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A Mutual Enrichment of Traditions: Folklore in Canadian Drama*

Anita MCGEE

"Folklore comprises the unrecorded traditions of a people; it includes both the form and content of these traditions and their style or technique of communication from person to person."[1] Though most contemporary Canadian theatre is not part of the oral tradition as such, folklore can and does figure in the drama sometimes as content, and often as form. Some drama acts as an archive for folkloric data while at other times folklore gains new life as part of dramatic form. This paper will therefore open with a discussion of the influence of folklore on Canadian drama, with particular attention to verbal lore. But the drama, in its turn, influences folklore. This discussion will proceed to examine the effect of drama on folklore with reference to the specific folkloric theme of perpetuation through transmission. Through the examination of folk traditions as they operate in a number of Canadian plays, a mutually revitalizing influence between drama and folklore will be observed.

Folk speech is one of the most easily recognized kinds of folklore since deviations from the normal structure of language are obvious both in voice and print. Dialect, the term usually applied to non-standard usage of language, is conspicuous by regular modification in three distinct areas: grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation.[2] Those plays which are set within specific regions and which deal with

*My thanks to Paul Michael Babiak for editorial assistance.

1. Jan Harold Brunvand, *The Study of American Folklore: an Introduction*. 2nd ed. (New York, W.W. Norton) 1978, p.1.
2. *Ibid*. p. 40.

cultural differences stand out immediately as examples of folk speech usage:

> Mary: Where did you learn so much about the dipper? Standin' there, earlier on, pretending not to know a blessed t'ing!

The language in this passage from David French's *Salt Water Moon*[3] has been regionalized so as to give a sense of the setting, and a sense of the characters in that particular environment. Odd word spellings ("Standin' ", "t'ing"), colloquialisms ("a blessed t'ing"), modifications in grammar (i.e.: the second sentence is a fragment), and punctuation (e.g.: "Standin' there, earlier on,. . ." for "Standing there earlier on,. . .") recreate the speech rhythm that exists in Newfoundland. By employing them, the playwright captures part of the setting. Like many plays, *Salt Water Moon* relies upon a specific regional environment which can be immediately established through the use of dialect.

The use of folk speech is also a reliable technique of delineating character. Demonstrative proof of the exact connection between people's language and their environment would be a topic for a paper in linguistics rather than in folklore. But by suggesting an environment, dialect gives characters specific geographic and economic reality. The people of the Southern United States, for example, speak more slowly than those living in New York City. Therefore, by observation of speech rhythms, slang phrases, and pronunciation, an affiliation between characters and their living conditions is detected. The use of folk speech in drama expresses this affiliation.

Folk speech can further give clues as to the orientation of a character at different moments within the play. Word form (morphology), order (syntax), and punctuation converge to evoke the changing moods of characters. In *Therese's Creed* Michael Cook manipulates dialect to distinguish different emotional conditions:

> Therese: I minds me mother to this day. I wor comin' up fifteen an' it wor as close as she ever come to givin' me a lesson on the facts of life. Weren't necessary I suppose. We all knew what we had to be the time we was nine or ten.
>
> Therese: But de way dey carries on, her and dem like her, dat's what's foolish, fer dey've all their lives runnin' ahead o' 'em and all it takes is to open yer legs once too often fer a feller who doesn't give a good goddamn fer anything, let along ye, and dey's half of it gone, an' de shame of it on ye, and the pain of it on ya, too soon be half, and yer girlhood gone like a flower cut wi' the frost.[4]

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3. David French, *Salt Water Moon*. Toronto, Playwrights Canada, 1985.
4. Michael Cook, *Tiln and Other Plays*. Vancouver, Talonbooks, 1976.

This run-on sentence counterpoints the broken rhythm of the former passage. In terms of character it signifies a different state of mind. In the first passage Therese is recalling an incident. The speech, in which Therese is in a controlled, meditative mood, is measured out in sentence fragments as her different thoughts are measured out by the punctuation. Control is thrown to the wind in the second passage. One sentence contains several thoughts which, as is indicated by the separation of elements by commas, have accumulative value. Each element builds upon the last, and in turn is built upon by the next. Dialectal rhythms give insight into character and mood.

