) and has a soul "that scorns a tyrant and a slave alike" (53). He also scorns the corrupting effects of civilization, rhetorically asking the French: "What have you taught them but Inglorious arts: / To emasculate their minds? But cursed luxury, / Which makes them needy, venal, base, perfidious / black Traytors to their Country, Friends to you"(34).

The noble savage was, of course, the character in which the white man wanted to believe. Not only did his benevolence and loyalty help make the new and threatening wilderness "safe" for the white intruders, but his untrammeled life represented existence before the Fall, before the artificial values of white civilization corrupted an unspoiled earthly paradise. Thus the literary perception of the native was, from very early times, filtered through a white imagination already well-stocked with cultural pre-conceptions. Leslie Monkman emphasizes the importance of the primitivist view of native culture:

> Writers who depict the Indian as a savage associate him with values opposed to white control, orthodox Christianity and ordered landscapes. The author who finds an alternative in red culture associates white culture with rational order, monotheistic religion, and technological supremacy; yet rather than identifying the Indian in terms of animalistic irrationality, pagan superstition, and nomadic

> disorder, the primitivist writer finds vital spontaneity, natural religion and harmony between the red man and the natural landscape (5).

One cannot, however, assume that the early white perception of the Indian as living in harmony with nature was based entirely on an imported fiction. On the contrary, one of the dominant beliefs of native culture, and one which is emphasized by native writers themselves, is that a profound inter-relationship exists between man and the natural world. The fact that there may be a genuine basis for the stereotype is not at issue: the important factor in the creation of stereotypes such as the noble savage lies in the white observer's need to interpret not only the native but his situation and sometimes his beliefs, in terms of his own concepts, experience and desires.

Therefore it is not surprising to find that the earliest and best-known examples of plays featuring Indian heroes and heroines all depict them as noble savages to a striking degree. Tecumseh, Charles Mair's 1898 play about the Indian hero of the War of 1812, struck all the expected notes. This character is a personification of all the sterling attributes assigned to the noble savage, including natural dignity, a passionate attachment to freedom and an irreproachable moral code.

As Murray Edwards notes in A Stage in Our Past, the play was never staged, although Mair had fondly hoped that it might be (119). Mair's admiration for Tecumseh was

genuine. As an ardent member of the Canada First League, he considered the Indian hero to be one of the founders of Canada's nationhood. In his notes to the play he urges Canadians to perpetuate Tecumseh's memory:

> ...to Canadians, whose fathers were the friends of his race, there remains the duty of perpetuating his memory. There is not in all history a nobler example of true manhood and patriotism (201-202).[2]

Tecumseh was not only a bona fide hero, but, along with the rest of his people, he looked "grave and decorous" and had "the mien / of pensive people born in ancient woods". He also personified oneness with nature: "My father is the sun; the earth my mother, / And on her mighty bosom I shall rest" (114).

Added to these qualities was Tecumseh's intelligent perception of the Indians' situation in relation to the white man. In a confrontation with Harrison, the American general, Tecumseh hearkens back to a time when, "happy here, we cared not whence we came", a time of no "hate, greed of gold, quarrels over God", a time that stretched unbroken, "Till, from the East, our matchless misery came!" (122).

The "matchless misery" inflicted on the Indian is entirely the work of the Americans - the British are exonerated from any blame in the matter and are presented throughout the play as staunch and loyal friends of the natives. It is Harrison, commander of the American forces, who must listen to Tecumseh's eloquent description of the appalling crimes committed against the Indians;

it is to Harrison that he presents his demand for a just settlement. But when Tecumseh states his people's claim to all the lands west of the Ohio, Harrison is incredulous, exclaiming "There's no asylum'd madness like to this!" (123).

General Brock, on the other hand, promises to honour Tecumseh's proposed boundary:

> My promise is a pledge, and from a man
> Who never turned his back on friend or foe.
> ...No treaty for a peace if we prevail,
> Will bear a seal that does not guard your rights (157).

And Tecumseh thanks him, saying "I have faith in you / My life is at your service!". This exchange paints a rosy picture of the relationship between Tecumseh, his warriors and the British and reinforces the perception of the solidarity of their aims. In Mair's play, Tecumseh's heroism is based on British values and he survives as a hero because he helped keep Canada for Britain.

As an Indian leader, he is presented sympathetically but elegiacally in a number of scenes where he deplores the ruination of his once-great nation. "The red men's memory is full of graves", he laments (116).

He dies grieving for his people:

> Who now will knit them? Who will lead them on?
> Lost! Lost! Lost! The pale destroyer triumphs!
> I see my people flee - I hear their shrieks -
> And none to shield or save! My axe! my axe -
> Ha - it is here! No, no - the power is past.
> O Mighty Spirit, shelter - save - my people! (196).

After Tecumseh's death, the sympathetic Colonel Baby pleads with Harrison to "make right use of your authority,

and shield (Tecumseh's people) if you can". Harrison's reply has an authentic tone of prevarication: "I shall, I shall. / Right feeling tends this way, though 'tis a course / Not to be smoothly steered (197).

Mair's view of Tecumseh as a noble savage/hero figure is undercut by the gritty realities in the play. Tecumseh's laments, his litanies of the injustices perpetrated against his people, and finally his death, all point to a much more tragic figure than Mair's sentimental depiction of a noble defender of British interests may have been intended to reveal. Although Mair may not have perceived the profound ironies in this portrayal of his favourite hero, the reader can clearly see the outline of a victim figure beneath the play's veneer of conventional values and rhetoric.

Twelve years after the publication of Tecumseh, James Bovell MacKenzie undertook to right what he saw as an "affronting anomaly", i.e., the celebration of Tecumseh's accomplishments by "the machinery of the drama" while Joseph Brant's heroic deeds went unnoticed and unsung. His play, Thayendanegea: an Historico-Military Drama (1898) is a eulogy of Brant, who is described in the preface as "The ideal Indian; with all the genius of his tribe, and the training gained in Connecticut schools..." (IV)

He was an educated Indian and a Christian, who fitted even more snugly than Tecumseh into the imperialist mould. Brant, like Tecumseh, finds a staunch friend in the

British authorities; like Tecumseh, he articulates the causes of his people's wrongs, dwelling on the

> ...pale-face ruffians ...who trap - delude;
> Contaminate - corrupt; ...
> Whose unclean, lawless trade it is to steep
> Too yielding brains in brandy's poisonous fumes
> To serve their foul, their sordid interest (46).

The English are shown as defenders of Indian rights. General Johnson urges the Indians to ally themselves with the British against the Americans in these persuasive words: "Be wise, then in your day / and Generation! Load the scales with us!" (78).

The treatment of the subject of religion is significantly different in the two plays. Whereas Mair seems to admire Tecumseh's attachment to his belief in the "Great Spirit" and barely mentions Christianity, MacKenzie finds, in Brant's conversion, an enhancement of his heroic character and evidence of his loyalty to British ideals. In a scene with the Reverend John Stuart, Brant lauds the missionary's success in "stifling of perverse, soul stunting practice" and "weaning (pagan Indians) from inane, deformed attachments"(40). Far from being a primitivist writer, and perceiving nobility in "natural" religion, MacKenzie identifies religion with the aims of the dominant culture. This tendency has been noted by Ronald A. Haycock in The Image of the Indian, a study of the Indian in the Canadian popular press. Discussing articles on native conversion written at the beginning of the twentieth century, Haycock

writes:

> The missionary conversion of the Canadian Indian, that noble, yet wronged savage, was more than spiritual salvation in heaven. To the men of the time it also clearly meant the conversion and acultration (sic) to Euro-Canadian behaviour patterns on earth (4).

The proselytizing efforts of the missionaries, praised in Thayendanegea as the road to salvation for the Indians, would serve as evidence for the prosecution when drama built its case against the white man, almost a century later.

Brant is the only example of a "Christianized" noble savage, however. The legendary hero Hiawatha is cast in the usual mould of pagan visionary in the 1909 pageant, Hiawatha the Mohawk. Written by L. O. Armstrong for the Lake Champlain tercentenary, it was unusual in that all the parts were taken by Indians from the Kahnawake reservation near Montreal. The early wars between the Indian nations and Hiawatha's attempts to unite the tribes formed the subject of the presentation. Based on Longfellow's poem, "Hiawatha", it portrays the hero first as a young blood, eager for war and glory; next, as a god-like figure capable of great feats; finally, as a peacemaker, preaching reconciliation. In this last guise he somewhat jingoistically intones: "All war is evil - Let us have peace, we need alliance, not defiance" (27).

The Master of Life gives him a vision, foretelling the future:

> He spoke to me of the future of our race - He told me that we should be conquerors for a time, but that after should come a strange race in numbers like the drops of rain. He told me to make friends with them and with all men - that peace was better than war (32).

This message of peace and goodwill must have been reassuring for the audience of 1909. Watching the stately pageant unfold before them, they might well have congratulated themselves on their government's good management of the Indian question. As David Blanchard states in his preface to the play, the intention of the editors was not to present the text as an accurate record, but rather "as a primary historical document, a point of view on how people thought at the dawn of the twentieth century".

The noble savage's heroic but doomed stand is reflected in another figure of late 19th century drama. The Aged Chief in John Hunter-Duvar's De Roberval (1888), a closet drama never intended for the stage, roundly condemns the white man in stirring fashion:

> They seek to take from us our hunting grounds,
> And drive us inland back among the hills
> Or chase us westward to the Ottawa

De Roberval, the French governor, responds uncompromisingly:

> This half of the world is wholly ours
> And all belongs to Francis, King of France,
> Ye are his subjects, and your lives must be
> Conformed to the requirements of his state (66).

Like Tecumseh and Brant, Aged Chief exemplifies the qualities so much admired by the Victorians - leadership, sportsmanship, fearlessness and loyalty. And like the other two heroes, he lingers in the mind as a lost, doomed figure,

the first of a long and tragic line of victims.

Another view of the noble savage is to be found in two satirical references in the 1895 musical review Ptarmigan or A Canadian Carnival, by J. N. McIlwraith and J. E. P. Aldous. The first occurs in a recitative by the liberated lady journalist, Hepatica, who refers to her Indian companion Wis-ka-Tjan in the rollicking lines, "So long's my noble red man's not corrupted / I'll join the dance that we have interrupted" (202). And in her rejection of her American suitor Ptarmigan, Hepatica trenchantly observes that

> ...next to the Noble Red Man, the naturalized American citizen is the nearest approach to the primeval specimen to be found in our Western hemisphere ...I'll make good copy out of your experience of low life (223).

When the noble savage found himself in the middle of a burlesque about Americans, he had perhaps received his final consecration as a Canadian stereotype. Ptarmigan's satirical comments show to what point the noble savage had entered the Canadian imagination, and to what point he failed, even in 1895, to correspond to the native reality.. Hepatica's derisive witticisms are in sharp contrast with the sentimental speeches of "heroic" dramatists like Mair. Not only does Ptarmigan reveal a social attitude that is distinctly uncomplimentary to the Indian, but by treating the noble savage as a figure of fun, it portends his death as hero and his reincarnation as an emasculated victim and example of "low life".

* * *

The Indian Maiden

The literary roots of the Indian Maiden, like those of the Noble savage, belong in European literature. In English Romantic poetry, she represented the accessible, earthy side of the feminine ideal, as opposed to the elusive and ethereal aspect of the dream-woman. The Indian Maid in Keats's Endymion exemplifies this figure. Beautiful, dusky, usually conveniently supine, she is the antithesis of Cynthia, the moon-goddess, who is silvery and remote. The Indian Maiden is always available, constant, and passionate.

Just such a figure is Ohnawa, the beautiful "forest child" who falls in love with De Roberval, in Hunter-Duvar's play of the same name. In this unlikely romance, Ohnawa fulfills all the fantasies a male French aristocrat could possibly have, as a new arrival in a hostile wilderness.

She is a fund of forest lore and survival skills. In his first meeting with her, De Roberval, hoping to impress her "untutored savage mind", points out that the French can communicate by semaphore, with no need of words. Ohnawa, unimpressed, informs him in reply that "...our braves, / On journeys speak in silent signs / By leaves, grass, mosses, twigs and stones..." (62).

Later, she draws a map to guide the French to "the far country by the sea". She cures the governor when his white doctors fail to help him. Small wonder that De Roberval calls her his "very guiding angel", and exclaims: "Why, Ohnawa, I've found a treasure in thee!".

Ohnawa becomes De Roberval's woodland protector, guarding him from mysterious evils. In such a role, she takes on a maternal aspect, acting as a warm and consoling guide and guardian.

Finally, when De Roberval seduces her, she becomes his devoted slave, forsaking and betraying her own people for his sake. She realizes her sacrifice is pointless, lamenting, "Yet loves he me? Alas, I do not know. / My heart is white, but my ways are not white" (130).

The impossibility of her survival is thus dictated by white cultural values, which she may approximate, but never truly possess. Her inevitable death occurs at the hands of her own people when she intercepts an arrow meant for De Roberval.

Iena, the Indian Maiden in Tecumseh, is also killed by her own kind, as are several native characters in the plays of Gwen Pharis Ringwood and Herschel Hardin. Terry Goldie, writing in Future Indicative, sees this pattern as a reflection of the tendency in literature to see the native as a doomed figure. Commenting on Samuel Hearne's "Coppermine Massacre", an account of a massacre of Inuit by Indians, Goldie writes:

> This is an early example of what has become the norm in Canadian literature, the concentration on the indigene of history rather than the indigene of contemporary experience...The end of the indigene particularly when at the hands of another indigene, becomes a part of the "inevitable" circumscription of the indigene as past (90).

Another result of focusing on the death of the indigene "at the hands of another indigene", is to allow white society to escape any feeling of responsibility in the matter of the indigene's death.

The romanticized figure of the Indian Maiden had undergone a startling transformation by the 1930's, when A. M. D. Fairbairn wrote A Pacific Coast Tragedy. In this play, Ernest, a "sensitive, kindly and cultured" English missionary, had previously married Martha, a "young and very beautiful" Indian girl, in order to further his work. She has now degenerated into a "fat, shapeless squaw, sullenly apathetic and primitively superstitious", (60) to quote from Fairbarn's descriptive notes on his characters. Hoping, through his marriage, to gain converts, Ernest used Martha as an entrée into the Indian community, much as De Roberval took advantage of Ohnawa's services as a guide. In a figurative sense, Martha too has died, a victim of the degradation and hopeless ignorance of her own people. In neither drama is white civilization blamed for the victims' actual and symbolic deaths; both plays ascribe responsibility to the Indians themselves. The comfortable assumption is that the Indians are killing themselves off.

The figure of the Indian Maiden is the most complex of all the figures to dominate dramatic depictions of the native. She can be a martyred heroine, a maternal figure and a wilderness guide. In her simplest and most recog-

nizable form she became the stereotyped victim of the most overt manifestations of white domination.

* * *

The Cruel and Cunning Savage

The heroic native protagonists in Tecumseh, De Roberval and Hiawatha are all contrasted with a cruel and cunning counterpart. Two obligations were thus met: the need for a basic dramatic conflict, and the conventional requirement to include a frightening savage in the cast, a "bad" Indian to play against the "good" one. Monkman refers to this figure as the "Indian antagonist", the Indian perpetrator of white massacres and torture, the "demonic savage" of white nightmares. He is the Indian Monkman describes as implacably "opposed to white control". (See page 9, above). Unlike noble heroes such as Tecumseh and Brant, the cruel savage never treats, never makes peace, above all never makes friends with the whites. The cruel and cunning savage is essentially a realist.

Such a figure is The Prophet, Tecumseh's brother (and an actual historical figure). General Harrison comments on the differences between them: "Oh, he is deep. How different those brother! / One dip't in craft, the dye of cruelty / The other frank and open as the day" (112).

