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HISTORY AT PLAY IN THE PORTRAYAL OF POLITICIANS IN CANADIAN DRAMA

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Abstract

This thesis intends to focus on certain playwrights' creative fascination and complex relationship with 'politicians as subject' who have been elevated to the rank of 'greatness' in part through their work. More specifically, it serves as a study into how playwrights mold certain politicians' images, a type of creative investment that in turn helps craft, (re) affirm, or deconstruct the politician as a 'cultural symbol.' Using a historiographic model based on Paul Ricoeur and Hayden White's work, this thesis explores the dramaturgical approaches used by 'artist-historian' playwrights when creating dramatic figures inspired by Canadian politicians. In particular, it examines Linda Griffiths' portrayal of Pierre Elliot Trudeau in *Maggie and Pierre*, David Fennario's portrayal of René Lévesque in *The Death of René Lévesque*, and Allan Stratton's portrayal of William Lyon Mackenzie King in *Rexy!*

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Introduction

The Canadian Politician as a Component of National Identity

Although the study of the theatrical and literary traditions are often categorized along national lines, – particularly in Canada where academics commonly define artistic enterprise in direct association with a national identity – there has been limited scholarship addressing one of the most inherently Canadian topics: the portrayal of politicians as fictional characters.

Canadians continuously hunt for common cultural qualities that transcend diverging nationalist interests at work within the Canadian state in a symbolic attempt to align our English, French, First Nations, and multicultural interests under the umbrella of ‘Canadian identity.’¹ Since the 1960s, it has been the implicit mandate of our system of government, and its various mechanisms, to find common ground among these interests. Yet, theatre scholars have rarely studied the representation or presentation of the agents, embodiments, and most visible symbols of this system – political leaders – in dramatic texts and/or on stage.

The successful politician is often elevated or transformed from a utilitarian social agent to the status of adored or vilified cultural symbol. For example, Pierre Elliot Trudeau has become a symbol that distinguishes Canadians from their British heritage through his role in the patriation of the constitution and his irreverent actions such as his 1977 pirouette behind Queen Elizabeth II. In the United States, George Washington holds a similar yet far more engrained iconic status as the founder of the American nation; a status developed through his role as military commander during the American Revolutionary War and as inaugural President of the newly formed United States of America (E. Miller 518).

¹ For a more in-depth discussion of Canada as a multination state, and the distinction between nation and state see Will Kymlicka, Eric Taylor Woods, and Kenneth McRoberts.

These symbols are established, edified, reaffirmed, or deconstructed when artists situate them as subjects in their works. This thesis intends to focus on certain playwrights' creative fascination and complex relationship with 'politicians as subject,' figures who have been elevated to the rank of 'greatness' in part through their work. More specifically, this thesis will serve as a study of how playwrights mold certain politicians' images, a type of creative investment that in turn helps craft, (re) affirm, or deconstruct them as 'cultural symbols.' It is my hope to help build a better an understanding of how Canadian audiences view their politicians through this form of artistic mediation.

The Mediated Political Process

Canadian citizens engage with their politicians through an inherently and increasingly mediated process. These forms of mediation are numerous and diverse, including, amongst others, televised news stories, in-print opinion articles, documentary films, political rallies, and partisan advertisements. Peter Van Aelst, Tamir Sheafer, and James Stanyer argue that the use of video recording has shifted political attention from local candidates to a few major party leaders (205). They describe this shift as "personalization" (Van Aelst 204) and it is defined by an increased interest in the individual politician's personal life and personal characteristics, such as attitude, appearance, and talents. Personalization is sometimes seen as being tributary of a shift away from discussions about policy and political philosophy: Neil Postman calls this the "dumbing down" of politics (qtd. in Street 23), while Bob Franklin simply believes the shift "privilege[s] presentation over substance, appearance over policy" (qtd. in Street 23). Some scholars, such as Roderick Hart, have described this as a "new politics" or a "mediated politics" (qtd. in Street 24). While mediation has existed in politics for a long time, the growth of

personalized politics has amplified the perceived importance of the relationship between Canadian citizens and individual leaders.