In addition to the use of folk speech as a means of describing character and state of mind, John Herbert's *Fortune and Men's Eyes* demonstrates how dialect can parallel character development.[5] The play takes place in a Canadian reformatory, an environment which has created its own vocabulary as a code system necessary for survival. Smitty, the new arrival into the cell, is not party to this peculiar dialect, which is comprised mainly of parodies of nursery rhymes, commercials, and religion; sayings of the "cruisin' for a bruisin' " type; and names. That he is "green" is reflected by the correctness of his speech:

> Smitty: This is my first time.
> Rocky: Braggin' or complainin'?
> Smitty: Neither, it's just a fact.
> Rocky: Well, that's nice. You shouldn't be here at all I guess. Got a bum beef?
> Smitty: A. . .a what?
> Rocky: Crap! A beef! A rap! Whose cookies did you boost. . .your mother's?
> Queenie: What the judge wants to know, honey, is what special talent brought you this vacation. . . are you a store-counter booster or like myself do you make all your house calls when nobody's home?

It is apparent from these lines that the reformatory has a special dialect which one must know in order to belong. Smitty does not; therefore, he is not yet a part of the group. He is in fact seen as a prize with which his winner will gain political clout, the major contenders being Queenie, who has "influence", and Rocky, who has brute strength. In an effort to win his allegiance, the contenders privately instruct Smitty how their particular slang systems work. Since each side has its own version of the reformatory slang, he is tutored in both

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5. John Herbert, *Fortune and Men's Eyes*. New York, Grove Press Inc., 1967.

sides of the dialect as well. Names play an important part in determining status within the community. Essentially, Queenie offers to be his "mother" who will place him in contact with important people who, for sexual favors, will grant him political status. Rocky, on the other hand, promises to become his "old man" who, with his strength, will protect him as long as he remains a personal slave to "the Rock". As time passes Smitty learns the "lingo", refuses both of the power structures offered him, and eventually earns an independent position in the hierarchy. With this, he earns the title "hippo", meaning a person of status. The evolution of his use of dialect, expressing Smitty's acceptance into the prison community, is one of Herbert's principal means of developing his protagonist.

Folk speech can also function as a means of distinguishing among characters and, in the process, of defining character relationship and conflict. A prime example of this is David Fennario's *Balconville*.[6] A distinctive mini-community exists in Balconville where most of the characters speak a macaronic mixture of French and English. Paquette can understand everyone but when conflict breaks out in Balconville, he refuses to speak the French-English mixture. Since Diane, Paquette's daughter, can speak little English she remains mostly outside of the group. Though Johnny can speak only English, he plays an active role in the community until the French inhabitants refuse to translate what he cannot understand from context. When war is declared between Johnny and his neighbour Paquette, language is the key weapon: the macaronic dialect is discarded and two separate camps with separate dialects replace the old community.

Paper Wheat is a collective creation partly about the establishment of prairie homesteads.[7] Folk language in this play helps to advance both plot and theme. Almost all the characters are immigrants. The initial scenes center around Vasil, an Ukrainian who speaks almost no English. In a later scene, Vasil has acquired enough English words to ask Anna, an English-speaking immigrant, to marry him. Finally Vasil speaks a macaronic dialect which involves a mixture of broken English and Ukrainian. The development of different dialects with English as their common basis is a direct reflection of the multi-cultural nature of the community, a theme of this play. In fact, the acclimatization of the newcomers gives a sense of the establishment of a com-

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6. David Fennario, *Balconville*. Vancouver, Talonbooks, 1971.
7. Twenty-fifth Street Theatre, *Paper Wheat: The Book*. Saskatoon, Western Producer Prairier Books, 1982.

munity with its own character, culture and dialects, almost from scratch.

In *Walsh* as in *Balconville* the author attempts to capture the conflict of cultures; here set in and around a fort in Canada's secluded Northwest in the time of the battle of Little Big Horn.[8] The following passages illustrate the play's treatment of interaction among the military establishment within the fort, the Anglo-Canadian community outside the fort, and the Indian trading tribes who are in contact with both communities:

> Mrs. Anderson: Ah major. . .this savage. . .this heathen. . .this. . .Indian has stolen my washtub!
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Walsh: The Great White Mother'd be very angry if she discovered you'd taken this white lady's washtub.
>
> Crow Eagle: I am sure if the Great White Mother knew how much we needed that drum, she would be glad to let us keep it.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Crow Eagle: We have cut the bottom out of that tub and covered it with buffalo skin. It makes a very good drum.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Mrs. Anderson: What's mine's my own!
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Walsh: Well, McCutcheon. . .hell hath no fury like a woman deprived of her washtub.