The Prophet is unrelenting in his attitude towards the whites, and capable of "horrid deeds", not only against them, but against his own race. The same traits are to be seen in Lowering Eye, the "cruel savage" figure in De Roberval.

Nevertheless, both Mair and Hunter-Duvar ascribe certain virtues to their fiendish red men. Both are passionate defenders of their land and advocates of tribal purity, attributes they share with the heroic figures of the two plays. The Prophet declares his belief that his people must "return to ancient customs", and hold "all earthly goods" in common. In a similar vein, Lowering Eye argues against French methods of hunting, claiming that their "thunder-arrows oftener wound than kill". De Roberval, the play's white protagonist, ignores this accusation, suggesting instead that his men try to create a Fontainebleau in the Canadian Woods: "Some of these days, when other work permits, / I shall have allées cut for hunting paths / And try our skill again at vénerie" (79).

Such an exchange leaves the reader wondering where the playwright's sympathies really lie.

Unlike the heroes Tecumseh and Aged Chief, who mix their ideals with prudence and caution, The Prophet and Lowering Eye are unyieldingly ferocious. Lowering Eye vows to wage "war, Exterminating war!" against the French intruders, and The Prophet declares that "My pulses bound to see those (white) devils fall / Brained to the temples, and their women cast / As offal to the wolf"(87). Lowering Eye, captured just as he and his fellow "fiends" had begun to torture a white man, is bloodthirsty to the last. Summarily condemned to be shot, he is tied to a tree. After "breaking out in deathsong", he utters his last defiant words: "The

Red Man looks on death and does not quail, / He has shone in battle - he has taken scalps; / The palefaces are women - they are dogs - ". De Roberval is not impressed, responding with "Cut short this caterwaul / Platoon! give fire!" (135).

The curious ambivalence which permeates the characterizations of the cruel and cunning savage, in Tecumseh and De Roberval, represents an early inflection of a stereotypical figure. In later plays of this period, he makes brief appearances in undiluted form. A. M. Stephen's little volume of Classroom Plays from Canadian History (1929), a collection of thirty plays used as a teaching tool, contains several references to the cruel Indians. Children probably shivered pleasurably, hearing of the "Iroquois who will not kill you quickly (but) will torture you with a slow and horrible death", (A Mission School, 38), and hostile warriors who "are howling and waving their war clubs" (The River of White Flowers, 108). The Bone Spoon (1930), Betti P. Sandiford's fantasy on an historical theme, centres around a group of Frenchmen fleeing from the Huron mission and the cruel tortures of the stake.

Traces of the cruel and cunning warrior may still be observed in a few contemporary plays about native people. In these works, revisionism has done its work: the cruel and cunning savage has taken on a heroic glow in such plays as James W. Nichol's Sainte-Marie Among the Hurons and Herschel Hardin's The Great Wave of Civilization. On the

other hand, the more generous attitude of the Noble savage towards the whites has been treated in contemporary drama with a mixture of cynicism and scorn.

* * *

Dirty and Ignorant Natives

Martha, the Indian squaw in Fairbairn's A Pacific Coast Tragedy, has most of the attributes of a figure which, for many people, came to represent the standard concept of the Indian. This was the dirty and ignorant native, who, unlike the noble and articulate Indians of old, spoke in grunts or in primitive English, had no moral convictions and was badly in need of conversion and basic hygiene.

Ernest, the missionary in A Pacific Coast Tragedy, describes his efforts to convert the Indians, and his subsequent abysmal failure, in a conversation with a visiting Englishman:

> Around me were these Indians, several hundreds of them, ignorant, disease-ridden, with not even an elementary knowledge of hygiene, with nothing of faith, actuated solely by a fiendish superstition which I felt it to be my God-given work to eradicate and to replace with the knowledge of the love and mercy of the Saviour.

When his visitor comments that his work has been "rewarded with success", Ernest sadly replies:

> ...My time has been wasted. I spoke just now of the superstition, the ignorance of the natives here. It is, if anything, even greater now than when I first came here. It is too deeply embedded in their natures to be touched (73).

Describing one of their superstitions, Ernest explains to his visitor that "It will serve to indicate the type of mind one has to deal with. Part child, part animal" (74).

He longs to get away, to return to England, to escape "this place, these depressing surroundings, the absence of anything of culture..." (77). One can hardly blame him, especially since his daughter, a "morose, slipshod and slow-witted half-breed girl, more Indian than white", is so coarse and promiscuous that not even Johnny, a young Indian, "surly and of low mentality", (60) will have her. If one adds to these burdens the fact that his son has just been released from prison, only to kill another Indian in a fight over a girl, then Ernest's suicide at the end does, indeed, seem the only way out.

In keeping with the tendency in this play, already noted in relation to Martha's character, to blame the Indians for their own misfortunes, the "tragedy" in the title A Pacific Coast Tragedy refers, not to the situation of the Indian characters, but to the white protagonist's disillusionment and final disintegration and suicide. The squalor and misery of the Indians are commensurate with the degree in which they have failed to adopt white values and culture.

The white protagonist in Ebb-Tide, another of Fairbairn's plays, bears a strong resemblance to Ernest. Ann Laird, a young schoolteacher, "tortured by the remembrance

of a past indiscretion, but with an inherent strength of character", lives in an "isolated and squalid Indian village" in British Columbia. Like Ernest, she has tried to help the Indians but sees that they are past redemption:

> They have no morals, no - anything that would help you to feel proud of things. Without knowing it you begin to think as they think, to act as they act. Slowly, oh! so slowly you sink (25).

She must decide whether to marry Billy, an "upstanding young half-breed". He would provide her with a home and family. But if she marries Billy, she foresees an unthinkable future:

> This is what I see. I shall become a squaw. Nothing better! Billy has white blood in him but white blood doesn't amount to much when it's mixed with Indian. He's all right now, but I've watched these mixed humans. They're all right when they're young, but after middle age they turn more and more to their own kind (25).

Ann takes the only way out - she decides to marry Dick, a drunken ne'er-do-well, because at least he's white. As she tells him,

> I want a white husband and white children of whom I can be proud. If Billy were white I shouldn't hesitate. But he isn't and, however kind he might be it would be more than I could bear to see my children and his - Indian children, Dick - crawling about in the streets here, in the slime and mud (26).

Michael Tait, writing on "Drama and Theatre", in Volume two of The Literary History of Canada, comments wryly on the "unpalatable characterization" in Ebb-Tide, adding in parentheses, that "the heroine Ann, whatever the author's intentions, sounds like a race supremacist" (150).

Certainly, the two plays are remarkably open in their expressions of prejudice towards the Indians. As examples of stereotyping they are almost terrifyingly pure. This is all the more extraordinary, since the other two plays in Fairbarn's collection, which I have already commented on in relation to the "tribal elder" figures they contain, make a genuine attempt to present the native point of view.

Fairbarn's Plays From the Pacific Coast was published in 1935. Six years earlier, in 1929, Stephen's Classroom Plays From Canadian History first saw the light of day. It too contained numerous examples of ignorant, dirty savages. In Lief the Lucky, Canadian children were introduced to Indians in these lines of Lief, spoken to an Indian who has been seized by one of the Vikings (stage directions have been included):

> Scum! I am not going to kill you, though. Nay! He will make us some sport, when our men return. (Fiercely to the Indian) Sit down! (the Indian collapses and squats, stolidly watching the Norsemen.) Strange creatures, these! Children of darkness they must be, if one judges from the colour of the skin (3).

In Henry Hudson, Hudson tells his son that the red men are "savages, whose skin is the "colour of a copper pot that has not been cleaned for a very long time". Commenting on their fighting skills, he says, "like wolves and other wild creatures, they fight best in packs" (25).

The gullible, childlike Indian plays a large part in several of these plays. Cartier, in The Discovery of

Canada, has an easy time persuading the Indian Chief to allow him to place his Cross upon the New Land, in exchange for knives (21). And Selkirk, in The Silver Chief, settles problems between the Indians and the settlers in the Red River colony by the simple method of making them shake hands. "These are my children who will keep faith with you", he tells the settlers (106).

Dirty, ignorant, simple-minded and - as represented in Fairbarn's plays - unredeemed and unredeemable: this was the picture of the Indian presented in these plays of the 1920's and 1930's. Drawn without irony, and without the sense of advocacy and guilt which was to characterize the plays of the 1950's and onward, these portrayals of the Indian served to crystallize a persistent and demeaning stereotype.

* * *

Shamans, Elders and Deities

The figure of the shaman does not play a major role in early plays. Two examples are nevertheless worth noting. The Prophet, in Tecumseh, already cited as an example of the cruel savage, is also a shaman or witchdoctor, in league with the powers of darkness. He uses his authority to play on the superstitions of his people, causing Tecumseh to berate him furiously:

> ...you craftily have played
> Upon the zeal and frenzy of our tribes
> And in my absence, hatched a monstrous charge
> Of sorcery among them... (86)

He calls up "strange sounds, and voices not of earth", and "vile beings flashed from hell" in order to terrify the braves into falling in with his plans. Mair clearly intends to show the superstitious basis for The Prophet's communion with the spirits, and to link such superstition with savagery in his characterization of The Prophet.

A similar dramatic situation is exploited in God of Gods, Carroll Aikins's 1927 play about a corrupt priestess and the deluded young virgin whom she trains to succeed her. Waning Moon, the old priestess, plays on the superstition of the tribe for her own wicked ends. The climax of the play occurs when Suiva, the young acolyte, exposes the entire religious system of the "God of Gods" as a cruel and selfish deception. Not only is the "God" false, it is associated with death and human sacrifice.

An interesting example of the portrayal of a native deity on stage is to be found in T. M. Morrow's Manitou Portage (1930).

The Manitou is a terrifying native deity who haunts the northern forest and frightens white intruders to death. Morrow means his audience to believe in the Manitou, and to be properly terrified by this evil and animalistic apparition, who roams around the stage, with eyes "glowing in the darkness". There is no intermediary shaman figure in this play, but the link between native religion, evil and

death, observed in the other two plays, can also be seen in this one.

The shaman is a potent figure, even in these early plays where there is a strong tendency to discount his or her powers. In contemporary drama, the shaman frequently occupies a central dramatic position, and usually represents a life-giving, rather than a death-dealing, force.

Deities and spirits also change their aspect from one of terror and mystery to one of familiarity and frequently, reassurance.

Like shamans, tribal elders are frequently shown to be in touch with the spirits; their association with the unseen world, however, is usually linked to tribal memory and cultural survival rather than to individual power.

Two plays from A. J. Fairbarn's collection, Plays of the Pacific Coast (1935) provide early but surprisingly well-developed examples of this figure. In The War Drums of Skedans, Skaana, an old Haida Indian, calls down the curse of the War Drums on a young Spanish ethnologist who has desecrated the graves of the tribal ancestors, in his search for Indian remains and artifacts. His callousness and insensitivity are compounded by the fact that he is the direct descendant of a Spanish captain who had led his crew in raping the village women, one hundred and fifty years earlier. Skaana, who is almost silent throughout the play, represents the tribal memory. In the few words he utters, he angrily denounces the "iron-men" (the Spaniards) "All

Haida", he says, "hate iron-man. Always!...My father tell me! His father tell him!" (95). Later that night, he bids his grandson (in Haida) to bring him some "small objects". Then, according to the stage directions, he closes his eyes and commences to rock back and forth". His "medicine-making" summons up the spirits, who send the War-Drums. The deafening sound of the drums, which can only be heard by the Spaniard, is accompanied by a terrifying vision which drives him to his death.

The second Fairbarn play, The Tragedy of Tanoo, casts Kiashwan, an old Haida woman, in the role of tribal elder. Although she has not been granted the power to cast spells, she is gifted with second sight, as well as great wisdom and common sense. The play deals with the epidemic of smallpox which almost exterminated the Haida Indian tribes in the latter part of the nineteenth century. In an illuminating exchange, Kiashwan debates the merits of "progress" with Tian, a young woman of the village:

> Tian: I am old enough to know that the white man has brought us many good things.
> Kiashwan: Yes, and many evil things.
> Tian: He has shown us how to put down the spoken word on paper so that you can speak it many times...
> Kiashwan: And water that burns like fire.
> Tian: Many things to eat -
> Kiashwan: And sickness that never was before... the white man and the Haida are enemies. It has been a long fight -
> Tian: The white man didn't want to fight. Only to trade.
> Kiashwan: He wanted to take our country. We fought him. We killed many of his kind. We were wise in those days. We saw! (37-38)

Elders like Kiashwan are conservers of the oral tradition, the old values, and the old ways. Both native and white playwrights frequently include these figures in later plays, where they represent continuity with the past and a varying degree of hope for the future.

Chapter II

Contemporary Native Figures 1950-1988

New Heroes, Old Story

After 1950, when John Coulter's play, Riel, had its first production, a more realistic portrayal of the native began to replace the stilted figures of the past. The "noble savage" is palely reflected in Riel and more strongly mirrored in Sitting Bull, the Indian Hero of Sharon Pollock's Walsh, but the distortions caused by the romantic idealism of late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century have largely disappeared. Instead, the native heroes of the post-1950 plays reflect a sense of white guilt and anger.

Although the heroes were evolving, their struggle was the same tragic one as that of Tecumseh and Brant; like their noble ancestors, the heroes of contemporary drama found themselves fighting to preserve a place and identity in a society which would grant them neither.

John Coulter's Riel, written in 1948 and first performed in 1950, was a milestone in the evolution of "native" drama, for a number of reasons.

For one thing, it established a new native hero in the Canadian imagination of the post-war period. For another,

it brought the Métis reality home to many Canadians. And finally, by bringing a new and powerful light to bear on a sixty-five-year-old (in 1950) controversy, it disturbed the complacency of many Canadians and forced them to re-examine their attitudes towards the country's native population.

Riel was an extraordinary play in other ways. In a style relatively new to the Canadian stage, it used multiple theatrical techniques on a bare stage to ease the continuous flow of action (there are thirty scenes in the play) and to heighten the epic quality of the story. For another, it communicated a sense of authenticity by the use of "docudrama" techniques. Actual court records were incorporated into the trial and execution scenes, lending them conviction and credibility.

Riel himself is presented as a complex character. Unlike the authors of Tecumseh and Thayendanengea, Coulter does not idealize his hero. Riel's character is viewed from many different perspectives, from that of his mother, to whom he represents perfection, to that of Sir John A. Macdonald, who treats him respectfully as a dangerous but astute adversary. The absence of a particular point of view in the play has been criticized by Eugene Benson and L. W. Conolly in their survey, English - Canadian Theatre (1987):

> What is missing from the whole play is a strong point of view. Riel is a controversial character; Coulter shows us a wide spectrum of his emotions and thoughts but leads us to no particular conclusion (54).

This lack of obvious intention could also be said to work in the play's favour. Riel manages, in a theatrically convincing manner, to keep the rebellion controversy alive and to allow the audience to make up its own mind about Riel's character. By avoiding rhetoric, Coulter has created an entirely new type of hero, one with the ring of authenticity about him.

Despite his scrupulous concern to present all facets of Riel's character, Coulter's sympathy for his hero is apparent in the manner in which the white characters are presented. It is difficult to feel warmly towards a Thomas Scott who, when he is challenged by Riel and his followers, fulminates in this manner:

> I'll go when I'm ready to go and not until then. And I'm takin' no orders from a pack o' mongrel Papishes ...Try it on, then, try it on, till I beat the gizzards out o' yous ...You there, Frenchie. I'll fight you first ... (139).

The white antagonists in the play are drawn with little subtlety, and do not serve to build a convincing case against Riel. The controversial side of his character, and the one which Coulter leaves open to debate, is the matter of Riel's sanity, which is brought out principally in the trial scene. Here, the audience must wrestle with the conflicting evidence brought forward by the Crown and the defence. The defence lawyer attempts to prove that Riel is a megalomaniac with "grandiose delusions", and hence not responsible for his actions. The Crown makes the case that he is perfectly

rational, and that his "delusions", such as his belief that he was divinely inspired, could have been a clever display of fraud. As Dr. Jukes, medical officer with the Mounted Police, observes:

> My opinion is ...that Mr. Riel is a man of great shrewdness and very great depth, and that he might have assumed, for the purposes of maintaining his influence with his followers, more than he really believed (192).