In reflecting upon his experiences as the leader of the Liberal Party of Canada during the 2011 federal election, Michael Ignatieff explores the public conception of the politician. He argues that the main task of the politician is to gain and maintain “standing” amongst the citizens they represent or hope to represent (23:45). ‘Standing’ is a term borrowed from legal jargon and derived from the Latin *locus standi*, meaning to have the right to speak on a given matter before the courts. In the political realm, Ignatieff is using the term to mean the right to speak as representative of a group of people. Ultimately, gaining or being denied standing in politics is a matter, according to Ignatieff, of whether or not the electorate believes the politician “belongs” (31:30). He argues one affirms their belonging and gains standing through their personal narrative, not their political platform. These narratives are constructed and framed by the politicians, parties, campaign teams, pollsters, and the media; elements are selected from the life of the individual politician and used to make an argument for why that person is the natural representative of a collective body (31:30). Of course, opposing politicians and parties attempt to undermine these narratives and rewrite less favourable versions by placing emphasis on other elements. According to Ignatieff, it is ultimately the prevailing narrative that will gain or deny a particular politician standing before his or her constituents.

To demonstrate how these personal narratives function, Ignatieff compares the story he unsuccessfully used to seek standing and the story that helped Barack Obama win the 2008 United States Presidential Election. Ignatieff’s narrative was one of an intellectual returning to a country he loves; however, his opposition was successful in retelling this narrative under the slogans “He’s not coming home for you” and “He’s just visiting” (34:30). This retelling cost

him standing and resulted in an overwhelming defeat in the election. Likewise, Ignatieff mentions the Liberal Party's strategy of telling Stephen Harper's narrative: "over the 90s, we attempted to portray him as a rightwing Republican extremist whose politics was essentially American" (39:40). To demonstrate a successful attempt at gaining standing, he looks to Obama who managed to craft a compelling "American story" out of "highly unpromising material" (39:50). Obama's narrative ties together a Kenyan father, a Hawaiian birth, and a childhood in the Philippines in order to construct the argument that America is a land where anyone can succeed. The parts of Obama's life that on the surface contradict this narrative – the privilege tied with his time at Columbia and Harvard Law – had to be "retold as the story of a high achieving son of a single mother" (40:30). This story is most explicitly laid out in his two autobiographies *Dreams from My Father* and *The Audacity of Hope* (Borins 2). Ignatieff describes the shortcomings of this approach to 'spinning' political narratives:

We have forgotten a small but crucial distinguish, between an opponent and an enemy... In political competition modeled as a battle between opponents... the competition focuses on vision, platform, and ideas. But in the model that has all but supplanted it, politics is lived as war. Your opponent is an enemy. Your object is not to defeat them but destroy them. You question their standing, their right to be in the ring, their citizenship, their patriotism, their motives, and their good faith. Competition does not focus on vision, platform, and ideas. Its explicit goal is to deny a fellow citizen a right to a hearing from his fellow citizens. (46:00)

In Ignatieff's view, this reliance on personal narrative undermines the very heart of politics: an issue-based discourse or debate about ideas.

The shift towards personal narratives, of which Ignatieff is critical, has opened the door for the 'celebrification' of politicians. Breda Luthar, in her analysis of political celebrities, claims, "the previously strictly separate spheres of politics and popular culture have become indistinguishable from one another" (695). This is important because it has assigned the

politician a new social role: the role of celebrity. 'Celebrity', according to Luthar, extends beyond the celebration and embodiment of the triumphant individual to include "a personalization of normative collectivity" (692). This is to say that the politician becomes responsible, in part, for establishing and maintaining social norms through their role as a celebrity. As such, the politician's personal narrative does more than just provide political standing; it positions the politician as the place of alignment between daily human actions and political ideology (Luthar 695). Consequently, the politician's narrative implicitly argues that if you live according to a certain set of social norms (a certain lifestyle), then you should hold a certain political ideology.

Van Aelst, Ignatieff, and Luthar all define the 'political figure' in a similar fashion: as a discursive construct. The political figure is the character that is constructed through the public discourse about the politician's narrative. A playwright engages in creating and telling these personalized political narratives when they take a politician as the subject of their play. As a consequence, they construct or deconstruct the political figure. Playwrights have also, on occasion, taken the tension between the politician and his or her political figure to fuel the dramatic conflict in their text. In this thesis, I examine three Canadian plays that depict a politician's struggle to create, change, or adhere to the political narrative that has been constructed based on their lives. Through these depictions, the playwrights challenge the known public image of the portrayed politician.

Related Studies

Related studies are far and few between. Canadian theatre scholars have examined the relationship between a specific politician and his or her representation onstage in one or two selected plays. Mary Jane Miller explores the representation of three iconic Canadians – Pierre Trudeau, Margaret Trudeau, and Billy Bishop – in two plays in her article “*Billy Bishop Goes to War* and *Maggie and Pierre: A Matched Set*.” She considers each play an investigation of the tension between public myth and private lives. Significantly, Miller recognizes that both plays, written in the 1970s, address the Canadian “need for/search for/fear of heroes” (188). Her exploration does not limit itself to the dramatic texts, but extends to the film adaptation of both plays. Ultimately, she argues that both plays and their subsequent television adaptations explore the type of hero Canadians were seeking at different historical moments. In each, the dramatic tension arises because of differences between the image of the hero being sought by the Canadian public, and the reality of the politician attempting to embody this image: when “the discrepancies between the image [of the hero] and the person” becomes too large, the politician “either become[s] subsumed in the myth or tr[ies] to destroy it” (M. Miller 188-189).