Mrs. Anderson's imprecations "savage" and "heathen" draw on a traditional vocabulary which, because it is only meaningful in a particular society at a specific time, is both colloquial and folk. Her use of such names immediately identifies her as English and her attitude towards the Indians as one of moral superiority. In the same way, "Great White Mother" indicates an Indian vision of the English and is thus integral to the character of Crow Eagle. The incident of the wash-tub is as much a cultural clash as a personal one. The culture to which Mrs. Anderson's use of the insults attaches her, interprets Crow Eagle's appropriation of the wash-tub as theft, and condemns it. But the culture to which Crow Eagle belongs approves his deed as necessary. The clash between these cultures is expressed not only in the conflict of the characters, which folk speech has helped to depict, but also in the contrast of the language they use. Walsh,

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8. Sharon Pollock, *Walsh*. Vancouver, Talonbooks, 1973.

through his position as "White Forehead Chief", is able to settle the argument. He has the ability to cross dialects enough to mediate between the two distinct groups. Folk speech not only indicates cultural and character conflicts within the play, but also provides the means of bridging them. Ultimately, by highlighting the conflict, dialect in turn enhances the dramatic impact of the play.

In *Balconville*, class as well as cultural conflict is explored through the use of urban lore, which arises from city life and technology. Parodies of commercials, songs, famous people and famous sayings, when used as means by which the characters identify with their class, are part of urban lore:

> Paquette and Johnny: Jesus saves his money at
> the Bank of Montreal.
> Jesus saves his money at
> the Bank of Montreal.
> Jesus saves his money at
> the Bank of Montreal.
>
> Jesus saves, Jesus saves,
> Jesus saves.

This little ditty, sung to the tune of a well-known hymn, is a slur on the institutions of religion and banks. Such mocking of the "system" is characteristic of this community, and as such, it is a means of identification among the community members. It is a major theme of the play that class conflict overrides cultural conflict. The playwright dramatizes this theme by having Johnny and Paquette, the antagonists in the English-French conflict, sing together against the establishment. Parody of modern institutions, because it unites the members of the community against a mutual enemy, becomes a common means of identifying the values of the community. In this case, the group is defined by a unified contempt for modern institutions. The playwright uses urban lore to clarify the relative importance of class, and cultural issues.

In addition to helping establish setting, character and conflict, folklore can effectively enhance the mood of drama. In *A Letter to My Son*, George Ryga makes use of folksongs to enhance the atmosphere generated by the story.[9] An introductory musical mosaic begins with an Ukrainian folk dance, plays several songs of various nationalities, and then returns to the folk dance. As in the plays dis-

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9. George Ryan, *A Letter to My Son*, in *Canadian Theatre Review*, Downsview, CTR Publications, 33 (Winter 1982), 44-85.

cussed above, an element of folklore immediately establishes cultural environment: this opening selection immediately sets Ivan Lepa's Ukrainian heritage amidst a multi-cultural society. But here folksong is also deployed to establish the mood of the scene. During this overture Old Lepa tries to write a letter to his son. Each time he fails. Melancholy folksongs accompany those scenes in which he tries to write to his son, describes his life on the homestead, and speaks of Hanya, his wife. Here the songs complement Ivan's regretful, somehow nostalgic feelings for his farm and family. Also complementary to atmosphere is the "traditional lament" which begins as he tells the story of how his uncle died in the war and which continues until he resumes his letter to Stefan. The songs become cheerful as he speaks of his youth and vitality, and again later when he speaks of his attempt to give hope to all the new immigrants he sees on the train. Another country dance tune plays over Lepa's final, successful attempt at the letter. The folk as well as the other musical selections follow the character's psychological development as he tells the stories of his life experience, and thus create an appropriate mood for each specific memory.

