

## TOWNSHIPS THEATRES: IDENTITIES AND CIRCUITS 1935–1982

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### Abstract

Where is English-language theatre in Quebec? To ask where English-language theatre in Quebec is, is to ask where it happens. Where are its homes and hubs? But it is also to query where it lives in the historical record. How can it be found, recorded, transmitted? These questions are intimately related, for the “where” of English-language theatre in Quebec is hard to precisely pin down for reasons that have to do with its particular nature and history, as well as with the way in which history records (or does not) such production. In this article, I contend that this theatrical activity that has been singularly vital in the Eastern Townships since the late nineteenth century requires conceiving of its place, its “where,” as networked. To support this claim, I offer first a brief history of theatrical, cross-border traffic of English-language drama and theatre in Quebec, and then a comparative analysis of the dramatic repertoire of the Townships’ major summer playhouses: The Brae Manor Playhouse (1935–56), The North Hatley Playhouse (1956–62), The Piggery (1965–), and Theatre Lac Brome (1986–).

### Résumé

*Où est le théâtre anglophone au Québec? Se demander où se trouve le théâtre anglophone au Québec, c’est se demander où il s’est implanté. Où sont ses pôles? Il faut aussi chercher à savoir où il réside dans l’histoire. Comment peut-il être trouvé, inscrit et transmis? Ces questions sont intimement reliées, car le « où » du théâtre d’expression anglaise au Québec est difficile à préciser à cause de sa nature et de son histoire particulières et de la façon dont l’histoire inscrit (ou non) de telles productions. Cet article soutient qu’il faut concevoir comme un réseau la place, le « lieu » de cette activité théâtrale qui fut si vitale dans les Cantons-de-l’Est depuis la fin du dix-neuvième siècle. Pour ce faire, l’article fournit un bref rappel historique de la circulation transfrontalière théâtrale au Québec ainsi qu’une analyse comparative du répertoire des principaux théâtres d’été des Cantons-de-l’Est : le Brae Manor Playhouse (1935–1956), le North Hatley Playhouse (1956–1962), le Piggery (1965–) et le Theatre Lac Brome (1986–).*

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### **Where is English-language theatre in Quebec?**

To ask where English-language theatre in Quebec is, is to ask where it happens. Where are its homes and hubs? But it is also to query where it lives in the historical record. How can it be found, recorded, transmitted? These questions are intimately related, for the “where” of English-language theatre in Quebec is hard to precisely pin down for reasons that have to do with its particular nature and history, as well as with the way in which history records (or does not) such production. In what follows, I contend that this theatrical activity that has been singularly vital in the Eastern Townships since the late nineteenth century requires conceiving of its place, its “where,” as networked.<sup>1</sup> To ask after the whereabouts of English-language theatre in Quebec (ELTQ) leads necessarily to the Eastern Townships, for its long history of theatrical production, for its regional location, and for its generous imaginary of place as revealed in the repertoire.

English-language theatre in Quebec proves difficult to locate as the result of three major factors: first, a paucity of sources – something I aim to remedy by reconstructing its history through archival research and oral histories.<sup>2</sup> Second, this history of artistic practice proves elusive due to the way in which the field of theatre history is generally organised as the history of its urban elements; and third, the vague “identity” of Anglophone theatre in Quebec can make it hard to recognize as such even when one runs across it.<sup>3</sup> These issues are especially acute in summer theatre in the Townships from the 1930s through the 1970s, the case study of this inquiry. The project of documenting and inserting this minority-language practice into the larger history of Quebec theatre is therefore as much a challenge to standard historiographical practice as it is to the received historical narrative.

### **A Renovated Narration of the Past**

Theatre histories commonly emphasise longevity, legacy, and urban centres, focuses that have the effect of rendering opaque the history of artistic practice of minority-culture, English-language drama and theatre in Quebec. Many English-language theatre companies were and are short-lived. For instance, Myron Galloway’s Script Theatre existed for a single season (1955–56), as did the Montreal Studio and Drama Club (1957–58), while the polarizing, experimental Montreal Theatre Lab led by Alexander Hausvater mounted six seasons (1973–79). Since the advent of theatre programs at English-language universities (Bishop’s, Concordia, McGill), the opening of the National Theatre School (1960), and that of the professional theatre programs at English-language Cegeps in 1973 (Dawson College and John Abbott College), graduates have founded independent theatre

companies almost yearly. But again, they often suffer the fate of their predecessors.<sup>4</sup> In 1953, a *Montréal Gazette* editorial on the death of an ELTQ pioneer, Filmore Sadler, laments: “Native theatre in Canada is still in the formative stage. Actors, writers, designers still find the opportunities so few here that a large number leaves, each year, for London, New York or Hollywood.”<sup>5</sup>

In the urban and metropolitan focus of much theatre history, ELTQ is again not well served.<sup>6</sup> While Montréal has been and continues to be the centre of English-language theatrical activity (professional and otherwise), the historically Anglophone regions of the Eastern Townships and the Montérégie, have also boasted a mix of professional and amateur houses of note. Let us approach this question of the dominance of the metropole through the lens of real estate. In the history of English-language theatre since 1930, only eight companies have owned their performance spaces.<sup>7</sup> Because ownership stabilises companies, allows for audience attraction and expansion, and permits future planning, it is significant to longevity and influence, both of which are relevance-factors in theatre historiography. Notably, of these eight, five were or are summer theatres in the Eastern Townships or the Montérégie (Brae Manor Playhouse [1935–56], The North Hatley Playhouse [1956–62], The Piggery [1965–], Theatre Lac Brome [1986–], Hudson Village Theatre [1993–]). Thus, the area that has produced the majority of stable theatres for the professional production of English-language theatre is not the urban centre but the rural regions around Montréal.