The controversy over Riel's sanity recalls the scene in Tecumseh, when General Harrison assessed Tecumseh's claims to the lands west of the Ohio as "asylum'd madness". It was, of course, the only defence that could be made. For a group of native people, Indians or Métis, to believe they could control their own destiny in North America after the arrival of the white man, could only be explained as a delusion.

Riel reminds us of Tecumseh in other ways. He exhibits the same naive trust in the British (although, unlike Tecumseh, he distrusts the Canadians), to the point of insisting that the British flag be honoured,

> ...to protect us against whoever would march in to grab and conquer - even if the would-be grabber is Canada - or the U.S.A. That is why we call England - Mother country (147).

Much to the embarrassment of his Métis, Scottish and Fenian followers, Riel forces them to rise and say "God save the Queen".

Like Tecumseh, Riel experiences betrayal. He is obliged to flee to Montana when Colonel Wolseley, Macdonald's

emissary, turns his peaceful mission into an attack on him and his men. Finally, he shares Tecumseh's fate, dying at the hands of the white man, his laments useless and his prophecies unfulfilled.

In his impassioned speeches defending his people and describing his vision of a peaceful existence for them, we hear echoes of Tecumseh's oratory. But, unlike the nineteenth century Indian hero, Riel's vision embraces the multiplicity of newcomers to Canada, not only those of Indian blood. In the trial scene, he fervently describes his plans for a New World:

> All my life I have worked for practical results. If I have succeeded, after my death my children will shake hands with the Protestants. I do not want those evils which exist in Europe to be repeated here. There will be at last a New World...We invite to our new world Italians, Poles, Bavarians, the Swedes, the Irish, the Jews... (196).

Riel, the halfbreed, is an intermediary figure between the white and Indian cultures. At home in both, he is able to visualize a peaceful and co-operative existence. Although he was seen principally as a leader of half-breeds and Indians, Riel refers to himself as leader of "My people here in the North-West...and not the Métis only" (179).

Because of his double heritage - Indian and French - Riel could be claimed as a hero by at least two minority groups. The rest of the country took him to their hearts as well, and gave him a permanent place in the small gallery of authentic Canadian heroes. His secure position is reflected

by the fact that the Regina Chamber of Commerce produces Coulter's The Trial of Louis Riel (1968) each summer as an annual theatrical event. This play, which is virtually a restaging of Riel's actual trial, is the third in Coulter's Riel trilogy: the other two are Riel and The Crime of Louis Riel (1966). The Trial of Louis Riel is a far less complex work than Riel. Relying almost entirely on court documents, The Trial is effective advocacy theatre. The new material in this play reveals the attitudes of some of Riel's contemporaries, represented by the Crown, who, in his summing up, describes Riel thus: "...In the changing light in his dark Indian eye, / ...we see the civilized man in him struggling with the Indian. We see the cunning, the greed, the superstition, the cruelty of the one..." (60).

Such lines required no comment, in the liberal climate of 1967. Their overt racism could be counted on to induce a sense of outrage in the audience against the perpetrators of white injustice.

In 1973, almost twenty-five years after the first production of Riel, Carol Bolt's play Gabe was staged in Toronto. A parodic look at the characters of Riel and Gabriel Dumont, this play casts two modern namesakes of the heroes, Louis and Gabe, in the title roles. Ironically set in modern-day Batoche, Gabe attempts to present the Métis' view of the Riel uprising.

Riel's modern counterpart, Louis, is a broken-down

rodeo clown, an eloquent but impotent dreamer. Along with Gabe, a disillusioned petty criminal and drunk, he has just been released from prison. The action focuses on their attempts to escape from the futility of their existence in Batoche, if only by buying a second-hand car and taking a joy-ride to an imagined life of luxury. Their unrealistic plans are foiled by Henry, a "friend" of the half-breeds, who exploits them for cheap labour, while at the same time enjoying their boisterous drinking parties, and joining in their uninhibited behaviour. White society, represented by the unpalatable Henry, calls the shots; Gabe and Louis have only their cynical awareness of their lost Métis glory to console them.

Both drink liberally to forget. In the first scene, they join in a drunken song:

> I got drunk that Friday night
> I got crazy drunk again
> Sure I was going to give them hell
> Like the crazy bastard Louis Riel
> And then the fuzz walked in (83).

Louis and Gabe's obsessive references to Riel and Dumont become a running motif in the play. In fragments which vary in tone from profane to elegiac, the tale of the Riel uprising is told. Introducing the subject of his hero, Louis is involved in the following exchange:

> Louis: My friends, Gabriel Dumont has persuaded Louis Riel to come from Montana and live among us for a while. This is a great day for the Metis nation. What he did before Monsieur Riel can do again.
> Vonne (a Métis prostitute): Did your friend talk like that in jail, Gabe?

> Gabe: Better.
> Vonne: Best thing I seen in Batoche since the Carling salesman.
> Louis: Louis Riel! Was the maddest, smartest, bravest Métis bastard ever wrote his own treaty. Ever fought for the rights of his people. For their land. Fought for representation. For his people and for their children. And the white man. The fucking Canadian, listened to him. We didn't listen... He was talking about medicare, health insurance, social security...Riel was...The white government's got all that and the Métis got welfare. Got charity and handouts...Getting thirsty (83-84).

The entire play is a commentary on the pointlessness of the Métis uprising. Louis sees that Riel's vision of a New World has indeed been implemented - for the white population. The implication is that Riel died, not for the oppressed natives, but for the privileged whites. Furthermore, if Riel had lived in the 1970's instead of one hundred years earlier, Bolt seems to suggest that he might have been, like Gabe, no more than a "comic-book hero". In Gabe, the de-mythologizing of the noble savage is complete.

This anti-heroic interpretation of Riel's story sheds an interesting light on Coulter's play, Riel, which, when contrasted with Gabe, takes on an almost rosy and heroic glow. Even though Coulter took pains to present a realistic portrayal of the Métis hero, the impression left on the audience, at the end of the play, may nevertheless be a romantic one. Riel's death scene is both poignant and impressive, leaving the playgoer no doubt watery-eyed. Unwittingly, in the final scenes of the play, Coulter has perhaps allowed the noble savage a few minutes on the stage.

Bolt draws parallels between the stories of Riel and Dumont and those of her two protagonists. Louis's crisis occurs when he attacks Henry and is thrown back in jail. Gabe's future is slightly brighter. With his decision to emulate Dumont, the "outlaw", by going back to the bush, he achieves a small measure of personal freedom. He tells Henry his plans:

> Gabe: Going to see how long I last. On my own. No supplies. No pack. No gun ...Us half-breeds are very wily in the bush.
> Henry: You half-breeds aren't responsible...
> Gabe: I can see things you can't see. Like Louis Riel, riding out of Montana...I can see you lying there on the floor, looking like something out of one of those comic books...
> Henry: I don't know what you're talking about.
> Gabe: Because you're stupid, Henry. Because you're not afraid of me. Or Louis. Because you think we're crazy. You don't have the brains of a rabbit, Henry (127).

Thus, the play ends on a note of pity for the white man rather than anger against him. The rather vague prophecy that Henry will be defeated by his own inferiority is an unconvincing attempt to turn the tables on white society. Nevertheless, Gabe's last words, and his desire to return to the "old" ways of his people can be interpreted as an attempt by the playwright to presage a better future, albeit in a veiled manner.

No such note of hope is sounded in Walsh, Sharon Pollock's play about Sitting Bull and his relationship with Superintendent Walsh of the North West Mounted Police. Produced in 1973, the same year as Gabe, this drama brings

Walsh, as the representative of white officialdom, into direct conflict with Sitting Bull, who, with his people, has sought sanctuary in Canada after the battle of Little Big Horn.

Initially friendly with Sitting Bull, Walsh is gradually forced by his superiors to abandon his sympathetic attitude and to enforce the government's callous policy towards the newcomers. This consists in withholding food and supplies in order to force the Indians to cross the border, thus fulfilling the request of the American government for their return.

The dramatic conflict lies in Walsh's inner struggle to comply with orders that are inhumane and abhorrent to him. In the process of implementing them he is forced to abandon his principles and to betray his friend, Sitting Bull. The Indian leader, on the other hand, has no moral dilemma to resolve; his single goal is his people's survival.

Sitting Bull is described in the play as

> ...a man of great presence and personal magnetism. It was not necessary for him to speak or to any way draw attention to himself for one to be aware of his strength of character. It was his custom to carefully size up a situation before committing himself to an action (32).

This description incorporates many of the characteristics of the noble heroes of earlier plays. Like them, Sitting Bull has fought for territory and rights and lost. And like them, he will die at the hands of white society. The dramatic characterization of Sitting Bull does

not depart from the stereotype, which, as I have remarked before, is dictated by the tragic situation of the native in North America. If Sitting Bull had thoughts other than noble ones, they are not revealed. His conflict is on the highest possible moral plane: should he stand and fight for his rights or sacrifice his pride for the physical survival of his people?

The dilemma faced by Walsh is less exalted: it presents a clear choice between good and evil. Sitting Bull is not perceived as being faced with a moral choice. Instead, he provides the white protagonist with the occasion for one. In keeping with the view of the native dictated by liberal humanism, Sitting Bull is presented as an icon of loss. His character is tragic, moving and dramatically effective, but never complex. He is primarily a reflection of white values, and an occasion for white expiation.

A number of dramatic devices are used to intensify the nobility of Sitting Bull's character. One of the most effective is the use of unrhymed verse at critical moments in the play.

For example, when the starving Perce Indians file pitifully across the stage, having come to join him in the forlorn hope of receiving help from the Canadian government, Sitting Bull, huddled against the cold, intones a lament:

> My heart is breaking.
> A warrior I have been,
> Now it is all over,
> A hard time I have (47).[3]

When Walsh hears of Sitting Bull's death at the hands of American soldiers, (starvation having finally forced the Sioux' return), he slowly removes his tunic and insignia. This symbolic gesture is an effective theatrical statement of white abasement and guilt. Once again, white values have been found wanting.

* * *

Mutated Indian Maidens

The commissioning and production of George Ryga's The Ecstasy of Rita Joe by the Vancouver playhouse in 1967 for their Centennial offering, focused the attention of Canada's theatrical public on the appalling circumstances of many of the country's native people.

The play revolves around the vagrancy trial of Rita Joe, a young Indian prostitute. In the course of the trial, her past life is reviewed, and the factors which have brought her to this moment in the courtroom are exposed. One by one, figures from her past life appear, gradually building up a composite picture of Rita Joe's unbearably deprived existence. In the background lurk the two sinister figures of the Murderers, foreshadowing Rita Joe's tragic end and providing a macabre accompaniment to the action.

In a sense, Rita Joe is the 1967 version of the Indian maiden. Her passivity and availability have been exploited by predatory white males. She is the object of white desire, but stripped of the romantic quality that characterized the earlier dramatic characters. An "older man" recalls his encounter with her:

> Gave her a job in my tire store...took her over to my place after work once...she was scared when I tried a trick - but I'm easy on broads that get scared, providin' they keep their voices down...After that, I slipped her a fiver...well, sir, she took the money, then she stood in front of the window, her head high an' her naked shoulders shakin' like she was cold. Well, sir, she cried a little an' then she says, "Goddamnit, but I wish I was a school teacher..." (64).

At the end of this speech, the speaker laughs and "everyone on stage joins in the laugh". In the white view, the thought that an Indian prostitute could have a dream of anything better, is simply preposterous. Gone is the perception of the Indian Maiden as a "forest child", free to roam in the wilderness and familiar with its secrets. Instead, Rita Joe is confined to the unfamiliar and soul-destroying city. The city, with its lure of a better life, offers only degradation and disillusionment: "...I never wanted to cut cordwood for a living...Never once I thought ...it'd be like this..." (66).

City life, which she expected would save her from the hopelessness of life on the reserve, in fact represents the burial of all hope. Indians like Rita Joe are forced to live at the very edge of society, ultimately driven to prostitution and hand-outs to survive.

White society is represented in the play by a number of authority figures: the magistrate, teacher, priest and Indian welfare worker. All regard Rita Joe with a mixture of exasperation, concern and disapproval, seeing her as a wayward, immoral and irresponsible child. Given eight hours by the judge to find someone who can vouch for her,

Rita Joe summons up characters from her past. Her teacher reveals that she always suspected Rita's "character" when she says: "I tried to teach you, but your head was in the clouds, and as for your body - well! I wouldn't even think what I know you do!" (81).

Rita's encounters with figures from her previous existence alternate with courtroom scenes. Some of these scenes come from her "native" past, recalling family life on the reservation and the only happiness she has ever known. Returning to the old life is never a serious possibility in this play, however; the reservation offers no opportunities for its inhabitants. Even Rita's father sees this: "If we only fish an' hunt an' cut pulpwood... pick strawberries in the bush...for a hundred years more, we are dead. I know this, here...(touches his breast)" (114).

Not only has the white man ceased to visualize the native as living in harmony with nature, and depending on it for sustenance, but this image has been driven from the native imagination as well. Any positive sense of the future has been effectively removed from the play, since life for the Indians is hopelessly bleak, both on and off the reservation.

Rita nourishes her pathetically few happy memories: the day her father refused to sell her to a white neighbour who had lost his own child - a story she loved to hear, apparently undisturbed by its dark undertones; moments of happiness with her sister Eileen; joyous love-making with

Jaimie Paul. She expresses herself in poetic language, full of vivid imagery, in contrast to the white characters, who speak in a pedestrian, factual style.

Rita's eloquent expression of her thoughts, feelings and memories is aided by the production values in the play. The use of music, in a series of ironically sentimental songs, provides its own wry commentary. The setting is a simple arrangement of ramps, with scenes being played at different levels, lit or in darkness as the action requires. This fluidity allows great range to both the acting and direction and adds depth to the portrayal of the principal protagonists.

Like her predecessor, the Indian maiden, Rita dies tragically at the conclusion of the play. Ryga, by using the word "ecstasy" in the title of the play, suggests that her death is to be interpreted as a martyrdom, since "ecstasy" was often linked to suffering by the Catholic saints. Rita's death is particularly horrible: she dies during a brutal rape by the three Murderers. White society is not spared in Rita Joe: the entire gallery of white figures is a stereotyped collection of bigots, self-satisfied do-gooders and brutal victimizers. Once again, it is not the native, but the white culture which is lacerated without quarter.

In her article "Ryga's Women", Bonnie Worthington argues that both Rita Joe and white society are stereotyped,

and that Ryga "makes it too easy for us to dismiss Rita Joe and her oppressors, for she is too purely innocent, her oppressors too purely evil. We have here the characters of a melodrama, not characters of the world" (CD 5, 2, 42). Jamie Portman had had no such qualms when he reviewed a production of Rita Joe for the Vancouver Province in 1976. In his view, the play was "like a fist through a window", so compelling was its depiction of the plight of the native (12 April, 1976, qtd. in CD 11.1, 51). Worthington correctly points out the dangers which lie in wait for the playwright committed to a cause. Despite the stereotypical whites and the "Indian maiden" aspect of Rita Joe's character, however, the play has an intense theatrical life of its own.