Michael McKinnie offers another insightful examinations of a Canadian politician onstage in “King-Maker: Reading Theatrical Presentations of Canadian Political History.” He compares two representations of William Lyon Mackenzie King: *The Life and Times of Mackenzie King* by Michael Hollingsworth – the seventh part of VideoCabaret’s series *The Village of Small Huts* – and Allan Stratton’s *Rexy!*, a play which I will examine in more detail in this thesis. McKinnie uses Roland Barthes and Hayden White’s discussions on historiographic models as an entry point for analyzing these two representations of Canada’s Prime Minister during the Second World War. He argues that Hollingsworth’s portrayal of King “subverts

[King's] diaries' construction of a guiding purpose by disallowing [the diaries'] attempt to construct a self [image for King] which is serenely above the fray" (McKinnie). Stratton's portrayal, on the other hand, is guided by King's diaries and allows "King's individual subjectivity [to] pre-exist as the play's coherent source of meaning and action" (McKinnie). McKinnie's exploration of how these two playwrights dramaturgically acknowledge the historiographic function of theatrical representation is an invitation for further investigation.

Bruce Altschuler's survey of plays about the American Presidency titled "Acting Presidents: 100 years of plays about the presidency" is another useful grounding point for this study. He addresses both the portrayal of fictional presidents and representations of historical presidents. He divides these representations into two categories: heroic presidents and anti-heroic presidents. He then traces the transition from heroic representations, "idealized versions" and playwrights who "invented details to make their romances more dramatically interesting" (Altschuler 155) at the beginning of the twentieth century to "more than 40 years of antiheroic tradition" (Altschuler 157) starting in the 1960s. The survey explores the evolution of the presidency as a subject of theatre, over the past century and its connection to evolving public perception of American politicians.

This thesis seeks to build on the work of these three scholars. It looks to expand Miller's argument about the "need for/search for/fear of heroes" (188) in Canada to politicians beyond Trudeau. It will build upon the historiographic analysis initiated by McKinnie by considering further examples and making use of epistemological tools developed by Hayden White, Roland Barthes, and Paul Ricoeur. These tools will be outlined in the first chapter. Finally, it will look at representations of politicians north of the border during the 1980s and 1990s, a period Altschuler describes as "antiheroic" in the United States of America (157).

Historiographic Models & Canadian Playwrights

In this thesis, I am going to use a historiographic model based on Paul Ricoeur and Hayden White's work in order to explore dramaturgical approaches used when creating dramatic figures inspired by or based on Canadian politicians. This study will demonstrate how Canadian playwrights use various dramaturgical techniques to manipulate existing understandings and popular conceptions of politicians as 'public figures'. Authorial license allows playwrights to engage and deconstruct emblematic and mythic tendencies in the conception of Canadian politicians in favour of portrayals that use a contemporary 'prestige of the image.'²

Ricoeur discusses the 'prestige of the image' or the 'rhetoric of praise' as a historiographic quality that arises from a combination of readability and visibility, narrative and icon, and absence and presence in the representation of an individual. This quality, he explains, is critical to the theme of power in historical works: "[t]o ask about the possible permanence of the theme of power is at the same time to ask about the persistence of the 'rhetoric of praise' that is its literary correlate, with its cortege of prestigious images" (Ricoeur 271). Drawing from Louis Marin's analysis of seventeenth-century writers' depictions of monarchs in *Portrait of the King*, Ricoeur explains how the representation of a king, an "image substituted for something present elsewhere" (Ricoeur 246), can generate the "imaginary absolute of the monarch" (Marin qtd. in Ricoeur 264). By this, Ricoeur means the fictional absolute and present power of the monarch is the product of rhetorical representations given in his or her place. These 'portrait effect' representations, whether literary, visual, theatrical, or otherwise, are composed of a readable, narrative portion – which reveal the inherent absence of the represented individual –

² "Prestige of the image" is a term used by Paul Ricoeur in *Memory, History, Forgetting*.

and a visible iconic portion – which give presence for the recipient. It is this combination, in the case of the king, that can provide the image of absolute or divine power.