This last point signals the significance of summer theatre to the history of English-language theatre in Quebec. Summer stock is where professional theatre has happened (and is happening) in English outside of Montréal. Theatre designer, director and critic, Herbert Whittaker (1910–2006), attested to the early place of summer theatre in the English-language theatre scene in his book on Montréal theatre between 1920 and 1949. There, he details the founding of the Lakeshore Summer Theatre in the Lachine Boating Club in 1940 (it lasted only two seasons due to war-time gas-rationing), inspired, he writes, by the American “straw-hat” theatres “springing up out of the New England ground like warriors from dragons’ teeth.”<sup>8</sup> Historical examples of such straw hat companies include: Joy Thomson’s Mont Gabriel Tent Theatre in the Laurentians (1956–57) and two companies in the Capitol Region in the 1970s – the Quebec City Summer Stock Theatre (QCSST) (1971–76) and the Phoenix Theatre Workshop (1977–78). Of these ventures, newspaper critic Bruce Bailey pinpoints the

[r]elatively successful [...] Frontenac Theatre [as the QCSST was called] located in the church hall of the Anglican Cathedral in Quebec City.

This fifteen-member troupe produces mainly sure-fire contemporary comedy in a region where only six percent of the population is English-speaking, and it survives solely through ticket sales, local fund drives and an annual auction of 'unusual items.'<sup>9</sup>

Montréal too had and has summer theatres: Rosanna Seaborn's Open Air Playhouse on Mount Royal (1947–50); Joy Thomson and Norma Springford's Mountain Playhouse – "Montreal's Indoor Summer Theatre at Beaver Lake" – which played in the converted Club House of the Toboggan Club atop the hill overlooking Beaver Lake on Mount Royal (1950–61); and, performing Shakespeare in Montréal parks and beyond since 1988 is Repercussion Theatre.

### **Theatrical Traffic**

The Eastern Townships has boasted a relatively stable, professional summer-theatre season since 1935, making this area an important home for ELTQ across the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. With the continuity of its theatrical offering in North Hatley and Knowlton particularly, the Townships has extended a kind of permanent residence, if you will, to ELTQ. Yet, analysis of the dramatic repertoire of their summer theatres points to a rather more expansive, international, and networked cultural and territorial imaginary that is as enduring as the playhouses themselves. Although ELTQ is well ensconced in the Townships, its imaginary has generally lain elsewhere. This complicates again the "where" of theatre in English in Quebec. Where does it look for models? What communities does it imagine itself to be a part of? To begin to answer these questions, I turn now to a comparative, diachronic analysis of the repertoire of the Brae Manor Playhouse, the North Hatley Playhouse (NHP), The Piggery, Festival Lennoxville at Bishop's University's Centennial Theatre (1971–82), and Theatre Lac Brome. As we shall see, this analysis suggests that these regional, professional, English-language theatres imagined their allegiances as extending well beyond the borders of Quebec, while exercising nonetheless a decidedly local citizenship. I offer first a brief history of theatrical traffic of English-language drama and theatre in Quebec, and then a comparative repertoire analysis.

There is a long and remarkably consistent history of influence and circuits in ELTQ where plays migrated north from (usually) New York City or Boston to land in ELTQ seasons and where theatre companies toured from the northeastern United States into Quebec bringing with them their repertoire of plays, lead actors, costumes, and sometimes even scenery. Only the technical crew, the audience, and some minor players were provided by the locale where these touring productions would play. Such encounters were not always successful. Indeed,

the actor, director, and educator Charles Rittenhouse (1909–1982) notes that the local players would have been “hastily rehearsed” and recounts the story of a touring celebrity who “became so incensed at his ill prepared cast that he arose during a death scene roaring ‘Am I to prompt you even when I am dying?’ and stomped off the stage.”<sup>10</sup> Productions like the one described were forged by the talents and capacities of New York theatre professionals and conceived by impresarios expressly for “export” to a generalized, distant audience – whether they found it in Quebec City or in Cleveland.<sup>11</sup> As theatre scholar Jonathan Rittenhouse (son of Charles) shows in his history of the Sherbrooke Opera House, in the 1890s a range of touring companies “pass[ed] through the area with increasing frequency. Along with H. Price Webber, the Lillian Tucker Co, Guy Brothers Minstrels, various *Uncle Tom* companies, A.Q. Scammon Co., Frost & Fanshaw passed through Sherbrooke, sometimes performing at other towns in the area.”<sup>12</sup> When Sherbrooke’s Opera House opened in 1901, its American owner, F.M. Clement “envisioned operating a chain of theatres from Portland [Massachusetts] to Montréal, linked by rail and under his managerial control.”<sup>13</sup> Already the owner-manager of theatres in Portland, MA and Berlin, NH – as well as being the latter town’s mayor – Clement imported American vaudeville and theatre until 1911, when he sold the venue.