A remarkable inflection of the Indian maiden is to be seen in the character of Agiluk, in Herschel Hardins's play, Esker Mike & His Wife, Agiluk. This play, written in 1967, was not actually produced until 1972, and has had few productions since then. Canadian theatre is the poorer for this, since Esker Mike is a powerful work, setting out the problems of Northern development in a compelling human context.[4]

Esker Mike is that rare specimen in Canadian drama: a play set in the Canadian Arctic. Agiluk, the female protagonist, belongs to an even rarer species: the Eskimo heroine. In the tradition of the Indian maiden, Agiluk has a white lover. He is Esker Mike, a trapper from Moosomin,

Saskatchewan, who has turned to welfare and now milks the system in order to support himself, Agiluk and their ever-growing family. Esker Mike sees nothing wrong in breeding more children and shipping them off to be educated in mission schools in Inuvik. When William, an Eskimo acquaintance, objects that after "eight children from Agiluk" it's just as hard to survive as it ever was, Esker Mike replies:

> I don't let that bother me. I ship them off to Inuvik...the more the Anglicans get, the more the Catholics want. And the more the Catholics get, the more the Anglicans want. The market for muskrat goes up and down but the demand for children in Inuvik is stable (17).

Agiluk, on the other hand, has decided not to bring more children into a society which cannot provide for them. "Why should my children go to Inuvik?", she asks. "I want them to eat out of their own hands". No more children, she swears, "until a man knows what he is".

Her decision to bear no more children means refusing to have sexual relations, in spite of her own strongly sensual nature. Realizing that she might weaken, she vows to punish herself: "There is only one Agiluk, and if she weakens, she will make herself pay for it" (24).

Agiluk's refusal to bear children sets her apart from the other Eskimos, creating a conflict within her own community. Old values, which dictate large and close family units, are suddenly seen in sharp relief against the new imported white "culture" from the South. The old Eskimo way of life could sustain the family as a proud and independent family unit; the new social system, based on white

intervention, can only demean and diminish it.

In her refusal to fulfill tribal expectations, Agiluk resembles the two Indian maidens, Iena and Ohnawa, who take white lovers despite the strong disapproval of their own people. But there the resemblance ends. The two earlier protagonists' renunciation of their native values and acceptance of white lovers, served to confirm the white man's superiority. Agiluk's refusal to bring children into a world vitiated by Southern paternalism is a powerful condemnation of the white value system.

As the drama develops, Agiluk comes to represent the terrible, unforgiving spirit of the North. Unlike the other Eskimos, who take a pragmatic view of Christianity, paying lip service to the missionaries, Agiluk says simply: "I am not a Christian". When, in desperation, Esker Mike arranges a "Christian" marriage between himself and Agiluk, hoping that she will then be compelled to sleep with him, his plans fail dismally. Although she goes through with the ceremony, much to the delight of the Anglican missionaries, Agiluk calmly takes off her wedding dress after the wedding, saying:

> I wore it to please you but I don't want to wear it any more. (She removes it. Underneath are her regular clothes). I am not a virgin, and I don't believe in them either. I can only believe in myself, which is nothing. So I don't believe in anything at all (37).

She may be the object of Esker Mike's desire, but unlike the Indian maiden of previous plays, Agiluk has renounced her passive role. Nor will she conform to the myth

of the "happy Eskimo". Esker Mike remarks on this: "An Eskimo is only supposed to think a day ahead. She (Agiluk) is thinking ahead at least a year" (20).

When the Minister of Northern Affairs visits Aklavik, he is appalled when Agiluk bites his nose instead of rubbing it, as a happy Eskimo should. "The master plan for the district seems so far away now", he muses bleakly after this incident (45).

Agiluk's attitude is in sharp contrast to that of the other Eskimos in the play, who, with the exception of the shaaman, Toomik, are dependent and impotent figures. Part of her independence is derived from her spiritual life, which is rooted in the dark mysteries of the old native religion. She is in touch with the spirits. Toomik, the old shaman, says: "I could tell you a thing or two about Agiluk and her struggle with the spirits" (29).

The climax of the play occurs when Agiluk yields to the advances of a former lover, Albert, thereby breaking her vow.

Her "struggle with the spirits" and its result then become dreadfully clear. Because she has transgressed her self-imposed code, she will kill her two youngest children, in order to make space for the one she will bear Albert and the one she must give Esker Mike "to balance that one". The white police officers who find her beside the two skin-covered small bodies, sum up the bleakness of the Eskimos' situation:

> Sgt. Green:
> A neat job indeed. One cut apiece, and small ones at that, considering the task.
> Constable: Brutal! Life here is brutal!
> Sgt. Green:
> Not brutal, Mac. Difficult. Life here is difficult (He contemplates the bodies). Twelve years! I feel a hundred years old. Older. Murder falls on me now like an act of peace, like a wet snow falling on an unsuspecting August (87).

Agiluk has become an icon of refusal. Her act of infanticide has about it the aura of Greek tragedy, and her terrible willpower elevates her to truly heroic status. John Ripley, writing in Volume 3 of Literary History of Canada, noted the parallel between Esker Mike and classical tragedy, but feels that "the Greek cosmic scale and textural richness are missing". Nevertheless, he calls the play a "theatrical tour de force of remarkable promise" (231).

Herschel Hardin was not the only playwright to see elements of Greek tragedy in the lives of Canada's natives. Gwen Pharis Ringwood adapted classical themes to native life in her Drum Song trilogy. The three plays, entitled Maya, The Stranger, and The Furies share several characteristics. All feature female Indian protagonists who commit acts of violence in response to the overwhelming frustration of their lives, or as a means of revenge against their white exploiters; all involve conflict between the old Indian culture and the "new ways"; all explore sexual relationships between white men and native women.

Like most contemporary plays on native subjects, Drum Song makes use of a rudimentary set, relying on lighting

and properties to suggest the scenes. An old man, Alphonse, links the three parts of the trilogy with his drumming, giving the work its title.

Maya, the half-breed heroine of the first play, has been seduced and later abandoned by Allan, a young white man. The child she bore him soon died, and Maya turned to drink and prostitution, abandoning any hope of a better life. The play's crisis occurs when Allan returns, expecting to resume their relationship. Gilbert, Maya's Indian boyfriend, attacks Allan in a murderous rage. In despair, Maya stabs Gilbert in order to save Allan's life.

In some respects, Maya's character bears a strong resemblance to Rita Joe's, but it is dramatically less convincing. Her language has a "literary" tone which is out of place, as for example when she addresses Allan:

> Look at me, Maya, the hill-side whore. Mistress of the toothless and the angry, concubine to the half-wit and the sot, wife to the fumbling and the fearful...Oh I'm a foxy-doxy, Chicken Little, and the world may end tomorrow, so bestride me, little man, be my Colossus and I'll be your world...(350).

Even for the most "outstanding student on the reservation", which is the way a former teacher describes Maya, this speech is absurdly pretentious. If one disregards her tendency to florid expression, however, Maya communicates the pathos of what it is to be a young Métis woman who, "for all her white blood...wanted to be Indian". Her grandmother Josephina recalls that Maya used to ask her

> ...how we did things in the old days...she begged me to sing the war songs or the potlatch songs, but I couldn't remember them...she looked at me as if I'd robbed her somehow (341).

Maya fails to find a sense of identity and continuity in the "old ways", because the tribal memory is lost. Josephina's friend reinforces this sense of loss: "None of us remember the old songs or the dances or how they did things. None of us remember"(341).

Instead of cultural security, Josephina can only offer Maya a jumble of Christianity and superstition. And like Rita Joe's father, Josephina can offer no practical advice. Maya reacts furiously:

> Get out! Get out!...I don't believe your books, your prayers, your songs, I don't believe them, hear me? ...Me, I'm an Indian, stretched out on a plain as barren as a burnt-out star. To hell with them all, I'll show them! (346)

Like The Ecstasy of Rita Joe, Maya closes on a note of despair. Holding Gilbert's dead body in her arms, Maya grieves for him and for herself: "I killed you, Gilbert. I, Maya - I wanted something. I don't know. I thought to be different" (352).

The Stranger, the second play in Ringwood's trilogy, is based on Euripides' Medea. Jana, a Chilcotin Indian, has followed her common-law husband, Jason (whose name is taken from the Greek legend), to the land of the Shushwaps, where she discovers that he is co-habiting with a white woman. Consumed with jealousy, she sends poisoned berries to her husband's lover, and in an ultimate act of revenge, murders their child and kills herself. Interwoven with this

drama are tribal pride and suspicion. The Shushwap regard her as an evil omen, and try to force her to leave. By introducing the theme of tribal differences, Ringwood counteracts the impression, common to many contemporary plays, of native "homogeneity" and adds a note of complexity to the dramatic portrayal of Canada's natives.

Jana, like Maya, has an Indian suitor whom she rejects. Seemingly, happiness is rarely to be found in romance between the Indian maiden and her own kind, in plays by white authors. Happy - or unhappy - native couples can only be seen in a few plays by native writers. This is inevitable, since "native" works by white playwrights depend almost entirely on the conflict between native and white values for their dramatic tension.

The Furies, the final play in Ringwood's trilogy, is an unusually complex treatment of the Indian maiden theme. Two time frames are used in the play. Seventy years earlier, five young Indian girls (unknown to each other) were seduced and dishonored by the same white man, Jacques LaRange. Hearing that he had been boasting of this sexual exploit, one of his victims called them all together to plot their revenge. Since they have been shamed before their people, they agree to kill themselves, but in such a way that LaRange will "never know a single night without the riding nightmare of what he sees here". They will hang themselves from a tree directly in his path. All but one girl, Selina, agree.

The action returns to Selina, now an old woman, whose granddaughter has been raped and murdered by white hoodlums. She persuades her female friends to geld the men, who have not been convicted of the crime. Finally, in this manner, her ruined life and her granddaughter's murder are avenged.

This macabre plot casts Selina as both victim and heroine, and the old women as the Furies of the title. In the plays of Ringwood's trilogy, the female protagonists perpetrate acts of extreme violence. They are the potent characters. The male native characters, on the other hand, are unable to act effectively in any situation. Even in The Furies, when Selina's brothers might be expected to avenge their niece's death, their role is merely to drug and bind the rapists.

It is left to the women to make these gestures of blood and defiance, rather than to the men, who have lost their position of power in the native community.

* * *

The Cruel and Cunning Warrior Revisited

A contemporary perspective on the warrior figure is offered in two plays on historical subjects. The first, Herschel Hardin's The Great Wave of Civilization (1976) is based on the events surrounding the destruction of the Blackfoot and other Indian people by the liquor trade in the nineteenth century. The second, James W. Nichol's Sainte-Marie Among the Hurons (1977), is set in the sixteen hundreds

and has as its theme, the conversion of the Huron Indians by the French Jesuits.

The Great Wave of Civilization is a non-traditional blend of musical comedy, satire and tragedy. It contains an assortment of Indian characters. Little Dog has all the attributes of the warrior, implacably opposed to the white traders, and determined to keep the spirit of battle alive. Opposed to him are the spent and sold braves and chiefs, who have been deluded by the white man's promises and corrupted by his liquor.

The white traders are presented as caricatures of the most virulent kind. The scene in which they mix a revolting brew for the thirsty Indians is typical of many. The lines belong to "Snookum Jim":

> See that foamin'? That's the claw that grips that scratches the hotseat o' the powerful bear residin' in the redskin's soul. There's more than just hooch in there. There's somethin' phi-lo-sophical about it...We're changin' civilization. History! We're playin' a role (28).

Little Dog is determined to resist the inroads of these new "civilizing" influences.

Accompanied by his reluctant fighting companion, Shoots-in-the-Air, he joins a scattered group of Indians in reprisals against white settlers, in what was known as the "Blackfoot War". Eventually he is almost isolated in his determination to keep fighting when his attempts to persuade other warriors to join him fail. Shoots-in-the-Air is ready to give up the fight:

> How long must one wait till the Blackfoot again can ride, shouting across the land, free from his hatred of the white man? To fight with a Cree is quick, but this slow war against the white trader blocks out Sun day by day until we have lost His fight!...Your dreams are diseased with fighting the white man in all of the seasons...(98).

Little Dog only replies: "I will destroy", and continues to kill. In one scene, not content with merely scalping his victim, he determines to desecrate it:

> We are alive, and he is dead, but he is still feeding on the land.
> The fat death!
> Look at the stomach and the cheeks!
> White man! You are dead!
> Die! Die!
> We will slice out your heart!
> Have we killed him enough?
>
> Shoots-in-the-Air:
> We have killed him enough.
>
> Little Dog:
> No. We must tear out his heart.
> Come, let us tear out his heart (80).

The futility of Little Dog's opposition and "cruel savagery" is revealed in the final scene of the play, when he accidentally shoots his wife Sitakopi in a tragi-comic duel with Snookum Jim. Once again, a native has been responsible for the death of another native, raising the spectre of self-inflicted genocide.

Tribal conflict is seen as another reason for the failure of the Indians to mount an effective opposition to the advancing white tide. Little Dog is portrayed as an isolated figure, who is gradually cut off from his people. As a lone warrior, he comes to represent the glorious but

useless "last stand" of the native people in the West. Although his acts of cruelty are not excused, neither are they condemned. When Father John, a missionary, tries to persuade Little Dog to emulate the Flatheads who have become Christians, and "whose lives are now peaceful", the warrior responds: "The flathead is fat. He takes what is given and does what is asked...but I do not flee! I have not changed! (88).

Father John engages in a debate with Little Dog about the merits of Christianity (which Little Dog wins with his "usual sophistry"), pointing out that many Christian teachings are inappropriate. For example, he says, his wives were extremely upset when he told them that the missionaries had said he should limit himself to one.

Little Dog invokes the Master of Life who "is great...(but) for the moment the white men are His favourites". He is unrepentant and unconvinced.

Writing in 1967, Hardin invested his cruel and cunning savage with an aura of heroism which would have been unthinkable in the days of Mair and Hunter-Duvar. The vicious delinquent has been rehabilitated.

In the traditional manner, Sainte-Marie Among the Hurons opposes a mild-mannered and a cruel savage, in the persons of Broken Rock and Sleeping Water. The white protagonist, Blackrobe, is a young Jesuit, full of zeal and burning to acquire savage souls for Christ. Blackrobe's

conscience is personified by a character named Martyr, who appears at critical moments in the play, goading and ridiculing him in turn. Martyr appears to him in the first scene. "All the other brats played at soldiers and sailors," he teases, "but...you played at dying" (3).

Nichol holds no brief for the Jesuits, whom he represents as being responsible for bringing disease and death to the Indians. The priests are artists in cunning - they convince the Indians that their "magic" clock and writing have special divine powers, attempting to trick them into conversion. Only Blackrobe, the idealist, is a figure of integrity.

The natives, on the other hand, are drawn with considerable sympathy. Sleeping Water, the gentle Indian, is a simple, straightforward character, converted to Christianity not by trickery but by Blackrobe's evident faith. Broken Rock, the renegade, equals Little Dog in religious repartee. Head-to-head with Blackrobe, Broken Rock counters Christian beliefs with Indian ones:

> Blackrobe: ...And God came forth and made light out of the darkness so that the water could be seen. And...God split the depth of the water into two parts...and God placed the sky and all things of the sky between the two parts!
>
> Broken Rock: Listen to the half-wit! In the beginning Ataenenstic, the mother of all men, lived in a forest above the sky. One day she was out hunting and her dog ran a bear into a deep cave...and she fell into the sky...and plunged into a great sea of water below... Turtle rose up out of the sea carrying the earth and Ataenenstic on his back...and that was the beginning of the world (8).

The basic differences between the two belief systems are well-illustrated in this exchange. Christianity, with its monolithic male God is opposed to the animist religion of the Indians, with its life-giving female deity.[5]

Broken Rock continues to hold his "pagan" beliefs until the sickness of his people drives him to ask Blackrobe to let him "share in the corpse of Jesus (and) join you in your strength". Ironically, Blackrobe has by now lost his own faith, and can only cry out: "There is no magic corpse! There is no solution! Nothing!" (45). Broken Rock then disappears, to "die in honour before the Iroquois", but not before "baptising" Blackrobe with a cauldron of boiling water.