So far this essay has examined folklore in Canadian plays as content; as a means through which such elements of the drama as character, setting, conflict, theme and mood can be enhanced. But in the conclusion of *A Letter to My Son*, folk elements involve themselves in the structure of the piece. As Ivan begins to write, thoughts pouring freely for the first time, the music is amplified to drown out his monologue and joyous laughter. An equation is thus suggested between the liberation of Ivan's spirit through communication and the theatrical triumph of the music. The dramatic climax and the musical climax are one. Here then the music is liberated from its use to express emotional content; it becomes a structural principle. The play's use of folk music develops in parallel with its dramatic structure so that by the end of the play it is impossible to say whether the music has enhanced the mood of the scenes or the scenes have specified the feeling of the music.

In Eric Nicol's *Beware The Quickly who*, commercial reference, one of many types of urban lore, gives a contemporary flavor to an older tale.[10]

> Johnny: Are you going to eat me?
> Giant: That depends. Are you clean?
> Johnny: Yes.
> Giant: Are you wholesome?

Johnny: Very wholesome.
Giant: Are you ranch-fresh, vitamin-enriched and finger-licken' good?
Johnny: Yea! Yes! Yes!
Giant: You've sold me. I'll eat you.

However, not only is folk narrative part of the content of this play, but it informs the structure of the story. In his quest for his identity, Johnny is told he is a giant, and is instructed in crying "Fee, fie, foe, fum, I smell the blood of an Englishman!" This allusion to "Jack and the Beanstalk" somehow summons a real giant who plans to eat Johnny. Here the play becomes the fairy tale.

The play adopts various folk narrative structures from throughout human history, from the ancient creation myth of Eden, through "Jack and the Beanstalk" and "Snow White", to contemporary urban scenarios of television advertisements. The contemporary references alter the traditional meaning by tapping our knowledge of well-known myths, tales, and urban clichés to debate identity.

By thus placing the main action outside of time, Nichol makes the play timeless, or universal. It therefore represents the working-out of a universal problem; and it works out this problem in universal terms, that is, in concepts.

Johnny sings to the tune of "O Canada":

Who can I be?
I wish I knew who I'm.
Help, Scenery!
While I have still got time.

I must be someone.
To learn who, is what I've got to do.
I don't care who. I could be you.
But tell me, what is true.

Who can I be? He, it or she?
Animal, veg or mineral, or gee! all three!
Who can I be?
Won't someone please tell me?

By beginning the story of his search for identity with this parody of our national anthem, Nichol makes Johnny a metaphor for Canada. The play thus becomes a form of allegorical drama. This allegory is developed by Nichol's constant use of traditional Canadian symbols,

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10. For *My Best Friend is Twelve Feet High, Beware the Quickly Who,* and *The Magic Carpets of Antonio Angelini,* See *Kids Plays: Six Canadian Plays for Children.* Toronto, Playwrights Press, 1980.

including the Lion and the Unicorn, and Castor Beaver, our "friendly symbol of industry".

In *My Best Friend Is Twelve Feet High*, a play for young people, Carol Bolt also creates a script in which folklore is both form and content. By setting the play in the "Engineers and Storytellers Lodge", a club dedicated to oral storytelling, the author has determined the form which her dramatic presentation will take.

Folklore in *My Best Friend is Twelve Feet High* becomes the form of the drama when the play becomes a storytelling.[11] As Pip, the preferred performer, begins to tell a "shaggy dog" story about how Mope was named Noble and how she rescued explorers in the Canadian Arctic, Alice becomes the dog. As each new story is introduced, the members of the Lodge, involuntarily, are transformed into characters in the tale. In one sense the play here suggests the identification of the folk audience with the characters in stories, and symbolizes their involvement in the narratives. But in another sense, at these points *My Best Friend is Twelve Feet High* is the telling of a story. This is not the only example. In the final episode, the actors request the input of the audience in determining the action. By doing this, the author places the theatrical audience in the same interactive relationship with her storytellers as oral-tradition audiences are with theirs.

In this way *My Best Friend is Twelve Feet High* both preserves and extends the oral tradition. This extension, however, is implicit. Other Canadian plays explicitly broach the perpetuation of folklore. Gwen Ringwood commences *The Magic Carpets of Antonio Angelini*[12] with Antonio's song:

> Rugs, Rugs, gorgeous to see,
> Handmade Canadian, buy them from me.
> Whatever the pattern or story you seek,
> Spanish, Ukrainian, Eskimo, Greek,
> Wherever you came from, whenever you came,
> You all have a story, you all have a name.
> Rugs, rugs, gorgeous to see,
> Magical carpets, buy them from me.