A similar dynamic had already taken hold in Montréal. Theatre historian Jean-Marc Larrue writes, “From 1880 [to 1929], Montreal and Quebec City would become stops on the route of theatre troupes that travelled the continent [generally by rail]. Quebec [...] was henceforth nothing more than an ‘annex’ of the great New York theatrical empire.”<sup>14</sup> The Princess Theatre (1908–15) was “Montreal’s link in the Shubert chain,” a theatrical producing organization, to which the New York impresarios would send their shows.<sup>15</sup> Quebec was figured as an American province, if you will, not a region with different or specific needs of theatrical entertainment. Indeed, as Larrue tells us, at the turn of the twentieth century, New York touring theatre constituted more than 90% of professional theatrical activity in Quebec.<sup>16</sup> A glance at the Montréal and surrounding area newspapers of this period provides an additional sense of the connection between ELTQ and New York City, especially Broadway. *The Gazette* would reprint theatre reviews by Brooks Atkinson, the *New York Times* theatre critic, would announce casting decisions for Broadway shows (and Hollywood movies), and would sometimes report directly from Broadway. By the evidence of the papers, knowing what was playing in New York City was *de rigueur* for Anglo-Quebecers until approximately the mid-1960s, when such missives faded out.<sup>17</sup>

The colonial organisation of ownership and dissemination, and the international imaginary are early instances of how ELTQ's imagined geography and allegiances extends necessarily beyond the provincial border. As J. Rittenhouse writes of the Granada Theatre in Sherbrooke: "The Granada's genesis and history are [...] particularly complex because of the many conflicting and complicating threads of its story, its many 'ours:' an American capitalized, Canadian managed and locally consumed space."<sup>18</sup> Such is largely the case for English-language theatre in Quebec more broadly. In the general absence of Canadian plays (never mind plays by Anglophone Quebecers), the landmarks and points of attachment of ELTQ in the first half of the twentieth century lay decidedly in the major English-language theatre centres of New York and London.

Just as ownership, dissemination, personnel, and repertoire confound the Quebec-US border in this period, so does one of ELTQ's theatres: the Haskell Free Library and Opera House. Built in 1901 (the same year as the Granada), the Haskell Free Library and Opera House stood "deliberately astride the boundary line separating Canada from the United States" in Stanstead, QC and Derby Line, VT.<sup>19</sup> It is a unique and telling case for this "border drama" of English-language theatre production in Quebec's southern regions. The Opera House, which is on the second floor of the building – the library occupies the main floor – was also a presenting house like the Granada, providing a venue to touring theatre and vaudeville productions, prominent public speakers of the day, and musical entertainments of various kinds. Its debut performance in 1904 was a most American entertainment – a blackface minstrel show touring out of Boston. In his brief, unpublished history of English theatre in Montréal housed in the Quebec Drama Federation files, former playwright, director and theatre critic Myron Galloway notes that the "popular minstrel shows turned up in Montreal through the 1880s."<sup>20</sup> Larrue documents that "between 1880 and 1914, more than 12% of shows presented on Montreal's English stages are minstrel shows. And the bulk of 'Varieties' and 'Vaudeville Shows' would include at least one 'Burnt Cork' number."<sup>21</sup> While blackface minstrelsy is thankfully no longer on the menu at the Haskell, most of its theatrical activity appears to have been American in origin. Interestingly, at the Haskell Opera House, this American product was mounted on a stage in Canada while the audience sat in its seats in the United States. In the 1930s, however, there is evidence that the Canadian stage element of the Opera house was more strongly asserted when English-language Quebec regional theatres and amateur companies performed on its boards. For instance, the Montréal-based Canadian Art Theatre

(1944–50), based their summer touring productions at the Haskell for the seasons of 1948 and 1949.<sup>22</sup> They sent members of the company into Sherbrooke to advertise their productions; those who spoke French poorly were “demoted” to pounding the pavement in the “small neighbouring towns of Vermont” in a bid to have American citizens take in American and English drama in Quebec.<sup>23</sup> The NHP took its 1957 summer productions to the Haskell on Tuesday nights as well.<sup>24</sup>

The dominance of touring companies featuring American or British plays is also clearly seen on Montréal’s major presenting stage – His/Her Majesty’s – between 1930 and 1960. A chronicler of ELTQ, Philip Booth characterizes the venue’s repertoire as having an “emphasis on romantic and musical comedy, seasoned with ‘serious’ productions of, for instance, Arthur Miller’s *A View from the Bridge* in 1944, and a ... recurrence of [European classics – Shakespeare, G.B. Shaw, Ibsen], and the like.”<sup>25</sup> Programmes from this theatre archived in the “Montreal Theatre Programmes Collection” at McGill University document the arrival of companies such as London’s D’Oyly Carte Opera Company, Dublin’s Gate Theatre, Milan’s Piccolo Teatro, New York’s Theatre Guild, the Playwrights’ Company (also of New York), and the Stratford (Ontario) Festival touring company as well as shows brought by American and English producers David Merrick, Elia Kazan, and Tyrone Guthrie. In a story that is familiar to Canadianist theatre and cultural critics, this circulation of English and increasingly American product persisted throughout the century. Even after the advent of the regional theatre system across Canada – a national network of civic theatres funded in part by the then recently formed Canada Council and inaugurated by the Manitoba Theatre Centre in 1958 – and the concomitant rise in production of Canadian-authored plays, Canadian plays were not on the menu in the English-language theatres in Quebec. Most still programmed what Mark Czarnecki calls “the three Cs”; this is “the Regional [Theatre]s’ formula of contemporary plays from other countries, classics from the world repertoire and, nominally, a Canadian script, usually not new.”<sup>26</sup> Indeed, *Fortune and Men’s Eyes* by Canadian John Herbert arrived in Montréal on 22 November 1967 as part of the tour of the “Original Off-Broadway Production!” It opened – and closed – the ill-fated “Le Centre,” Jacques Languirand’s Cultural Centre meant to be composed of two theatres, a discothèque, and a pub in Montréal’s Old Stock Exchange building. The space, in which only one theatre was completed before money ran out, would be taken over in 1969 by the Centaur Foundation for the Performing Arts, led by Maurice Podbrey.<sup>27</sup> Outside of Montréal, most still programmed only the first two C’s.