Sainte-Marie Among the Hurons depicts the cruel savage as a character to be sympathised with and pitied. He is not, in this contemporary interpretation of the Jesuit mission, what Monkman calls "the demonic antagonist of an ordained mission to bring civilization to the new world" (8). Rather he is the defender of the old world against new horrors.

In both The Great Wave and Sainte-Marie, the "noble savage" who seeks the path of peace is condemned as a coward and a follower of white ways. In Sainte-Marie, Broken Rock accuses Sleeping Water of being Blackrobe's lover, and tells him to "sit beside the women", the proper place for a coward (20). And in the Great Wave, Flat-Tail an old Piegan

warrior is mocked by Little Dog for "listening to the promises of the white man". "Where is your knife, white man? Why don't you fight?" (20), Little Dog insultingly asks the old man.

Shoots-in-the-Air and Broken Rock are both examples of the historical "cunning warrior", reinterpreted by contemporary playwrights. An example of a modern-day "warrior" can be seen in Ryga's portrayal of Jaimie-Paul, in The Ecstasy of Rita Joe. Resentful and pugnacious, Jaimie-Paul takes out his frustration in drink. The proud brave has been reduced to scavenging in the rummage of the Indian centre, and drunken insults and empty threats have replaced his tomahawk and rifle. Instead of confronting his white enemies face to face, Jaimie-Paul dies beneath the wheels of a train, joining the ranks of the anonymous victims of white "civilization".

* * *

Anonymous and Despairing Figures

Perhaps the purest, most easily recognizable of all the dramatic native stereotypes is that of the shiftless, drunken Indian, the welfare bum who is slow to work but quick to accept handouts from white society. This white view of the native was reflected in the portraits of dirty, ignorant savages found in the plays of the 1930's. The same stereotype is used as the basic dramatic material in two highly realistic plays of the 1960's.

Both plays explore the human personality beneath the stereotype. And by setting the "white view" of Indians against

their inner reality, both dramas achieve unexpected and illuminating insights.

The two plays in question, George Ryga's Indian and Philip Hersch's The Last Man in the World, are both television dramas, although Indian was originally written for the stage. The impact of the two plays derives to a great extent from the power and immediacy of the television image.

Indian was first produced on the CBC series Quest, in 1962. Darryl Duke, Quest's producer, saw the series as focusing on "social purpose dealing with matters that relate to contemporary society and with problems entirely new to television" (qtd. in Miller, 305). Ryga's play fitted this bill perfectly. Indian is a short (30 minutes), searing account of two encounters between an Indian protagonist and two white men. We are first shown "Indian" (he never gives his name) with his callous employer, who berates him for sleeping off his hangover when he should be working. This scene establishes the stereotype of the drunken, no-good Indian, unable to work because of a head that's "gonna explode" after the previous night's binge.

The second scene pits "Indian" against a soulless and officious white government agent. In the course of this encounter, "Indian" relates the story of his mercy killing of a brother several years before. The tension in the play is intensified by "Indian"'s forceful coercion of the agent into listening to his tale. He threatens and bullies the official into hearing him out, thus causing him to experience

for a brief time, the feeling of helplessness natives must endure every day. The Agent, horrified by what he has heard, dutifully tries to write a report of the killing (which was related to the brother's sufferings at the hands of white society) but "Indian" refuses to give him his name. Instead, he mockingly gives the agent several names, of the type found on every reservation and challenges him:

> Go to reservation with hunder policemen - you try to find Johnny Stone...you try to find Tommy Stone ...Sam Cardinal, too. Mebbe you find everybody, mebbe you find nobody. All Indians the same - nobody. Listen to me, sementos...Look - (turns out both pockets of his pants, holding them out, showing them empty and ragged) I got nothing...nothing...no wallet, no money, no name. I got no past...no future ...nothing, sementos...I not even live in this world ...I dead!...I not just dead...I never live at all! (32)

Having expressed these insights into his hopeless situation, "Indian" goes back to his job, driving fenceposts. In the course of these two brief scenes, the surface Indian has been replaced by a passionate, three-dimensional character.

"The Last Man in the World" was the first episode in the Wojeck series. Wojeck took its title from the name of the crusading coroner whose cases formed the basis for the series, and whose job it was to expose some of the social abuses current in the Canadian society of the 60's.

The play is concerned with an Indian, Joe Smith, who hangs himself in Toronto's Don Jail. Through a series of flashbacks, we learn about his history and are led to understand why he was driven to commit such a desperate act. We

further learn that the hanging was witnessed by several white fellow-prisoners, none of whom called for help until too late.

The flashbacks start with Joe's first excited, happy arrival in the city, and end with his final moments in jail, where he has been thrown to cool off after his arrest for drunk and disorderly conduct.

Like Rita Joe, Joe Smith has come to the city in search of a better life, but is soon disillusioned. The only work open to him is transient labour, and he is even turned down for that. When he is passed over in the line-up, a white bum consoles him: "Don't feel bad, chief. You can always go back to the reservation".

The concept of the reservation as a refuge and provider of a better life is a 'white' illusion. When Lucy, the white prostitute whom Joe pathetically believes to be a friend, asks him about the reservation, he cannot reply. In the stage directions, Hersch parenthesizes: "How can he tell her of the cold, the hunger, the indifference, the death of children and the emptiness of their lives?"

The technique of placing Joe in a number of different situations allows for an effective exposure of the stereotype. The white characters' idea of "the Indian", in scene after scene, is punctured by touches of reality. Gradually, for the audience, a composite picture of a real, suffering human being comes to replace the superficial, standard white view of the Indian.

In the final scene, just before his suicide in his jail cell, there is an audio reprise of lines uttered by some of the white characters he has met in the city, culminating with Lucy's reply to his request to be his girlfriend: "Not if you were the last man in the world".

At the end of the play, to quote Mary Jane Miller, writing in Turn Up The Contrast,

> The audience is left to make its own judgements on people, both Indian and white and none really "villains", and to reflect on the various degrees of responsibility viewers share in "Joe Smith's" death. The characters cannot be shelved as stereotypes, and the events have the dignity and the coherence of tragic inevitability (53).

At one level, both these plays successfully inflect and explore conventional native figures. Yet, at another level, they reinforce the prevailing image of the indigene as a misunderstood and exploited victim.

This view of the native, which has been a dominant theme in Canadian drama on the subject, is reflected in an arresting manner in Michael Cook's On the Rim of the Curve (1977). The play is based on the extermination of the Beothuk Indians in Newfoundland. The rivalry between the Beothuks and the Europeans for territory and furs, and the introduction of strange diseases by the whites, led to the eventual extinction of the entire race.

The Europeans are depicted as coarse and almost indescribably cruel. The unifying image in the play is that of the cold-blooded murder of a nursing mother and her baby,

hunted down by two trappers. One of them says: "Jesus, she had some set on her. Look. The milk's running out. The other replies: "I s'pose we could've waited a bit. Made some use of her" (15).

Retribution is finally meted out in the afterlife, when the white men are compelled to carry the burdens of their victims forever. The Indians, for their part, have found peace and immortality.

The play employs a non-realistic setting and blends poetry and prose to create a dream-like evocation of an extinct people. Of the many dramas which show natives in the posture of helpless victims, perhaps none does so more graphically than On the Rim of the Curve.

* * *

Glimpses of the Old Power - Shamans, Spirits and Deities

A number of contemporary white dramatists have incorporated elements of the supernatural into their plays about native people. Drum Beat contains many references to omens and second sight, and employs a shaman-like drummer to conjure up the three episodes in the trilogy. In Esker Mike & His Wife, Agiluk, Toomik, the shaman, and Agiluk herself are in frequent communion with the spirits. Len Peterson based the plot of his 1958 play, The Great Hunger, on the evil interference of a shaman in the lives of an Eskimo family.

Cam Hubert's television drama, Dreamspeaker, was based on her novel of the same title. Broadcast by the CBC

in 1977, this play reverses the usual situation, wherein the native is a supplicant in white society. Instead, it tells the story of a disturbed young white boy who is helped by two West Coast Indian men, one of whom is a shaman. Fleeing from a "facility" where he has been incarcerated after setting fire to his school, Peter (the young boy) stumbles on the two men in a forest clearing. The younger man, a deaf-mute, is the "adopted son" of the old shaman. Slowly, they win Peter's trust, and the "treatment" begins.

The old man, who calls himself a "Dreamspeaker" shifts the burden of guilt, which has been tormenting Peter, onto the spirits. The hallucinations and fits which Peter experiences are regarded by the shaman as a manifestation of the spirits. Unlike the psychiatric staff at the facility, who have been treating Peter as "sick" and giving him medication, Dreamspeaker accepts him as a normal boy and shows him a positive way to deal with his difficulties. He tells Peter that

> There's spirit things that can start fires without no help at all. They love to hang around where there's kids, that way nobody knows it's spirits, they blame the kids. ...Does one of them come around here and start a fire, boy, don't you stand there like an ass dithering and waiting to get blamed...you chuc' bucket 'a water on the bugger.

When Peter protests that he is "bad", Dreamspeaker tells him the story of Raven, the Spirit who "steals and swears and fights...all the bad things". He helps Peter to overcome his terrible fear of his "fits", and begins to

teach him some simple skills. Dreamspeaker's educational technique, like his treatment of Peter's emotional and mental problems, is antithetically opposed to the white system. No "teaching" takes place. Instead, as Dreamspeaker puts it, "you just let the kid hang around, watching."

The play ends tragically when Peter is discovered and returned to the institution. Once again confined, he becomes uncontrollable, incoherent and despondent. When his 'spirits' tell him that the Old Man has died, he hangs himself. From Peter's death, the camera cuts to the Old Man's ritual burial in a tree, followed by the deaf-mute's suicide. The last frames are bittersweet - Peter and his Indian friends are shown happily splashing in a stream, in what is apparently meant to be a happy spirit-place.

Despite its ending, which seems unnecessarily melodramatic, Dreamspeaker succeeded in portraying native culture in a positive manner. The suggestion that white civilization has something to learn from native beliefs and attitudes has been rare in plays about indigenous people. Generally, in these dramas, the white "vision" of the native has precluded such a point of view, because it is so narrowly circumscribed by white concerns.

A light-hearted look at native supernatural beliefs was taken in an episode of The Beachcombers in the late 1970's. The Return of the Hexman, by Arthur Mayse, was a sequel to the highly successful The Hexman episode, broadcast

in the 1975-76 season. The Return takes the form of a ghost story in which the spirit of a Newfoundland fisherman puts a "hex" on Nick, the principal white character of the series, and his irritating rival, Relic.

Jesse, Nick's Indian partner, calls on the spirit of his Great-Grandfather to break the Hexman's spell. "Great Grand-dad's voice is heard in a parody of the familiar Indian lament:

> Great Grand-dad: Once the whale swum in the sea. Once the deers and the antelope roamed.
> Jesse: He's on his ecology kick.
> Great Grand-dad: The King-george man came. He shot the deers, he killed the fish, he poisoned the clams.
> Jesse: Listen, Great Grand-dad Could you kind of skip that part? We're in trouble, we need help.

Help is obligingly provided, and the spell broken, in a scene which is surprisingly effective. The play treats white and Indian legends with a blend of humour and respect. It foreshadows later works by native playwrights, in which the spirits and shamans exhibit an engaging earthiness.

Chapter III

New perspectives

The effort to present the native point of view, which can be observed in plays like Indian and Esker Mike & His Wife, Agiluk, grew more deliberate and intense as the 1970's gave way to the 80's, and non-native playwrights began to produce sensitive works in which white breast-beating was no longer the inevitable dramatic focus. Slowly, dramatists began to pay less attention to the "why" of native survival and to look at the "how" of their remarkable endurance.

Then, with the advent of "native theatre" and the appearance of contemporary native playwrights, a new voice began to be heard, giving expression to a wide range of native concerns and cultural concepts. Unfamiliar figures began to appear, gradually displacing the old stereotypes, although these still flashed occasionally across the stage.

* * *

Bridging Two Cultures - The Métis in the 80's

The changing perception of the native in the drama of the 1980's owes a great deal to several stage and television plays about Métis people. In these plays, the Métis were perceived as links and mediators between the white and Indian

cultures. The white audience was forced to acknowledge the presence, in their midst, of a race which shared their own history and desires. As the "otherness" of the native was slowly eroded, possibilities for understanding began to increase.

The playwrights of the 80's saw the Métis not only as mediators, but, perhaps even more significantly, they depicted them as sturdy survivors, as well as people with a voice of their own.

In a discussion of recent "Métis" drama, it is not surprising to find another play about Riel, the hero who still haunts the Canadian stage. Plays continue to be written which use the Riel myth as a point of departure for a re-examination of native and white identities and their interdependence.

Rex Deverell is one of the latest English Canadian dramatists to mine the Riel story for material. His play, Beyond Batoche, was published in Canadian Drama in 1985, in an issue devoted to dramatic depictions of the Métis hero. It resembles Carol Bolt's Gabe to the extent that it is a modern interpretation of the old story, and introduces a native point of view. Unlike Bolt's satirical play, however, which is a wry "what if" look at the events of 1885, Beyond Batoche is a metadrama which explores the difficulties faced by the white playwright in attempting to re-interpret Riel's story. The subject of the play, the

production of a new television film on Riel, was inspired by Deverell's own experience as the screen writer for the CBC series, The Riel Commission. In a non-realistic style, the play puts the production team and Riel onstage simultaneously, with a modern tour guide providing an intermittent and provocative commentary on the events of 1885.

Matthew, the screen writer in Beyond Batoche, must contend with the other members of the production "team", all of whom have their own idea of what will "play" and what will "sell". Burns, the producer, puts his own case succinctly: "I'm going to sell Riel and somebody's going to buy him - but first you gotta give me ten minutes of what they most want to see" (379). Agreeing on the ten minutes of the pilot tape presents difficulties. Matt's view of Riel as primarily a mystic does not impress Shane, the actor, who argues that "that's what I won't be able to play. I mean I can play the anger against England - I can play the revolutionary - but how am I going to play bloody mysticism? (380). Matt's inability to accept the rebel in Riel is linked to his need to romanticize his hero, and to make him over into his own image. "He's the mystic who wanted to better the lot of his people. He dreamed the voice of God and acted on it. I'm an author who dreams stories and I want to change the lot of my people" (Act 1, 393). When Matt asks him to define "his people", Matt simply states "I've got a social conscience".

Within the framework of this dramatic conflict,

Beyond Batoche dissects the wnite playwright's "standard view" of the native. The indispensable native element is added in the person of Yvonne, a young Métis teacher. When the deadlocked team decides to bring her in as an advisor, their initial idea is to obtain "some first-hand experience", to "get the flavour, the texture of Metis life", as Matt puts it. Yvonne's first question is predictable and disconcerting: "Couldn't you have found a Métis actor to play the part?" Her next question, "Why don't you look at the present for a change?" meets with an enthusiastic response as the group begins to visualize their chance to "make a real political statement", by bringing elements of a modern, but essentially unchanged Métis society into the play. Carried away by their vision, they fail to appreciate the irony in Yvonne's suggestion that "You could have a Mountie raping an Indian girl".

Yvonne's revelations of "what it's like to be Métis" are exploited in Matt's final script, which she describes as "like Velveeta cheese or something..." The screen play, which he had visualized as a moving statement of political injustice, is rejected by Yvonne, and by the rest of the now sympathetic group. The final script, which is developed without Matt's help, is a co-operatively produced statement of genuine feeling. The "final take" in the new script shows Riel walking to the gallows while Yvonne, watching after him, speaks these lines:

> Pray for us, Louis. Pray for us who come after. Pray for us in your distant future. We are proud to be called your children. Pray for all of us. Pray for those who have forgotten we are Métis. Pray for those who have grown up speaking our own language and those of us who know what it is to be Métis and are joyful. Pray for us who are still searching, still struggling to find out. Pray for us in our politics, in our struggles with the children of John A. Macdonald. Pray for us in our struggles with one another. Help us to be strong and may we be one (426).