By peddling the rugs, Antonio is in fact preserving the ethnic traditions associated with them, for the characteristics of the rugs identify the nationality of their makers: Ukrainian rugs have vivid colors whereas Icelandic rugs are renowned for their patterns. In fact, the

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11. See n. 10.
12. *Ibid.*

play singles out the rug-makers, the bearers of tradition, acknowledging and praising the importance of the folk artist in its continuation.

Folklore study defines artifacts such as rugs as "material tradition". The play explicitly describes the preservation of ethnic traditions through the material tradition of rug-making. However, the artifact itself documents the family histories which relate the immigrants' journies to Canada as well as the early stages of their lives in the new country. The play thus also puts the oral tradition on display just as it does the rugs. Though he is a pedlar, Antonio never sells the rugs. Instead he collects them and their stories and travels from village to village displaying the rugs and telling the tales connected with them. The real bartering in the play is the exchange of the stories the rugs symbolize. These Canadian folk tales become as much artifacts as the rugs are.

By drawing on material and oral tradition for its content, the play simply preserves them. But the branch of folklore that the play actually perpetuates is the oral tradition. When Antonio addresses a customer he displays a rug and then begins to tell the story of how it came to be made. As he is relating the tale, the characters on stage reenact the story as in *Beware the Quickly Who* and *My Best Friend is Twelve Feet High*. Once again the play becomes folklore at this point, and oral storytelling becomes its form.

The scope of folk tradition is vast, and the term "folk life" includes material folk traditions—architecture, costumes, crafts and foods; oral folklore—speech patterns and names, folk songs and ballads, rhymes, myths and legends; and customary folklore, for instance superstitions, dance, riddles and games. Judging by this one may think that just about anything is folklore. This is not so. Wherever a tradition is recorded, it ceases to be living folklore. Therefore, the recording of folklore as literary or dramatic content preserves but does not perpetuate it. The perpetuation of folklore is accomplished only in its inclusion as form and performance. Folklore is both preserved and perpetuated by this dual inclusion, but only implicitly. Whenever a play's use of folklore becomes explicit, the latter comprises the content of the drama.

The problem of transmission is thus integral to the relationship between drama and folklore, and various Canadian plays deal either explicitly or implicitly with it. The survival of folk tradition from one generation to the next is a process explicitly examined in *Walsh*. After the defeat of General Custer at Little Big Horn, the Sioux Indians were forced to leave their land and were hunted as criminals. The play

tells of how Sitting Bull and the remainder of his tribe sought refuge in Canada's West and set up camp just outside the fort commanded by Major Walsh. In one scene Sitting Bull narrates the Sioux story of creation to his son Crowfoot. In this way the play preserves and records both his traditions and his attempt to transmit them.

Though he hardly speaks, Crowfoot plays an important role since he is the sole heir to the Sioux chieftain. From the outset it is obvious that he is being taught the ways of his people. Pretty Plume, his mother, gives him a rawhide bag which contains sacred stones. Crowfoot clears a spot on the ground and begins to arrange the stones in the shape of the "medicine wheel" while his father begins the myth which accompanies the ritual: "To the Great Spirit belong all things. . . .To you, he gives the cup of living water." Sitting Bull divides the circle into four parts as he explains how all things are reflected in and by the sacred circle. This story is presented as the main creation myth of the Sioux, as a sacred belief which explains the universe in terms of the tribe. Significantly, Crowfoot is assigned the task of completing the story of the sacred circle. Parts of this story have been told and repeated over and over in the same manner so that the student will remember. This method of learning by constant repetition is the foremost means of transmitting oral traditions. The attention given to the passing on of Sioux myths and legends to the boy heightens the impact of the ending. In view of the importance of Sitting Bull's teaching his only heir, the news of his family's slaughter demonstrates the tragic futility of the chieftain's efforts. We see the sacred circle die with Crowfoot.