Mid-century ELTQ did produce one very visible, exportable success. This was *My Fur Lady*, a 1956 McGill student musical spoof that toured across Canada for 18 months and made more than \$900,000.<sup>28</sup> Gregory Reid understands the performance and reception of this popular production as what Canadian theatre historian Alan Filewod calls an “imagined theatre,” in this case an imagined theatre of English Quebec. For Filewod, an imagined theatre is a site at which the historical performance of Canadian nationhood is enacted. More than this, the enactment of nation-ness “simulates an unattainable original” that, in so doing, authenticates the imagined nation through its visible presentation.<sup>29</sup> In Reid’s argument then, *My Fur Lady* performs an idea of “English Quebec” that conjures the existence of “English Quebec.” And yet, this performance of group identity paradoxically (or rather, symptomatically) requires knowledge of non-English Quebec “originals.” *My Fur Lady* was a take-off on New York’s hit musical of 1954, Lerner and Lowe’s *My Fair Lady*, which of course was in turn based on a British comedy (G.B. Shaw’s *Pygmalion*). In the McGill version, an Inuit princess meets the Governor General of Canada and romance ensues. You can imagine the rest!

### **The Geography Staked Out by the Repertoire**

So what – or rather, where – is more precisely the geographical imaginary of ELTQ in the first half of the twentieth century, as expressed in the repertoire of plays performed in the professional summer stock houses of the Eastern Townships? Let us begin with the foundational Brae Manor Playhouse. Begun in 1935 by American expatriots Filmore and Marjorie Sadler, The Brae Manor Playhouse was, in the words of actor, Martin Hunter, “part stock company, part drama school, part happy family.”<sup>30</sup> Student actors who paid a fee<sup>31</sup> would study technique with the Sadlers and occasional other instructors; part of their curriculum was to act in a different play each week, open to the paying public. After the war, the Sadlers hired experienced or professional actors from around the region of Western Quebec and Ontario to join themselves and the students onstage. For instance, a number of commentators remember Christopher Plummer being driven out from Montréal to replace an actor the night before opening in Richard Brinsley Sheridan’s eighteenth-century witty comedy, *The Rivals*. Plummer himself confides in his autobiography that he learned his lines in the car between Montréal and Knowlton.<sup>32</sup> Other professionals who trod the boards with the students at Brae Manor included Filmore and Marjorie Sadler themselves, who were frequent collaborators at the Montréal Repertory Theatre during the winter season, Eric Donkin, Maurice Evans, David Gardiner, Amelia Hall, Joy



Lafleur, Silvio Narizzano, Bruce Raymond, and more. Susan McNicoll notes that by 1948, "It had become largely a resident company augmented by six or so apprentices each season. These apprentices were the only ones still paying to be a part of the theatre; the balance of the members were paid."<sup>33</sup>

The Sadlers's selection of plays drew on diverse sources, but, as *Billboard* writes in 1948, "Typical offerings in the Brae Manor repertory are *Arsenic and Old Lace*, *Yes, My Darling Daughter*, and *The Rivals*."<sup>34</sup> Many of their choices formed the staple diet of Townships summer theatre into the 1970s. They were the first to professionally perform plays by Noel Coward, Terrence Rattigan, Patrick Hamilton, Rose Franken, and William Douglas Home in the Townships; successors such as the NHP (1956–59) and The Piggery (1965–) took up those authors as well, often performing the same plays ten, twenty, or even thirty years later. For instance, Frederick Knott's thriller *Dial M For Murder* was produced at Brae Manor in 1955, again in 1958 by the NHP, and then in 1978 by the Piggery. The example of Hamilton's melodrama *Gaslight* (also called *Angel Street*) similarly stretches across the three companies: Brae Manor in 1945, NHP in 1959, and the Piggery in 1975. *Rookery Nook* is shared between the Canadian Art Theatre summer company (1948) and the Brae Manor Playhouse (1945), whereas the thrillers *Ladies in Retirement* and *Night Must Fall* are in the repertoire of the Canadian Art Theatre, the NHP, and the Piggery. Where the Brae Manor Playhouse repertoire differed from its successors was in its consistent showcasing of Euro-American modern drama by the likes of Lillian Hellman, George Bernard Shaw, Oscar Wilde, and Clifford Odets.