The deliberately low-keyed tone of this final speech is in marked contrast to the sentimental note sounded in Matt's rejected script. Yvonne prays to Riel as to a well-loved father. Matt's concerns about 'visions', about the guilt or innocence of white society, are absent in this speech, which is deliberately low-keyed. Yvonne has not found the answers: as she said, earlier in the play, she is searching. Her search embraces the discovery that she is capable of sharing a point of view with white people, and even of liking them. When she confides to Kelly, Matt's wife, that "The first time I laid eyes on you, I said - there is my least favourite kind of person", and then confesses, "I like you, Kelly, I do" a small, important and rare moment has occurred. Such an example of trust between native and white, without the ominous foreshadowing of betrayal, is seldom seen in plays about native people.

The question of Yvonne's sense of cultural identity is not an issue in Beyond Batoche. "I'm Métisse, eh? I own myself. That's what the Cree used to call us. O-tee-paym-soo-wuk (we own ourselves)" she tells her friend Kelly.

This sense of being a people apart, of "owning themselves" is explored in Daughters of the Country, a dramatic film series made by the National Film Board in 1986 and broadcast by the CBC in the spring of 1988. Spanning a period of two centuries (1770-1985), the four one-hour episodes follow the historical and social evolution of the Métis people in Canadian society. Each program tells the story of a Métis woman and her family, and shows their position within the larger framework of Canadian society. At the end of the series, the audience is forced to realize that life has changed little for this marginalized people, since white and Indian blood was first mingled in the early days of European settlement. This inevitable and depressing conclusion, while important in the political sense, (and the advocacy aspect of these dramas cannot be ignored) is not the only message of Daughters of the Country.

The series makes a major contribution to the understanding of the Métis people, in several ways. First, the producers of all four episodes are largely successful in avoiding the stereotype and in portraying their protagonists as individuals. Secondly, native culture and values are depicted in a positive manner. And finally, following a trend which has become more noticeable in recent years, all the native and Métis parts were played by indigenous actors.

Perhaps the greatest challenge to the film makers was offered by the first episode, "Ikwe" (writ. Wendy Lill), the story of the marriage between Ikwe, a Cree Indian girl

from an Ojibway village on the shores of Ontario's Georgian Bay, and a young Scottish fur trader. It would have been easy to fall back on the conventional "Hollywood" image of the early Indian. Instead, the producers achieved a sense of authenticity by using historically correct costumes, habitations and customs. And in an admirable innovation, the Indian characters spoke in Cree, with English subtitles providing the audience with a translation. The extraordinary effect of this simple device was to elevate Cree to the status of an established, respected language, with a place of its own in world culture. The use of subtitles, usually reserved for international languages such as French, German, or Russian, generated a beneficial sense of shock in the audience, when applied to the Indian language in Ikwe.

Ikwe blends the Indian belief in dreams with reality, and opposes the close family ties of the tribe with the remoteness and insensitivity of Ikwe's Scottish husband. Her dream of an ominous stranger "whose presence evokes haunting images of sadness and desolation", as the NFB publicity release describes him, is fulfilled when her marriage turns out badly. Her husband, who would have died of cold and starvation during their first winter together, but for Ikwe's Indian skills, shows her no gratitude or affection, but persists in treating her like "a savage", although he grows fond of their children.

Eventually his callousness becomes unendurable, and

when he ships their son off to be educated in Scotland without informing her or obtaining her consent, Ikwe returns to her Indian family. But unwittingly, in her flight from the white settlement, she has carried the smallpox epidemic with her to her village.

The sole survivor of the epidemic is Ikwe's small daughter, who is seen in the last scene of the film, making her way along the river with touching determination, carrying her few possessions. Since we know that she has been well-trained by her mother in woodlore, the message of survival is clear. We also know that she has been taught about her double heritage by Ikwe, who took care to impress on her that "you have two people inside you", and that both are of equal importance.

The themes of betrayal by the white man and of the return to the native community are re-iterated in the next episode, "Mistress Madeline" (writ. Anne Cameron and Kim Johnston). The action takes place eighty years later, in 1850, in the North West of pre-Riel days. The Métis, who have their own well-established communities, have started their own trading routes with the Americans, angering the Hudson's Bay officials. Madeline, the cherished common-law wife of one such official, finds herself torn between her brother, a Métis "free-trader" and political rebel, and her husband, who represents company policy. She is driven to seek refuge with her family when her husband, despite his

genuine affection for Madeline, returns from abroad with an English bride.

Madeline then aligns herself irrevocably with her brother and cements her ties with the Métis community. The last frames show her dancing with her brother to the music of a Métis fiddler. "I loved him (her husband) very much", she tells him. "I know", he replies. It is Madeline's definitive split with the white world, and the beginning of her own existence as a Métisse.

"Places Not Our Own" (writ. Sandra Birdsell), set in Manitoba in 1929, concerns the Lespérance family, who have been forced by drought to abandon their farm and settle on the edge of a small prairie town.

With the loss of their farm they have also lost their sense of place, as the title of the script suggests. Rose Lespérance's dreams for a better life for her family are shattered, one by one, as the white community refuses to accept them. Discouraged, the family leaves, to go north to join Alex, Rose's husband, who has gone there to seek work. "Places Not Our Own" emphasizes the marginalization of the Métis, and the fragility of their physical roots in the country. It also portrays the two female protagonists, Rose and Flora, as women of courage, hope and humour.

The fourth and last program in the series is set in Lac la Biche, Alberta. The year is 1985, one hundred years after the Riel rebellion. The figure of the cowardly and

treacherous white man, absent in "Places", returns in this episode, which is entitled "The Wake" (writ. Sharon Riis). In a sense, this is the darkest of the four dramas, since it offers the hope of a new understanding between Métis and white and then tragically withdraws it. The white man in question is an idealistic young RCMP officer who falls in love with Joan, a Métis woman. She reciprocates, and despite opposition from both their families, a happy union seems a real possibility. Then in a harrowing scene, Joan's young cousin and several of her teen-aged friends, plunge in their truck through the ice of a nearby lake in the course of a police chase following a school dance. Jim, Joan's "fiancé", who is in the patrol car with an older officer, wants to go to their aid but is persuaded by the other man that the water is shallow and it will "do them good to cool off". When Jim discovers that all but one of the youngsters have drowned, he is horrified, but tries to cover up his involvement. Having found out from her cousin that Jim had witnessed the accident, Joan confronts him, offering to forgive him if he will make a truthful report. When he refuses, Joan spits in her lover's face and leaves. The door, which had fleetingly opened between Métis and white, is discouragingly closed as the series ends.

A number of vivid portraits of Métis characters are realized in this drama. Especially convincing are the adolescents, in their efforts to conform to the North American

teen image. Their attempts to keep up with white trends in music, makeup and clothing, are touchingly at odds with the serious domestic problems which beset many of them at home.

The Métis' pride, sense of community and loyalty to their own people are highly developed in "The Wake". The title refers to the two wakes which begin and end the play. The first honors Joan's grandfather, an old man who has died at the end of a long and complete life; the second mourns the premature death of five young people who represented the hope of their families and community. A quasi-joyful atmosphere pervades the first event, while the second communicates a sense of despair and anger. The young constable who attempts to pay his respects at the young people's wake, in the apparent belief that his act of cowardice has gone unreported, is confronted by a wall of grim Métis men who slowly force him back to his car.

It is tempting to look for the stereotype of the Indian maiden in Daughters of the Country. After all, in three of the four episodes, the female protagonist is betrayed by a white lover for whom she has left her own people. But neither the original romanticised maiden, nor the victimized version of the character personified by Rita Joe, are to be found in the heroines of this television series. Apart from Ikwe, who dies of smallpox, none of them die tragically; none kill their own kind in a futile and suicidal gesture. Instead, they survive and continue their

struggle to find "places of their own".

Daughters of the Country does not spare white Canadian society, particularly in The Wake, which contains many examples of insensitive white behaviour. The white characters, however, are not the vile stereotypes of Rita Joe and On the Rim of the Curve. In their place, the camera shows us "ordinary" people, social workers, policemen, bullies and do-gooders; in short, reflections of ourselves.

Métis women have central parts in two other stage plays, which will be discussed in the next section. These two works are Jessica, by Linda Griffiths, and Gabrielle, a "native" play.

* * *

It is difficult to pinpoint the beginning of the contemporary "native" theatre movement. Rota Lister, in her 1974 article, refers to Indian pageants such as Hiawatha (1908) and the Forest Theatre plays of the Six Nations, held on the Grand River reserve in Brantford each year since 1949, as examples of involvement by native people in dramatic productions (68).[6] She also cites productions by native theatre groups, of plays by white playwrights (70), a trend which continues in "native" theatre to this day.

Native playwright Thomson Highway, in his unpublished monograph "A Brief History of 'Native Theatre' in Ontario", expresses his own uncertainty about the history of the

movement, in Ontario at least: "'Native Theatre' in Ontario can be said to be about 10 years old this year (1987), although one would be hard-pressed to find an exact date for its actual birth". He goes on to list a wide range of influences and early initiatives, including the plays of James Reaney and George Ryga and the 1962 Norval Morrisseau exhibition, as contributing to the development of the native theatre movement.[7]

As Highway also notes, the formation of the Association for Native Development in the Performing and Visual Arts in the mid-seventies lent a great impetus to the development of native theatre in Ontario. Regional groups like the De-ba-jeh-mu-jig Theatre Company on Manitoulin Island, as well as Highway's own "Native Earth" theatre group continue to nurture native actors and native playwrights. In the western provinces, a number of indigenous groups have produced original works, four of which are discussed below.

For the purposes of this study, I have divided "native" plays into two categories. The first contains works by non-native writers working closely with native collaborators or theatre groups; the second embraces dramatic works created solely by native playwrights.

* * *

Native Theatre - "Co-op Plays"

The Twin Sinks of Allan Sammy (1973) was written by Cam Hubert for Tillicum Theatre, a native youth theatre which

she herself had founded. Hubert, who also writes under the name of Anne Cameron, has had a close and lengthy involvement with the native community. She has written poetry, novels, and radio and television plays on Indian subjects, including Dreamspeaker, the script for "Mistress Madeline" (which she co-authored with Kim Johnston), discussed under "Métis theatre", above, and From the Belly of Old Woman, a radio play.

The Twin Sinks develops the theme of "the dilemma faced by many native Indians when confronted with a tough urban environment" (Introduction, 59). The standard view of the city, expressed in Rita Joe, The Last Man in the World, and Jessica, as an environment hostile to natives, prevails in this drama. Not only is the city an impersonal, destructive place to be, but it is antithetical to native culture. One is reminded of the fears of the Quebec clergy for the spiritual survival of their flock, at the time of the great population movement to the city from the country in Quebec in the 1940's. Souls were lost in the city, the Church maintained; far better to stay at home on the farm, where the old values still held sway.

A similar fear of cultural loss and assimilation is at the centre of The Twin Sinks. Sammy, the Indian protagonist in Hubert's play, is involved in a labour dispute, a lockout. Ineligible for either strike pay or social assistance, he must decide between "selling his heritage"

in the form of the precious coppers which he has inherited from his ancestors in order to remain in the city, where he has worked hard to obtain a good home and educational opportunities for his children, and returning to the reserve, where he will be materially poorer, but spiritually more fulfilled. ("The Twin Sinks" of the title symbolize the coveted, more comfortable life of the city.) The spirits of his grandather and a matriarchal "crone" are present in the play, and argue for the old values. "If God hadda wanted Indians to live in cities He'da put them there", says "Crone". In the end, Sammy decides to return to the reserve with his family:

> If we never got nothing else we got us. Us and our people. Don't even really need a copper with that. Not really. We'll live like we should, eat good, and come some Saturday night we'll drink us some beer, dance, sing, have a good time, and we'll laugh. Just laugh and live. Then we'll go home to Granddad's house and we'll make us some babies (79).

This idyllic view of reservation life is in sharp contrast to the depressing vision of the reserve conjured up in other plays. Instead of a place to flee from, "home", in Hubert's play, becomes a desirable refuge and a source of cultural enrichment. Not only has the negative view of the reserve disappeared, in this play, but so has the stereotypical view of native people in the city as victims, unable to influence their fate. In The Twin Sinks, the Indian characters are portrayed as people with a choice, and the ability to control their lives. They are also

depicted as members of an industrialized group, where Indians are not singled out and mistreated simply because they are Indians. Sammy and the white members of his union are all caught in the same oppressive machine. He is thus doubly marginalized, by virtue of belonging both to a racial minority and to a group of disadvantaged whites.

The conflict between the old ways and life in the city is one of the themes developed in Jessica (1986), written by Linda Griffiths in collaboration with Maria Campbell, a native writer. The play is a dramatization of "Halfbreed", Campbell's novel about a contemporary Métis woman.

In this play, native spirits share the stage with the "real" characters of Jessica and the significant people from her past life. Each character, spirit or human has a double existence. As Vitaline, the shaman and intermediary figure between Jessica and her spirits puts it, "It's as if each human character has had a dream of being an animal, and each animal character has dreamt about being human". Visually, the transformations take place by means of lights, sound, and the donning and removal of masks.

The central action in the play is Jessica's search for her "own voice" after a chaotic and wretched existence. Her quest for her true personality becomes a journey into the unseen world, with spirits acting as her guides. A passage in the play's introduction describes Jessica's unusual dramatic form:

> The entire play is a ceremony. From the first moment that Vitaline's prayer call goes out, until the final scene when Jessica sings her power song, the action is in flashback. When the spirits decide to "take Jessica back", they agree to allow her to relive parts of her life, but with certain changes that will allow her to see some path through the muddle of years (introduction).

Like young Peter in Dreamspeaker, Jessica has her disturbed personality healed by the ancient power of native mythology. White society has torn and divided Jessica's psyche ever since her rape at the age of twelve by a Mountie. (One wonders if Griffiths was aware of Beyond Batoche, with its ironic comment on this plot possibility). At the same time, she must learn to live in a white environment, which is where her work as a social activist has placed her. The play attempts to reconcile the Indian and white elements in Jessica's life. Early in the play, Jessica articulates the difficulty she has in applying the old beliefs to her everyday existence:

> I can't do it anymore, I'm a modern person. I'm a halfbreed. I live in a white world full of filing cabinets and common sense. The years go by and everyone around me is making decisions and calming down, and my life just gets weirder...no, it's worse than that...waves and waves and waves of fear, I'm drowning and I'm cracking apart (Act 1, n. p.)

In her supplications to the spirits to help Jessica, Vitaline includes symbols from white culture. Instead of the native objects traditionally used in "making a ceremony", the shaman places Jessica's jeans, walkman, cigarettes and scarf in the four corners of the room. Then she calls on

the unseen beings to guide Jessica, who

> is caught somewhere, between the light and darkness of her own spirit...this woman is of mixed blood so this ceremony is of mixed blood. The city is with us, the white world is with us, there is a new energy that speaks to us (Act 1, n. p.)

Bear, one of the spirits, objects that "it's dangerous to mix up different kinds of power", but Vitaline responds that "they're mixed up in her life". In a somewhat contrived manner, a "white" spirit, the Unicorn, symbol of the prehistoric, pagan "magic" of vaguely anglo-saxon origins, is brought in to create a racial balance in the spirit world. In keeping with the negative attitude of contemporary white dramatists towards Christianity, Griffiths seeks positive spiritual values in pre-Christian beliefs, rather than in teachings which are identified with the dark days of the missionaries.