Carol Bolt has preserved the details of Sitting Bull's traditions by recording them, rather than perpetuated them by adapting her form to theirs, consistent with her intention to show their end. If she has used the form of the tradition, the suggestion would be that the tradition survived somehow even after the death of Crowfoot. By including the folklore as content she fixes it in history, and in so doing, she emphasizes the finality of the tragedy. For Carol Bolt in *Walsh*, there is no solution to the problem of transmission.

Unlike *Walsh*, in which the use of folklore as content at least proves dramatically successful, *Paper Wheat*, a collective creation developed by the 25th Street Theatre, fails to utilize folk traditions to the benefit of the entire play. The first half of the play concentrates on the immigrants who began the western homesteads. Immigrants' stories, anecdotes both of individuals and of the community, and folk speech combine to depict the character of pioneer life. In the first

scene, short monologues about the characters' immigration are separated by song verses and a refrain in the spirit of lyrical folk song.

> We got sixty million dollars'
> ridin' on this game
> We can't let our iron horse
> pull up lame
> Our National dream is a
> monetary scheme
>
> Refrain:
>
> Roll out, Roll out
> Roll out those rails
> Roll out those rails
> Roll out

The fiddle, too, heightens the mood as it accompanies transitions between scenes, and figures prominently within certain scenes. Folksong complements individual themes, as in the instance in which a traditional Latvian tune underscores Anna's nostalgic thoughts about her home. The song reflects her mood and at the same time informs the audience further about her character through her association with the music. These folksongs sometimes also evoke the spirit of the community, as in the quotation above.

The second half of the play departs from the folklife of this people and begins to concentrate on Socialism and the establishment of the Farmers' Cooperative. The play's focus shifts to the documentation of political and economic data rather than the development of character and cultural environment. The characters which are clearly developed in the first half of the play do not figure prominently in the second half.

The play's major weakness is that it unsuccessfully attempts to create a cultural history by allowing folklore to predominate in the first half, and historical fact in the second half, taking a feeble stab at blending the two. Culture involves a synthesis of tradition and history. Since the play separates folklore and historical fact, the cultural history is incomplete. Writers can use folklore to depict more fully the historical facts by freeing themselves from the fallacy that history is purely documentary.

Not only is history frequently the rich source of much of our oral tradition, but folklore is the source of much of our history; and together they give us the broadest, and therefore truest, picture of our culture. While explicit treatment of folklore is more impressive, implicit treatment is more effective, especially in solving the problem of transmission. If the second half of the play had drawn more on folk-

lore, especially for its structure, as did the first half, this attempt might have been successful.

In contrast, *The Farm Show* taps the folklore of Clinton, Ontario for both its content and its form. It not only preserves but also perpetuates the community's material traditions, oral and customary folklore to give a full and vital portrayal of Clinton's folk life.

The play begins by introducing some of the props to be used: a bean dryer, straw bales, and old cream can, some crates, and a shopping cart. This is the material tradition of the Clinton community; these are the things that the people use in their everyday lives. We see these artifacts at work as they are used in the real life of the community.

Use of folk speech in *The Farm Show* fulfills the same functions discussed at the beginning of this essay: establishing setting, character, conflict, mood, and relation of character to environment.[13] For example the following speeches, by their use of dialect, immediately suggest a character and his environment, an attitude towards technology which expresses conflict, and a dominant mood:

> Lee Jervis: Now that's an old black Persian ram, 'n' he's a mean old bugger and I'm deaf, so I put this old cow bell on 'im. Uh. . .he won't hurt you so long as you're lookin' at 'im, but as soon as you turn away, why that's when he'd. . .uh. . .give you the works!
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Anyways. . .I said to my wife. . .and this was when they didn't have jets then either. They had these here Eng. . .no. . .what d'you call them? Oh. . .roy. . .Royal Royce engines on them, way out on the sides?

A strong clue that Lee lives in an agrarian society is given in these lines. In the first example, that he is in control despite his cautious attitude is directly evident in his straightforward yet playful speech. In the second, Lee describes his experience with something foreign to his way of life: a ride in an airplane. An element of wonder and uncertainty is apparent in the way he relates his first encounter with this new technology.

The play also commemorates some of Clinton's local legends:

> Woman: He had what, I guess you'd call a tic, on the side of his face, and he'd work it and rub it and his tongue would roll out the side of his mouth, so it was very difficult to understand what he was saying. Oh, I didn't know him very well. Alma used to. . . .
>
> Man: You could always tell one of Charlie's tools.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Well, it looked funny, but it worked.