The NHP was Brae Manor's most immediate heir; in fact, its artists stayed at the Brae Manor. Sponsored by businessmen who summered in the town, it produced nine shows in as many weeks in Ray Hatrick's converted curling club with a largely resident company. While their repertoire influenced future Townships theatres, their summer conversion of a winter leisure spot into a theatre revived an earlier practice. In this respect, the NHP's Townships predecessor can be found in the Rink Opera House of Sherbrooke (1890–1914). Here, in a reversal of the conventional, urban seasonal ordering of professional theatrical production, the town's Anglophone population "skated in late fall, winter, and early spring and went to shows the rest of the year."<sup>35</sup> The NHP similarly had to wait until curling season had finished before preparing its summer productions. Its artistic director and director-in-residence for the first two seasons, Montréal's Arthur Voronka, programmed a steady diet of comedies (sophisticated, farcical, and romantic), thrillers, and a serious play for leavening – unsurprising

and, so, undistinctive choices for any North American summer stock company of the mid-century. Most notable about the NHP repertoire under Voronka's direction is the preponderance of plays that had been turned into movies. The Playhouse's opening season of nine plays featured eight that had received filmic treatment; four of the ten plays in its second season had been made into Hollywood movies. It seems, however, that such a gamble did not entirely pay off. The "NHP Notes" in the 1958 season programmes admits the following:

Last season newly released sophisticated comedies from London and New York, did not meet with great enthusiasm and unfortunately it cannot be said that the season was a success. [...] Therefore with every consideration for your entertainment, each play this season is a tried and true favourite. The main emphasis has been on comedy but for variation a drama and a thriller have been added to the schedule.<sup>36</sup>

It is noteworthy that it was not the provenance of the plays to which the audience took exception (at least in the estimation of the NHP administration), but rather their level of sophistication. The playhouse's first four seasons nonetheless followed a similar dramaturgy: opening with a well-known play or author whose recognition factor had often been aided by a recent film (e.g., *The Reluctant Debutante* in 1958 and *The Remarkable Mr. Pennypacker* in 1959), closing with a feel-good comedy (e.g., *The Tender Trap* in 1957, *The Father of the Bride* in 1958), and relying on comedies of mistaken situation (e.g., *When We Are Married* in which couples celebrating their 25<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary learn their marriages are not legal, or *The Seven Year Itch* in which the nerdy male lead imagines a Marilyn Monroe-type character to be interested in him), and murder mysteries in between (e.g. *Night Must Fall* in 1956, *Laura* in 1957, *Dial M for Murder* in 1958, and *The Mousetrap* in 1959). The two subsequent summers (1961 and 1962), under the direction of a guest company in residence, staged a return of sorts to mixing in more highbrow fare as did the Sadlers at the Brae Manor. The Genesisians (St. Genesius Players Guild) mounted plays by more philosophically and experimentally inclined playwrights William Saroyan, Eugène Ionesco, and Thornton Wilder.

The mid-1960s saw the founding of two important regional theatres in Quebec – the aforementioned Piggery Theatre in 1965 (North Hatley) and the Centennial Theatre (Sherbrooke) in 1967. Both are presenting venues and have also been producing companies. The Piggery, a not-for-profit professional theatre, was both of those, hosting others' productions in its space and producing or co-producing original productions for their season. In 2003, it stopped being a summer theatre and instead presented outside theatre

productions interleaved with increasing amounts of comedy, tribute bands, folk musicians, and country singers.<sup>37</sup> The Centennial, which is owned by Bishop's University, has just announced the suspension of their multidisciplinary and bilingual production season as of 2016–17, due to insufficient finances.<sup>38</sup> I will be most concerned with the period 1972–1982, the years in which the Centennial hosted Festival Lennoxville, a professional summer theatre produced by the St. Francis Theatre Company, in association with Bishop's University. With respect to the Piggery's history, 1972 is the year that the Piggery went professional, and 1982 the year in which it first received subventions from the Canada Council and the Ministère des affaires culturelles du Québec. They are particularly useful case studies for exploring the geographical imaginary and imagined theatres of ELTQ during this period. Although both are summer houses, they display rather different approaches to their seasons during the same period and in neighbouring Eastern Township communities.

The Piggery is housed in a converted pig barn donated to the Townships Playhouse Guild (later incorporated as Le Théâtre Piggery, Inc.) by Arthur Virgin, a New Yorker who summered in North Hatley and whose familial bequest helped to sustain the Piggery's operations into the 1980s.<sup>39</sup> We have already examined The Piggery's reportorial indebtedness to its predecessors through its first ten years of production (1965–75). Between 1976 and 1982, it introduced the comedies of more contemporaneous authors such as the English dramatists Tom Stoppard and Peter Shaffer, and the American Lanford Wilson; it branched out in to musicals (e.g., *The Apple Tree* in 1977 and *Music by Rodgers, Lyrics by Hart* in 1980), and four Canadian-authored productions, including Gaëtan Charlebois's *Returning* in 1981. In that 1981 programme, the "about us ..." note trumpets its production of Ira Levin's *Deathtrap*, a "runaway Broadway hit" as evidence of their desire to "bring our audience the best in North American entertainment."<sup>40</sup> In short, the Piggery deployed the "regional theatre" formula described above and tweaked (toward comedies and crowd-pleasers) for the exigencies and expectations of summer stock. However, in this "updating," the Piggery left behind what, in retrospect, reads as an experiment in French-language productions; the first two seasons produced by – rather than simply presented by – the Townships Playhouse Guild (1973 and 1974) included both English- and French-language productions in a ratio of two to one.