Jessica contains many reminders of Rita Joe. Like the earlier heroine, Jessica has endured years of degradation as a prostitute, and has reached the nadir of despair. The flashback technique is used in both plays to explain and comment on the situation of the protagonists. Profound differences, however, exist in the dramatic viewpoint of the two playwrights. Rita Joe dies tragically, powerless to change her lot. Jessica, even without her spirits' help, has rehabilitated herself, moving from a life of prostitution to one of social action. Finally, Rita Joe, the helpless victim of an uncaring society, finds no protection or help in the "old life", but must be content with her father's poetic

but futile evocations of a dead past. Jessica, on the other hand, is "taken back" by a band of colourful and potent spirits to confront her past life and to make sense of it. There is a sense of empowerment in Jessica that is missing in Rita Joe; the "mutated Indian maiden" has gone.

Jessica's spirits use their "magic" powers sparingly. Their main function is to help her to face reality and to rid her of her burdens of guilt and despondency. Once again one is reminded of Dreamspeaker, where Peter is encouraged to come to terms with his past and to accept responsibility for his own actions. In a telling scene, when Jessica is contemplating suicide, Crow berates her:

> Let's play both ends of the stick, see how quick we can get to the middle, let's play tough bitch and junkie and halfbreed from the bush, and see how quick you can kill us both. I can't even fly anymore, I had to run here all the way from the pool hall (Act 1, n. p.)

The point of the play lies in Jessica's assumption of her own power. In the last scene, seeing "someone made of smoke, maybe it's a man, maybe it's a woman", Jessica is urged by Vitaline to name her. "Grandmother and Grandfathers, give me strength", Vitaline cries. "Call her now or you'll never see her again. Name her." And Jessica responds with her own name, before breaking into a "power song" of recognition and healing.

A number of strands which have been observed in earlier plays are interwoven in Jessica. The importance of a sense of self, the attempt to bridge two cultures, the

assumption of individual responsibility and the intrusion of the spiritual into the physical world, all these themes enter into this important, non-stereotypical portrayal of native people.

The Land Called Morning, a collection of three "native plays" was published in Saskatoon in 1986. Two of these dramas, Gabrielle and the title play, while not written by native playwrights, were developed with a high degree of native involvement. Both were performed by native casts, and developed with indigenous audiences in mind, although they were performed before non-native audiences as well.

Gabrielle, which has no acknowledged author, was created by a high-school drama group, Upisasik Theatre of Rossignol School, in Ile-a-la-Crosse, Saskatchewan. The play, produced to commemorate the Riel Rebellion of 1885, is another dramatic variation on the Riel theme.

Gabrielle is a spunky attempt at political theatre, considering the youth of its creators. The play takes the form of an update of the Riel rebellion, set in modern-day Batoche. The contemporary issue is land claims; the modern Métis leader is a woman named Gabrielle, a young, ambitious law student.

Riel's presence is used in a straightforward way. Without any of the subtlety of Beyond Batoche, the Métis hero is enlisted in the contemporary struggle with oil developers and government. He exhorts his descendants to act decisively: "You hold all the cards, you are strong

enough. All you have to do is take your lands!" (49). Acting on Riel's "advice", the Métis set up a provisional government and "kidnap" the Provincial Minister, who, with heavy-handed symbolism, is called Scott. A happy ending is not assured, but the Métis people have been united by their daring action.

The value of Gabrielle does not lie in the depth of its characters, but rather in its vitality, and in its approach to the Riel story. In this little play, which presumably reflects the attitude of contemporary Indian and Métis students, Riel ceases to be the repository of white guilt and a source of endless reappraisal. Instead, his legend is plundered in a friendly and familiar way, without hesitation and without guilt. Riel, to these kids, is just family. This lack of self-consciousness is a further step in the development of a genuinely "native" point of view.

One further point is worth noting in this play. Gabrielle, like Jessica, is a political activist. (So, in a sense, is Yvonne, in Beyond Batoche). It is significant that the role of political reformer has been given to women in at least these few plays.[8] From passive sexual object to survivor and preserver of heritage and family, and finally to social and political activist, ready to do battle for her race - it has been a formidable progression for the female character, since we first met her in the early plays.

The Land Called Morning, by John Selkirk and Gordon Selkirk, was developed with the help of a group of young Cree Indians from the Montreal Lake reserve in northern

Saskatchewan. The play had its first performance at the Edmonton Fringe Theatre in 1985, a city which was, as John Selkirk states in his introduction "the farthest most of (the actors) had ever been from home" (73). It was also performed at the Quinzaine Internationale du Theatre Quebec, in 1986.

This play focuses on two teen-aged couples, all "trying to make their way in, and make some sense of, the world around them" (introduction, 73). Each young person represents a different attitude towards his or her "Indian-ness". Robin, a brilliant young boxer, achieves fame and fortune off the reserve, proving to the world that he is not only "the best Indian" but "the best. Period" (100). His girl friend, Patsy, represents the "old" Indian values, in contrast to Peter, the flippant, hard-drinking petty criminal who is oblivious to his heritage. Anne, Peter's girl, is a dreamer, who becomes more and more depressed at her inability to change her life and finally commits suicide.

In production, the characters of the four young protagonists doubtlessly gained a great deal of authenticity through their portrayal by native actors. But, like Gabrielle, the play focuses on issues rather than character development. Nevertheless, it is a strong statement of the concerns of young people growing up on an Indian reserve, and of their various ways of dealing with them. The audience is clearly meant to approve of Robin's ambition to excel in the white world, as well as of Patsy's desire to cling to

her Indian roots. At the conclusion of the play, Robin takes up the theme of individual responsibility, heard earlier in Jessica. His monologue takes the form of an epitaph to his sister, Anne, who has shot herself in a field:

> But that's the whole point. I figured it out. You make your own luck. Like in the ring when a nigger breaks your nose you make your own luck. And even sitting out in some clover field you still gotta make your own luck. So maybe I won't win a lottery, who cares? I got a good family and I got a son at home almost one year old. After I'm done fighting he's gonna take my place on this earth and he's a real smart boy. Do you see now? (Looks to the sky). Do you see, Annie? There's no bullshit. There can't be or we won't survive. None of us will (He slowly makes a fist, a salute). It's like what our mama calls love (112).

On this note of hope, the play ends. The Land Called Morning introduces a new character into native drama - that of the ambitious young Indian, anxious to "reach the top" in white society. And along with this new figure, an old stereotype also makes an appearance in The Land Called Morning: the drunken, shiftless Indian, represented by Peter.

Another play to emerge from this "co-operative native theatre" movement is No' Xha' (Our Footprints), a work written by David Diamond with the assistance of several other individuals. Credit in the programme is given to Headlines Theatre, a western theatre company, the Gitskan-Wet' suwet'en Tribal Council and "many individuals in the area surrounding Hazelton, B.C.", for their collaboration in producing the play.[9]

No' Xha', presented as part of Toronto's Alternative Theatre Festival in 1988, belongs to the tradition of agit-prop theatre, taking up the cudgels for the Gitskan and Wet'suwet'en people on a number of critical issues.

Land claims, self-government and the affiliated issues of land and resource management are the principal concerns addressed in the play. Various techniques are used by the company to convince the audience of the rightness of their cause, including printed information, direct addresses to the spectators and a post-play discussion with interested playgoers. A great deal of useful cultural, historical and political information has been packed into this play, which has been used to raise the consciousness of native as well as white audiences.

True to the format of the "Theatre of the Oppressed", No' Xha' fields a team of uncomplicated characters, all with a message to deliver. Among the Indian characters is the impressive mythical figure of the salmon dancer, linking the various scenes. The action covers a period extending from the advent of the first white settlers in British Columbia, to the present day.

An interesting look at the white stereotype is afforded by No' Xha'. White settlers are depicted as greedy, predatory, oblivious to Indian culture and lacking in any sense of justice. The Indian is presented as a peace-maker, anxious to present his claims but unwilling to push them as far as violence. A central theme of the play is

that of the "peaceful meeting place", where differences between people will be reconciled. Echoes of the noble savage and the fiendish white reverberate in this play, providing yet another graphic example of the continuing love affair between the stereotype and the didactic writer.

One scene avoids the stereotype, however. In a confrontation between two couples, one native, the other white, their differing views and genuine emotions are communicated in simple and human terms. The anguish of four friends whose long-standing association is now threatened by the Indians' political activism, is movingly expressed. Despite the presence of unsympathetic white stereotypes, No' Xha', through its message of peaceful co-existence, holds out hope for conciliation between natives and whites.

* * *

Native Playwrights

George Kenny's October Stranger (1978), written in collaboration with Denis Lacroix, and based on Kenny's book, Indians Don't Cry, is a significant landmark in the development of authentic native drama.

This play was Canada's entry in the sixth International Theatre Festival in Monaco, in 1977. In his introduction to the 1978 edition of the play, James H. Bullen, executive director of the Association for Native Development in the Performing Arts, states

> I was determined that our production would be a play that was written, produced, directed and performed by Native people. I realized, after some searching, that there were very few appropriate plays written by Native people that related to contemporary situations (introduction, V).

Kenny was accordingly commissioned to write a play which would put the contemporary Indian on stage. The cast, which was wholly Indian, is credited by Bullen with an important role in developing the script. Certainly, its authentic flavour suggests that it was tested against "real life" Indian experience.

The entire action of the play takes place on a dock, near the reserve where John has been visiting his family after a long absence. The play, in a sense, is a long, drawn out final goodbye to the old life for John, who has decided to pursue a serious writing career in the city. Written in a poetic, non-realistic style, October Stranger makes use of a chorus, and alternates what are described as "realistic" with "introspection" scenes.

The play works at several levels. The by now familiar contrast between the "old life" on the reservation, and the corrosive life of the city, provides the play with a loose dramatic structure, within which a number of more subtle conflicts develop. Although some of these conflicts peripherally reflect the personal relationships between the five characters in the play, the most significant ones centre on the controversial place of the Indian creative artist in contemporary society.

With the exception of Ida, a woman who has found fulfilment in reservation life, all five characters in October Stranger are artists. John, the principal protagonist, is a poet, and his friends include a painter, an "entertainer" and a dancer.

John's drive to write is presented as an impersonal, universal need, disassociated from any utilitarian, political end. His friends try to persuade him to enlist his talent in the fight for Red Power, but he refuses, preferring to write about characters like Gerald Ballantyne, "folk hero of Ear Falls" who "breathes out his memories / from his log cabin / for the Ear Falls Observer / stories of integrity / and lies / up and down the shores / of Lac Seul (53). By describing the past and present life of Lac Seul, John is contributing indirectly to a better understanding of his people and at the same time fulfilling himself as an artist.

Not all the artistic visions in October Stranger have the integrity of John's. A few, like some of Gerald Ballantyne's memories, are lies. Paul, the dancer, is mocked by the group for "going native". He defends his choice of Indian apparel: "I've worn these moccasins (bought at the Toronto Native Centre) into the Department of Indian Affairs in Toronto, and along the marble halls of the Royal Ontario Museum. Yes, I showed those people what a real Indian is" (41-42).

Other false concepts of the Indian are caricatured by the group, in song and dance routines about the "old-time"

Indian and the "Hollywood Indian". Throughout the play, John and his fellow-artists wrestle with their own need to express their native identity in a largely uncaring world. Paul, the dancer, adopts the aggressive stance of the activist; Liz, the "entertainer", opts for moving recitations about native life. John, cut off from his purposeful friends, feels the isolation of the artist. The play ends with John reciting: "I don't know this autumn stranger / that writes his stories / as if Chaucer himself / was kicking him along, never letting him / rest / this Indian dedicated to / becoming published (76).

Of the plays discussed in this paper, October Stranger is the only one to cast the Indian artist in a central role. (Although it should be emphasized that other plays, omitted in this selection, may well exist on this subject).[10] With the arrival of the artist, a new dimension has been added to native drama. His artist-characters give Kenny the freedom to comment on Indian and white society, and above all, the ability to "try on" different points of view. It is to be hoped that other native playwrights will explore the possibilities offered by this theme.

Teach Me the Ways of the Sacred Circle, the third play from the collection The Land Called Morning, is the work of Valerie Dudoward, a native writer.

The difficulty of maintaining links with the past in an urban society, one of October Stranger's concerns, is at

the centre of this play, which Dudoward states was written "with very specific intentions - to educate cross-culturally, to entertain with both music and the spoken word, and to connect heritage, youth and the elderly" (introduction, p. i). Through the mediation of ancestral figures, both living and dead, the young "urban-oriented, goal-motivated" (p. 1) protagonist comes to terms with his Indian heritage.

The need to reconcile old and new ways, white and native culture, is an almost obsessive preoccupation in many native plays, in both the "co-operative" and the native-authored categories. It reflects, almost more than any other factor in this new dramatic literature, the fact that we are now, as audience and readers, sharing native ideas and concerns, rather than grafting white concepts onto native reality. At the root of this anguished questioning about identity and place lies a deeply felt fear of assimilation into an alien culture.

Frequently, the ending of these plays somewhat simplistically implies that recognition of and pride in heritage is sufficient protection against absorption into white society. This is the case with Jessica, The Twin Sinks, and Teach Me the Ways. At the end of Dudoward's play, Matt, the young protagonist graduates from high school, bound for a career in business, but aware of who he is. Matt can say:

> I know where I've been. And I know who I am. I know some long ago stories that my ancestors told. And I can think of those stories and those people every day of my life, whether I'm downtown or at school or in my future office at False Creek (35).

The play projects an image of adolescents that the playwright apparently feels Indian teenagers need to see. All the young people in Teach Me the Ways are clean-cut high-school graduates, educated in a white school, yet intensely aware of their birthright. By the end of the play, all have reinforced their ties with the reserve and plan to return, at least intermittently. Is this an idealized picture? It sounds suspiciously like it. Perhaps only another native playwright can refute this particular portrayal of native people in drama. In any case, the ambitious adolescent seems to be here to stay, as a new apparition in plays by and about native people, and possibly even as a nascent stereotype.

An extraordinary break with all previous portrayals of native people, including the tentative new perspectives being developed by native playwrights, was made by Thomson Highway in his 1986 play, The Rez Sisters (winner of a Floyd S. Chalmers award in 1986, and Canada's entry in the 1988 Edinburgh Festival). The play is remarkable because it simply walks around many of the usual perceptions of native people. It does not define them in terms of their struggle to exist in white society, or even in terms of their cultural past. For Highway's dramatic purposes, white society exists only peripherally, and the cultural past is alive and well in the dusty present.

The"Rez"is the affectionate name given to their Manitoulin Island reserve of Wasaychigan Hill, by the seven "sisters" in the play. All the characters in the play are female, reflecting what Ray Conlogue, in an interview with Highway in the Globe and Mail calls his "extraordinary empathy with women". Conlogue quotes Highway as saying:

> I am sensitive to women because of the matrilineal principle in our culture, which has gone on for thousands of years. Women have such an ability to express themselves emotionally. Men are all clogged up. And as a writer, you want to express emotion (C5).

Each one of the sisters has a distinct and vivid personality. Most have unforgettable names as well, such as Emily Dictionary (so named because no-one could pronounce her real name), and Zhaboonigan Peterson. Their common enthusiasm and bond is bingo. The play's action is very simple: it involves their expedition to Toronto to the "biggest bingo game in the world". Bingo, of course is much more than a mere game. Through bingo, all the women's desires will be fulfilled. Bingo, in The Rez Sisters, is life itself, the supreme game of chance.

With great humour, (it is a very funny play), Highway sends his seven women careening down the road to Toronto. On the way we get to know their frequently tragic stories. Several of them involve brutality, Indian as well as white. One of them, Annie Cook, is dying of cancer and will not return to the reserve.

Marie-Adele's death is linked to the figure of the

Seagull, who in turn is an incarnation of the Trickster, a central character in Indian mythology. Represented on stage by a dancer, the Seagull appears at critical moments in the action, foreshadowing Annie's death. In the bingo scene he takes on the identity of the Bingo master. It is in this guise that he dances with Annie, in a slow waltz of death.