---

13. Théâtre Passe Muraille, *The Farm Show*. Toronto, Coach House Press, 1976.

In the form of these anecdotes, the eccentric character of Charlie Wilson remains a part of the community. A sense of pride in and bewilderment about their intelligent fool who had a "tick", seem to be the very reasons the folk have preserved his memory through storytelling.

The Farm Show also uses Clinton's customary traditions. Music, song and dance are integral to the life of the community. In fact, during the performance the fiddle music which begins the play and reappears throughout is supplied by local musicians:

> Now, on to your partners!
> Now, corner address.
> Now all join hands, and circle left!
> Circle left, go round the ring
> Around the ring with a pretty wee thing.

"The square dance is an authentic American folk development of the Old-World four-couple dance" in which "the three most distinctive features are the shuffling-gliding-running step, the hand-clapping done by both dancers and bystanders, and the chanted or sung 'calls' giving directions for the steps."[14] This particular example is a "prompt" call, in that it gives directions only when the dance requires a new figure; as opposed to the "patter" call in which the caller rattles on continuously, giving key phrases at the change of the pattern. The square dance is a form of recreation in which the whole group participates, if not in the actual dance itself, then in its observance. It helps to define the social fabric of the Clinton community.

Custom and ceremony too play an important role in the folk life of the play. Every twelfth of July the Orangemen from Clinton and surrounding villages join the Royal Orange Lodge in their annual "walk" through the town. There is a sense of participation of the whole town as the scene describes the people's involvement in the preparation, execution, and clean-up of the event.

Wedding ceremonies also make for exciting anecdotes:

> Lula Merrill: Now, Lois is our youngest but she got married first. Well that's the way things happen sometimes. One cute thing with Lois' wedding. . .they took a ride in the wheel barrow after the ceremony. . .around the town so's everybody could get a look.
> Jean Lobb: Now Fay wanted red at her wedding. Well so did Marilyn. Marilyn wanted her wedding late in the year, last year, Marilyn Tebbutt, so she could have red in her wedding.
> . . . . . .

14. Brunvand, p. 262.

And about another ceremony the same character says:

> Oh, now let's see, here's a cute thing they did. Right after the service they went over to this little table and there were these two candles that were lit and this taller one in the middle wasn't. They each picked up a candle and they lit the middle one then blew the other two out. Well, it was something they saw at another service somewhere.

The preceding passages indicate the importance these people place on ceremonies, especially those which deal with rites of passage such as marriage. Both the service and the celebration are integral aspects of the life cycle of the community.

In addition to successfully utilizing Clinton's folk life as content, *The Farm Show* functions as the direct voice of Clinton. In a foreword to the play, Paul Thomson states, "The play was not written down; it was developed out of interviews, visits, improvisations. Most of the words were given to us by the community along with their stories." The company of actors implicitly functions just as a traditional storyteller. *The Farm Show* is oral folklore. It helps to solve the problems of transmission by itself preserving and perpetuating the folklife of the community.

The Farm Show is exemplary of the strongest interrelation between folklore and contemporary Canadian theatre: they reinforce each other to their mutual advantage. Folklore as content supplies theatre with theme, character and mood, and with conflict and thus plot. More importantly, as its nature is to define the group, it offers a solution to another problem which is often broached by our drama: that of national identity. It is to this end that some plays, such as *Beware the Quickly Who*, and *The Magic Carpets of Angelo Angelini*, include folklore as part of their content. The plays that adopt folkloric forms, on the other hand, make a contribution to folklore; and in many plays, like *The Farm Show*, a mutual enrichment takes place. A dialectical relationship between theatrical and folk traditions is a part of Canadian culture. By merging theatrical and folkloric forms, these plays both expand their own scope and extend folk tradition into mainstream culture. Not only is the connection between that culture and its roots preserved, but folklore is also perpetuated in this new way.

Everyone has folklore. It belongs to all Canadians and can be traced within rural regions and urban areas, among immigrants, university students, professors, criminals, prostitutes, housewives, and businessmen. This fact alone creates enormous possibilities for the use of folk material in Canadian plays.

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