Another road was being taken at the Centennial Theatre in Lennoxville, built in 1967 as part of Canada's celebrations of its 100 years as a dominion. In 1971 it became the home to Festival Lennoxville, a summer theatre festival of exclusively Canadian

plays. By “Canadian,” the founding artistic director, William Davis, and founding artistic producer, David Rittenhouse (another son of Charles Rittenhouse) intended plays written in English by Canadian authors. As Jonathan Rittenhouse notes, the shift here was from “theatre in Canada” to “Canadian theatre,” the former of which was accomplished by building infrastructure (like the Centennial Theatre) to house play production and the latter of which was an active concern by the time of the regional theatre system’s consolidation in the late 1960s. While Festival Lennoxville’s mandate to produce Canadian theatre in a theatre in Canada was entirely of the times, it was also a decidedly risky venture because of its place. In a searing critique of the Festival in *Canadian Theatre Review*, Don Young and Nelly Auster Young write: “To outsiders, it must seem strange that a small English town in Quebec was chosen for a theatrical festival whose mandate is the staging of high quality productions of Canadian plays. The political environment is hostile, the local market small and the culture it wishes to celebrate basically foreign.”<sup>41</sup>

The authors pinpoint a fundamental misrecognition of place on the part of the festival producers. Imagined as “Canadian,” the Festival sutured itself to an Anglophone, pan-Canadian culture and participated actively in the nationalisation and institutionalisation of Canadian drama and theatre concretized (literally) in the burgeoning regional theatre system and enacted in Canadian content on its stages.

The same was true of the Festival’s personnel. The announcement of its founding notably indicates, “Actors will be sought from leading Canadian centres, with apprentices chosen from the graduating class of the National Theatre School and the drama department of Bishop’s.”<sup>42</sup> The artistic director from 1971–77, William Davis was a Toronto-born, London-trained actor and director who had recently been hired as a professor in the Bishop’s new drama department. In its first season, director John Hirsch remounted a revised version of Ann Henry’s *Lulu Street* from the Manitoba Theatre Centre; in the second, Bill Glassco brought his Tarragon Theatre (Toronto) production of David Freeman’s *Battering Ram*.<sup>43</sup> In his brief article on the Festival’s import, Jonathan Rittenhouse summarizes its rise and fall as follows:

The Festival’s nationalist orientation, its all-Canadian perspective, ensured its early success with funding agencies and foundations as the Festival could successfully argue that its existence fulfilled a genuine need. Emboldened by this success and support the Festival further professionalized; however, it suffered growing pains when the federal government curbed support for most of its cultural programmes in the mid-1970s; when foundation ‘seed’ money ended and wasn’t completely made up in private sponsorship and box office revenue; and,

finally, when Quebec nationalism of the late 1970s and 1980s made the Festival's explicit Canadian mandate and English-language orientation problematic.<sup>44</sup>

The Festival Board as well as the administrative and artistic personnel were certainly aware of the gap between the Festival's "imagined theatre" and the demographics and perspectives of its surrounds. In response, it belatedly programmed two plays in English translation by Québécois playwright Michel Tremblay in 1977 and 1978,<sup>45</sup> introduced bilingual programmes in 1978 under the artistic direction of Richard Ouzounian, and, the Youngs tell us, launched advertising campaigns in the French-language press. In what turned out to be the final summer season in 1982, the new Artistic Director, Scott Swan, planned four English-Canadian plays, two Acadian plays by Antonine Maillet (including *La Sagouine* in English translation and performed by the actress most strongly associated with Maillet's work: Viola Léger) and a French-language original creation by a visiting company – Jean-Pierre Ronfard's iconic *Vie et mort du roi boiteux*, which opened the festival on 3 July 1982.<sup>46</sup> Nonetheless, the gap between could not be bridged and the misalignment of repertoire to place was compounded by the loss of the Festival's founder, David Rittenhouse, to Toronto as well as a late start to season-planning due to belated funding assurances.<sup>47</sup> In her survey of ELTQ from 1975 to 1995, Catherine Graham suggests that its focus on Canadian work alienated local, majority, francophone audiences not only due to its language and Canadian repertoire; the festival also failed because it attempted to please "a poorly defined local community [that of Anglo-Quebeckers] as well as the whole of Canada."<sup>48</sup> This was true right up to the festival's final season; the February 1982 press release announcing the summer season promised a season of "national scope and interest."<sup>49</sup>

Festival Lennoxville imagined its place as national (that is, English Canadian), but its "imagined theatre" failed to "simulate its unattained original" of a pan-Anglo-Canadian affiliation. The crowds did not come in sufficient numbers from either of the target markets Graham identifies and it closed the 1982 season three weeks early.<sup>50</sup> The Festival did, however, put its finger on one kind of production that would, after its demise, more successfully put the proverbial bums in seats in summer theatre: the country musical. John Gray's *18 Wheels* starring Booth Savage, "a country and western musical-comedy about truckers," was the highlight of the 1978 season and the largest-grossing production in the Festival's history.<sup>51</sup> Combining the attractions of the musical – long a staple in summer stock and in non-metropolitan amateur and community theatre seasons all over North America – with the locally preferred musical idiom of country

music brought in the crowds and brought down the house. Festival Lennoxville's summer competitor, The Piggery, produced *18 Wheels* a decade later in 1988.<sup>52</sup>