After Marie-Adele's funeral, her sister Pelajia reflects on life:

> Well, sister, guess you finally hit the big jackpot. Best bingo game we ever been to in our lives, huh? ...What choice do we have? when some fool of a being goes and puts us Indians plunk down in the middle of this old earth, dishes out this lot we got right now. But. I figure we gotta make the most of it while we're here (81).

The emphasis in The Rez Sisters is on the present, on life as it unfolds in all its triviality and grandeur. The serious concerns in the play, such as present illness, and abuse and tragedy lived through in the past, are set beside such matters as Philomena's passionate desire to have a sparkling new toilet and bathroom. Above it all flutters the Seagull, the Trickster who represents to Highway "a connection to this great energy or God which most people perceive only in moments of extreme crisis. Or when they are close to death, and can see into the spirit world" (Conlogue, C5).

The role of the Trickster in The Rez Sisters differs from that of the spirits in other plays discussed in this paper. Spirits or deities, particularly in post-1950 drama,

usually perform a healing function or are seen as links with the past. In Highway's play, the personalities of the Rez sisters are comfortably complete. None of them experience the anguish and despair of the Indian seeking to find his or her true identity; all these colourful women know who they are. Nevertheless, they are connected to the unseen mythological world through the familiar Seagull, who is a visible presence throughout the play, although "appearing" only to the dying Marie-Adele.

Highway has taken reservation life, and laced it with strong doses of humour and spirituality. What results is not a "real" picture of Indian life, but one that communicates a strong sense of truth. A good example of Highway's treatment of reality can be seen in the character of Zhaboonigan Peterson, the retarded niece of one of the sisters. Zhaboonigan's story is based on an actual occurrence, where a retarded Indian girl was raped by white men, mutilated and left to die in the snow. As Conlogue's interview states, Highway took this dreadful story and gave it another ending. He imagined that the girl, instead of dying, could have been recalled by the Trickster and allowed to live. This girl then became Zhaboonigan in the play, a familiar of the seagull.

In the same way, the tragic past life of several of the Rez sisters is transformed into bearable experience. The play celebrates not only life, but the human personality. All Highway's characters are larger than life, and are worth listing in order to show their great variety: Emily Dictionary, a biker with lesbian tendencies, Veronique, an inveterate

gossip and busybody, Zhaboonigan, the retarded adolescent, Pelajia, the complainer, Annie Cook the stage-struck "groupie" and Marie-Adele, the faithful wife and mother. In creating this remarkable clan, Highway has utterly avoided the stereotype of the Indian and shown us another side of native life - the side that is vital, loving and deeply humourous. More than any other playwright, Highway has shown us just how the Indian has managed to survive, through centuries of exploitation and neglect.

It is a reflection of Highway's depth as a writer that what emerges from his play is not merely a quirky depiction of happy Indians, content with their lot. Instead, his play allows the audience to see beneath the surface and to come to their own conclusions about reservation life and about the place of the Indian in society as a whole.

In a personal interview, Highway discussed his views of the Trickster and of the future of native theatre. He sees Christianity as a male, judgemental religion, fundamentally life-destroying and opposed to native religion, which he characterizes as non-sexist, accepting and life-enhancing. The spirit of the Trickster, which has been smothered by many years of "white" religion and thinking, is now beginning to revive. In his view, Christ is a figure "on a pedestal", whereas the Trickster is disarmingly, even crudely, human.

It is this liberated vision of life which Highway wishes to communicate through a "new form of theatre", which

he hopes will blend white and Indian traditions in a positive way. His desire is to create a theatre "As unique to Canada as Kabuki theatre is to Japan". In speaking of his ideas for the future, Highway is enthusiastic about the possibilities for cross-cultural enrichment: "Just imagine, for example, a Verdi opera using Indian imagery!" Talking to this extraordinary playwright, hope begins to rise, and anything seems possible, even Aida sung in the beautiful Cree language (Highway, personal interview, 24 June 1988).

An effective use of the Trickster figure can be seen in Daniel David Moses's play, Coyote City (1988), written as an entry for Toronto's Alternative Theatre Festival in 1988.

The play attempts to "lift the veil" and to show us the world of the departed which is just beyond our senses. The myth of Coyote, who returns to the spirit world for his dead wife, but who then loses her again because he tries to make love to her (the tale bears an intriguing resemblance to the Orpheus myth) provides the parable for the play.

Moses, an Iroquois from the Six Nations reservation, sets his story first on a reserve, then in the city. In response to a telephone call from her dead lover, Johnny, Lena sets out for Toronto, anxiously accompanied by Thomas, a devoutly religious Indian minister and reformed alcoholic. In hot pursuit come Lena's sister Boo and her mother, Martha. All, including the "passed-over" Johnny, meet at the Silver Dollar, where a Mephistophelian prostitute called Clarisse lures Lena into prostitution, and Thomas into returning to

the bottle. The story of Coyote, related in snatches by Boo, provides the accompaniment to his periodic appearances onstage.

Johnny, who eventually fades back into the land of the dead, is portrayed as an unrepentant and crude "drunken Indian". His shadow can be seen in the opening scene, and his voice heard, saying "Give me a drink. I need a drink. shit. I'm over here you bugger. I'm almost empty here. come on and dispense with the booze" (1). Diamond makes clever use of this stereotypical figure, contrasting his profane and coarse language with the devout and precious phrases of Thomas, the "Christianized" Indian, who in discussing Johnny with Martha, can say: "Why do our boys waste themselves this way, Martha? Can't they see that Jesus already shed His own precious blood for all our sakes?" (21).

In Lena we can clearly see the gullible, innocent victim and "mutated Indian maiden" who will be later introduced by Clarisse to a succession of white "Johnnies". The appearance of the Indian temptress in the person of Clarisse is an intriguing new departure in native drama, suggesting a mingling of Christian and Indian mythologies.

"Indian" Christianity is mercilessly satirized in the person of Thomas, whose veneer of religiosity and stock of devout phrases rapidly disappear under the influence of the "demon drink". Neither Christianity nor the Trickster

figure can prevent Thomas's death from heart failure or Lena's slide into prostitution.

When questioned about the failure of Coyote either to influence the mainly depressing events in the play or to lure his own wife back from the dead in the "Coyote Story", Moses echoed Highway's view of the Trickster as a fallible spirit. Coyote, he maintained, "provides not only examples of what to do, but what not to do" (Moses, personal interview, 12 May, 1988).

Another portrayal of native people by an Indian playwright is to be found in "A House Divided", an episode of The Beachcombers broadcast on the CBC network in the spring of 1988. This episode, the work of Drew Taylor, was the first to be written for the series by a native author.

"A House Divided" focuses on the dilemma of Jesse and Laurel, who find themselves involved in a job conflict, when Laurel is offered the position of administrator of her own band, some distance away from the couple's present home. A number of issues, including feminism, tribal differences and the place of the Indian male in the modern family are dealt with in this program. Bound by the strictures of the thirty minute "family adventure" formula and the obligatory happy ending, Taylor nevertheless achieves a high degree of authenticity in this interesting script. Jesse and Laurel's problems are unrelated to the community, in which they live and work on equal terms with the white majority. Instead,

their difficulties are linked to each partner's need for "room" within marriage to express his or her own personality.

A House Divided is an example of a play which brings the native into the mainstream of white Canadian society without ignoring native culture and concerns. It is another example of a positive use of the television medium in combatting the native stereotype.

Conclusion

The struggle against the stereotype in plays about native people can be seen as the struggle of a race to make itself heard above the many alien voices bent on defining it. Non-native dramatists, for hundreds of years, were the exclusive interpreters of the native to Canadian audiences. Beginning in 1606, with Le théâtre de Neptune en la Nouvelle-France, literate white playwrights set themselves the task of giving expression to what was, until comparatively recently, a non-print society. Inevitably, the native became a focus for the non-native dramatists' own concepts and concerns, sympathetic or otherwise.

The appearance of native dramatists able to compete in the field of printed drama, however, is helping to create a more balanced portrait of the native. (Only by adopting the "white" print culture have native dramatists been able to bring their plays to the notice of general audiences. Ironically, it is still the dominant culture which sets the terms).

White dramatists were influenced in the creation of the native stereotypes discussed in the previous chapters, first by their own romantic notions about heroes, warriors and maidens, then by disillusionment and racism, as they surveyed the squalid reality of the 30s. The contemporary

view, current since the 1950s, has been coloured by yet another emotion: that of guilt. With a new sense of social conscience, contemporary dramatists looked with fresh eyes on what white society had wrought, and were appalled. What they saw was terrible and heart-rending, a vision compounded of alcoholism, suicide, violence, hopelessness and disease. Here was ample material for tragedy, for rousing audiences to a guilty perception of the true state of things in native society. The plays that resulted from this thirst for social justice were often moving and theatrically effective, but they nevertheless succeeded in perpetuating a standardized view of the native. The contemporary view often emphasized the victim status of the indigene, and was reflected in plays in which a pathetic native was caught in the clutches of a villainous white society. The native could do little more than to beg white society, as Jaimie-Paul does in The Ecstasy of Rita Joe, to "give me back my truth", or, like "Indian", in Ryga's Indian, to lament that "I not just dead...I never live at all!"

To do justice to the contemporary white dramatists, they had little choice in the matter or manner of their presentation of the indigene. They were simply writing from the outside, looking in at native society and interpreting it as sympathetically as they could. And as is almost inevitable in the case of a marginalized people, the natives were viewed in terms of their problems. With dramas like

Dreamspeaker and the four episodes of Daughters of the Country, however, the white playwrights transcended the "problem-oriented" play and achieved a high degree of authenticity in their portrayal of native people, thus contributing to the erosion of the stereotype.

It is significant that several of the plays which were influential in combatting the stereotype had women as their principal protagonists. The central position assigned to women in many contemporary plays reflects the disappearance of the potent male. As the warriors of old faded into hopeless and powerless figures, the female emerged as the strong symbol of the race. It is the woman who exhibits an indomitable will to survive, and who is frequently the channel for the validating force of the spirits. And, in an extraordinary collection of plays about Métis women, dramatists have helped to create greater understanding between the native and white cultures.

In his analysis of English-Canadian literature devoted to the Indian, Leslie Monkman sees hope for continuing progress in the erosion of boundaries between white and native cultures. In his concluding chapter he maintains that his study has demonstrated

> ...a continuing movement of the Indian and his culture from a role in which he is simply a stereotype against whom the white man can assert the values of his own culture to a status in which his history and culture are guides to concerns common to all cultures (161).

My own observations about the evolving portrayal of the native in drama lead me to support Monkman's optimistic conclusion. It is possible to conceive of the new wave of native dramatists assuming a "guiding role", and giving us a fresh perspective on both native and white societies in Canada.

The plays discussed in the last section of this study already confirm this hope. For example, the "city versus reservation" dilemma is brought home poignantly in several plays, reflecting native concerns about assimilation and cultural loss. In contrast to the negative view of the reserve projected by several non-native dramatists, however, a number of 'native' plays portray the reservation as a warm refuge from the cold and impersonal city.

Occasionally, the reservation even represents the "wilderness", where old pursuits such as fishing, trapping and hunting are still possibilities. In The Rez Sisters, Emily Dictionary sings fondly of "Wasy", the reserve, in these words:

> When I die, I may not go to heaven,
> Cuz I don't know if they let Indians in;
> If they don't, just let me go to Wasy, lord,
> Cuz Wasy is as close as I've been (64).

There is no irony in these words; they reflect the real attachment of the play's characters to the place they call home. Perhaps the white playwright has failed to take into account the fact that, with all its social problems (and they are many), the "rez" is home to Canada's native people.

This view may surprise white audiences, since it negates the perception of the native caught between two cultures, with a place in neither. Native playwrights are pointing out one of the ways in which native people have been able to survive - they have been nurtured as well as deprived, on the lands "given" to them by white governments.

Another instance of this new perspective is the emphasis on the many facets of daily living. This more realistic view replaces the focus on violence and tragedy seen in so many plays about native people. By building up the mass of unforgettable and sometimes trivial detail which goes into the creation of three-dimensional characters, native playwrights are further contributing to the eventual elimination of the stereotype.

Yet another sign of a new vitality is to be found in the strong emphasis placed on their native heritage and mythology by the new playwrights. Native religion, with its emphasis on individual responsibility, and its dissociation from guilt, offers another way of seeing things, which need not be confined to the native population. Indigenous playwrights have the opportunity to bring native mythology out of the vague realms of scholarship, which is where many non-natives believe it exists, and to animate it on the stage, to the delight and instruction of all Canadians.

Perhaps more than any other art form, the theatre has the capacity for reflecting how we think and feel about

ourselves. We have seen how Canadian plays about native people have mirrored the changing views of society. It is encouraging to note the positive moves that have occurred, away from standard concepts and towards a new understanding of native people. There is every hope that the theatre, in both its conventional and electronic forms, will play an increasingly important role in forging a link between native and non-native cultures.

Notes

Chapter I

[1] Chris Johnson, in his article "Amerindians and Aborigines in English Canadian Drama, 1606-1975", remarks of Le théâtre de Neptune that "The Amerindian's debut is not auspicious; he represents the new land to be conquered, as Neptune represents the sea, and submits to the initiative of the newcomer, speaking as the newcomer would have him speak" (167). The tendency to "fit" the native into conventional white speech patterns can be seen in later plays, such as the verse-dramas of the late nineteenth century.

[2] Rota Lister, in her article "Canada's Indians and Canadian Drama" notes the paradox in the fact that Tecumseh was first published one year after Riel's rebellion and execution (1886). Although Mair professes sympathy for Tecumseh's aims in reuniting his people, he "opposed Louis Riel bitterly in the interests of expanding and consolidating Confederation" (58). In a sense Mair's attitude is understandable: as a Canadian government employee he had been imprisoned and sentenced to death by Riel in 1870, and only narrowly escaped. (Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature, 501).

Chapter II

[3] Chris Johnson states that Sharon Pollock uses Sitting Bull's own words in this speech, and that "The lines are a vast improvement on most previous attempts to render

Amerindian speech; the style avoids the excesses of both cliche-ridden broken English and of anachronic European poetic forms" (172).

[4] In his introduction to the play, Peter Hay deplores the fact that Esker Mike, although published in The Drama Review in New York in 1969, was not produced until 1972, and blames the unimaginative attitude of Canadian theatre producers for this failure (6).

[5] Exchanges on the subject of religion, in which the white defenders of Christianity are bested in argument by the native have become a minor tradition; such scenes occur in De Roberval, Tecumseh, Esker Mike, as well as in The Great Wave and Sainte-Marie.

Chapter III

[6] Robert Krieg, in his dissertation "Forest Theatre: A Study of the Six Nations' Pageant Plays on the Grand River Reserve", while acknowledging their value as "all-Indian" productions and enriching community experiences, criticizes these pageants for focusing too narrowly on the theme of "the peaceful Iroquois" and argues for more historical integrity as well as greater dramatic impact (176).

[7] Highway credits James Reaney with making him aware of the possibilities in indigenous drama. "I met James Reaney...and I began to learn from his many things but above all the fact that you could take your own stories,

your own mythology and turn them into stage magic" ("A Brief History of Native Theatre in Ontario", 4).

[8]"Where the Heart Is", an episode of the TV "docudrama" series Moments in Time (writ. Suzette Couture), also focuses on a young female activist, a woman who has lost her status through marriage to a white man and who returns to the reserve to assert her native rights. In this drama, the male Indian chief and his council are cast as the villains, in an unusual departure from the norm.

[9]I witnessed a performance of No' Xha' in Toronto on May 15, 1988. The discussion following the play was lively and indicated a high level of sympathetic interest in native issues on the part of the mainly white audience. Since I have been unable to locate a script for the play, my comments on pp. 83-84 are based on my notes, the program information and post-play discussion.

[10]In fact, a recent episode of Spirit Bay, a CBC television "family adventure" series set in a northern Ontario native community, was devoted to exploring the differences between "real" and "fake" Indian art.

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