### Conclusions

About Anglo-Quebec theatre, Larrue goes so far as to assert that "to look for a 'soul' in English Canadian theatre" at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century would be "in vain."<sup>53</sup> By this he intends that ELTQ lacks definitive character that would make it recognizable as such, and this due to its functional dependencies on and notional allegiances with American and English homologues. On this question of ELTQ "soul" almost a century later, authors of a 1991 Quebec Drama Federation status report on ELTQ concur, writing that there is "nothing distinct" about it. However, as this essay has shown, in light of the history of foreign influence and the expanded, international imaginary that it generates as evidenced in repertoire and address, we cannot properly understand Quebec's English-language dramatic output and theatrical production as a "distinctly" or "autonomously" Quebecois or English-Quebecker product. This is, of course, part of an inheritance of British Empire which stipulated that "culture" and "good theatre" had to be imported to Canada from the United Kingdom.<sup>54</sup> If this "cultural coat-tailing," in Ric Knowles's apt phrase, was a point of pride in the early part of the period of study as it displayed participation in a commonwealth of theatrical culture, it became an increasingly sore point from the 1960s, and especially the 1970s, forward.<sup>55</sup> ELTQ's indebtedness to American repertoire and companies was a function of a New-York dominated theatre system in North America, and a common language, which also intensified perceptions of a shared, North American culture.

It is not simply that we will largely fail in looking for such marks of distinction in the history of ELTQ up until the 1970s (and then we find them largely at Festival Lennoxville); searching for the same evidence in the period since 1980, we risk being disappointed in the relative scarcity of local product. In fact, the kind of Anglo-Quebec plays that travel best, such as the comedies and domestic realisms of Montréal playwright Colleen Curran who is regularly produced in Ontario and the northeastern United States, are those that do not have any particularly Quebec markings. Instead, attention to the cultural and territorial imaginaries at work in summer English-language theatre in Quebec shows that this cultural field must be conceived as a circuit and as regional in order to discover its logic, operations, imaginary, and even possibilities.

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## ENDNOTES

1. As part of her research with me on this project in tracing and visualising ELTQ, Sunita Nigam first articulated this idea of the inadequacy of the name “ELTQ” to its actual, historical and imagined geographies. I thank her for sharing this important insight with me.
2. If you have stories, documents, or leads to share, please contact me at [erin.hurley@mcgill.ca](mailto:erin.hurley@mcgill.ca).
3. Theatre history also tends to be the history of professional practice, excluding amateur, community, and educational theatre. Space prevents me from detailing here the rich and long history of these theatrical practices and cultures of ELTQ, but I intend to cover those in the larger project of which this is a part. Robin Whittaker’s scholarship on non-professionalizing theatre in Canada is an important interlocutor in this regard. See R.C. Whittaker, “(Re) Collections, Master Narratives, and Nationalizing Practices: Alumnae Theatre Company and Nonprofessionalizing Theatre in English Canada” (forthcoming) and “‘Entirely Free of Any Amateurishness’: Private Training, Public Taste and the Women’s Dramatic Club of University College, Toronto (1905–21).”
4. The number of “professionalizing” companies and practices that provide professional opportunities to recent graduates and young theatre professionals is testament to the effort that has often been required to hold on to the next generation of talent. The following companies have as part (or indeed all) of their mission providing such professional work opportunities: Brae Manor Playhouse (1935–56); Instant Theatre (1965–1969); Geordie Productions (1980–); Montreal Young Company (1999–2006?); Persephone Theatre (2002), Black Theatre Workshop (Youthworks: Young Performers Initiative 2000–2013 and Artist Mentorship program 2013–).
5. “Filmore, Sadler-An Artistic Pioneer,” p. 8.
6. See Wolf, *Theatre as Social Practice: Local Ethnographies of Audience Reception*, 1994, for a keen analysis of the effects of this metropolitan-centric approach in the case of US theatre history.



7. Montréal currently houses two of the professional English theatres that own their production space (the Centaur Theatre and the Segal Centre for the Performing Arts). Other Montréal professional theatres that had their own spaces include: the Phoenix Theatre (1971–1981), which mounted shows in a converted hair salon in the Town of Mount Royal before moving into the theatre space at 1858 de Maisonneuve, first opened in 1957 by the Montréal Studio and Drama Club. The Montréal Repertory Theatre (1930–1962) occupied first a small hall on Guy Street and then another on Closse.
8. H. Whittaker, *Setting the Stage*, p. 98.
9. Bailey, "Theatre in la Belle Province," p. 18–19.
10. C. Rittenhouse, "Dream Sequence: Montreal English Theatre 1804–1962," p. 12.
11. Circus historian Julie Boudreault's research has turned up a similar tendency to import in circus as well. To date, she has traced 72 tours of North American Circuses through Quebec between 1846 and 1967. Boudreault, "Are Quebec Circuses of Foreign Origin?", 58 and 628.
12. J. Rittenhouse, "Building a Theatre: Sherbrooke and Its Opera House," p. 76.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 79.
14. Booth, et al., "Anglophone Theatre in Quebec from 1879 to 2000," [n.p.].
15. C. Rittenhouse, "Dream Sequence," p. 12–23.
16. Booth, et al., "Anglophone Theatre," p. 2.
17. By the 1970s, the theatre listings were surrounded not by news of New York but by advertisements for porn cinemas.
18. J. Rittenhouse, "'Our Granada': The Granada Theatre, Wellington Street, Sherbrooke, Quebec, Canada, America, the World, and Me," p. 152.
19. Farfan, "History of the Haskell Free Library and Opera House."
20. Galloway, "English Theatre in Montreal 1642–1992," p. 21.
21. Booth, et al., "Anglophone Theatre," p. 25. For an analysis of the legacy of blackface performance in Quebec, see Nigam, "Feeling in Public: Blackface as Theatre of Action in Contemporary Quebec."
22. Voronka, "In North Hatley, There Was *Life* Before Stratford. Theatre in North Hatley 1948/1965," p. 1–3.
23. Hall, *Life Before Stratford: The Memoirs of Amelia Hall*, p. 70.
24. "NHP Notes," Programme for *Nina*.
25. Booth, et al., "Anglophone Theatre," p. 95.
26. Czarnecki, "The Regional Theatre System," p. 37; Wallace, "Theatre and Transformation in Contemporary Canada," p. 15.

27. Rump, "Drama: English Canada," p. 445.
28. Booth, et al., "Anglophone Theatre," p. 57.
29. Reid, "Le théâtre Anglo-Québécois: The 'Imagined Theatre' of an Unimagined Community," p. 27.; Alan Filewod, *Performing Canada. The Nation Enacted in the Imagined Theatre*, p. X, XVII.
30. Hunter, *Romancing the Bard: Stratford at Fifty*, p. 56.; Knowles, *Shakespeare and Canada: Essays on Production, Translation, and Adaptation*, p. 23.
31. In *The Opening Act: Canadian Theatre History 1945-53*, Susan McNicoll writes: "By 1948 they were paying \$35 to \$38 a week for the privilege of combining 'valuable dramatic studies with the joys of a delightful summer holiday,' as the Brae Manor program stated" (216). McNicoll, *The Opening Act*, 2012.
32. Plummer, *In Spite of Myself: A Memoir*, p. 58.
33. McNicoll, *The Opening Act*, p. 217.
34. "Eastern Canada's Haylofts Pulling Best in Years," p. 43.
35. J. Rittenhouse, "'Our Granada'" p. 148–166. As one example of what was performed in the converted rink, the *Sherbrooke Daily Record* advertises "The Great Melodramatic Treat. SLAVES OF GOLD, Massive, Magnificent, Marvellous. A Carload of Special Scenery," 14 April 1897, p. 4.
36. Programme for *The White Sheep of the Family*. 6-9 August 1958.
37. In a 2003 quarterly newsletter of the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres, to which The Piggery sporadically belonged in the 1980s, the Quebec regional report announces that The Piggery "no longer exists as a summer theatre." "Region 6," p. 16.
38. McKenna, "Lennoxville's Centennial Theatre Cancels 2016–17 Season."
39. "The President's Message" from Andrew Fleming that appears in all of the 1982 season programmes announces Jeannette Virgin's passing and that her bequest was put into a capital fund whose annual income would be put toward infrastructural upgrades.
40. Programme for *Returning*, Summer 1981, n.p.
41. Young and Auster Young, "Lennoxville's Uncertain Future," p. 112–120.
42. H. Whittaker, "New Festival," p. 15.
43. Details of casting, productions, co-productions and etc. are drawn from my study of all of the original Festival Lennoxville programmes from 1971–1980, loaned to me by Patrick Neilson.
44. J. Rittenhouse, "Festival Lennoxville," p. 89.
45. Archival papers document the desire of the Festival administration to mount bilingual seasons using two companies – one Anglophone

and one Francophone. The final season in 1982 under the artistic direction of Scott Swan, which closed half-way through, had for an objective "a truly Canadian theatre Festival in Canada's two official languages in the Eastern Townships, where both languages are spoken." J. Rittenhouse, "Festival Lennoxville," p. 133.

46. "Festival Revival," 1982.
47. The Canada Council at first refused to accord Festival Lennoxville an operating grant; after a letter-writing campaign, this decision was reversed. Marler, "Grants that never came," B-3.
48. Graham, "Le théâtre anglophone au Québec," p. 416. Emphasis mine.
49. "Festival Lennoxville Announces 1982 Season." Press release. In Volume 41 of the Performing Arts Collection at the National Archives of Canada.
50. A UPI article indicates that "Festival organizers had hoped for attendance of 25,000 over the season. The decision to close came with total attendance at 9,000, and projections of only 17,000 until the end of the season." "The 10<sup>th</sup> Season."
51. Young and Auster Young, "Lennoxville's Uncertain Future," p. 116.
52. More recent examples of this Townships genre are: Laura Teasdale's *Honky Tonk Blue: The Night Hank [Williams] met Patsy [Cline]* (2003 and 2013 at The Piggery; 2005 at Theatre Lac Brome); *Always ... Patsy Cline* by Ted Swindley (Theatre Lac Brome, 1999); *Hank Williams: The Show He Never Gave* by Maynard Collins (Theatre Lac Brome, 2001 and 2002).
53. Booth, et al., p. 2.
54. A case in point cited by numerous theatre scholars is the founding of the Stratford Festival in Stratford, Ontario in 1952 as a "national" theatre company. Dedicated to producing the plays of William Shakespeare, its opening production *Richard III* was directed by the English director, Tyrone Guthrie (also the Festival's founding Artistic Director) and starred Alec Guinness. See Ric Knowles, *Shakespeare and Canada*, 2004.
55. See Don Rubin, "Creeping Towards a Culture."

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