Marin and Ricoeur trace ‘prestige of the image’ back further from seventeenth-century kings to the hagiographical accounts of the saints and the Eucharistic motif (Ricoeur 264). Here the narrative of Christ and his inherent absence are coupled with the iconic bread and wine, a visible presence. As such, the Eucharistic motif, insofar as it is a representation of Christ, achieves ‘prestige of the image’ by conveying an image of Christ as provider of salvation.

Ricoeur’s approach begs the question whether or not there is an equivalent in a modern democracy to the image of absolute power of kings or the image of salvation sought by the religious figure; and, as a consequence, whether ‘prestige of the image’ is a quality in contemporary historical accounts. He finds the objective of the ‘rhetoric of praise’ is to grant the political and anthropological quality of ‘greatness.’ And then he turns to Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot’s *De la justification: Les Économies de la grandeur* for a contemporary definition of ‘greatness’ that is not dependant on power or religion. In this revised and more secular understanding, ‘greatness’ is a quality attributed to those who demand justice (Ricoeur 272). Thus, Ricoeur finds a contemporary ‘prestige of the image’ in historical accounts that make use of iconic figures who demand justice. In this thesis, I will explore how playwrights, in their “portrait” representations, use Ricoeur’s contemporary ‘prestige of the image’ to engage and deconstruct existing mythic or emblematic conceptions of Canadian politicians.

Myth, according to Roland Barthes, is a second level semiotic operation. The first level consists of the signified and the signifier that together generate a sign or meaning. This sign in turn becomes the signifier or form of another signified concept known as myth (Barthes 115). For example, a picture of Pierre Trudeau in his sports car (the signifier) and the actual Pierre

Trudeau in his sports car (the signified) come together to form a meaningful sign of a particular historical occurrence. In the myth, this sign becomes the signifier for another signified concept – Trudeau as a sex symbol – thus helping generate a myth and detaching the historical grounding of the initial sign.

Signifier (Photo of Trudeau in sports car)	Signified (Actual Trudeau in sports car)	
Sign or Meaning (Trudeau in sports car) Signifier or Form		Signified (Sex Symbol)
Signification or Myth (Trudeau as Sex Symbol)		

When the myth is constructed, the historical reference is downplayed (Barthes 117) in favour of “giving an historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal” (Barthes 142). Thus deconstructing a myth is, in part, the process of reconstituting the historical intention to the signifiers to see what remains of the alleged ‘natural justification.’

As such, the aim of this project is threefold in addressing the work of playwrights: epistemological, aesthetic, and sociopolitical. It is grounded in three fundamental questions: What is the historiographic approach of the playwright? Or, in other words: what are the epistemological principles the playwright uses to define his or her artistic material? What are the aesthetic or dramaturgical tools used to craft a dramatic figure that is inspired by existing archival, historical, and biographical data? Finally, this study invites consideration of the way

narratives created by playwrights act themselves as agents, sculpting and influencing the collective conception of certain Canadian politicians.

For the purpose of this study, Canadian politicians are defined as individuals who, at one time, held an elected or appointed position within the federal Government of Canada or a provincial or territorial government. This study examines portrayals of these individuals that, at least for a portion of the representation, depict them in their position of power. These dramatic figures can be linked with a living or deceased 'life world' individual in an easily identifiable way. The most common method of identification between the 'life world' and 'world of the play' is through the use of names: a reader, or theatergoer, is often introduced by way of their supposed or perceived personal knowledge to the biographed figure when the title carries the figure's name. When, for example, reading the title *The Death of René Lévesque*, the reader automatically calls upon pre-existing knowledge or a series of expectations in regards to the politician René Lévesque. In other cases, associations or recollections may occur when the reader encounters the naming device in the *dramatis personae* or when the audience member hears the name mentioned onstage for the first time.

However, other categories of identification exist: for example, placing a dramatic figure in a fictional world situation that is clearly associated with a particular life world individual. In Michael Healey's *Proud* the audience is introduced to a Conservative Prime Minister who has just won a majority government for the first time following the 2011 Canadian federal election. Although the dramatic figure is referred to only as 'Prime Minister' in the play-text, it is apparent that the dramatic figure is intended to be a representation of Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper. This is by no means an exhaustive list of approaches, but rather a short demonstration of possible options when establishing a connection between a dramatic figure and

a known politician. I will, at times, refer to a 'political figure', which is the character in the public political narrative surrounding a given politician.

Three case studies will demonstrate how playwrights have manipulated archival material to construct dramatic portrayals that affirm or reaffirm Canadian politicians as cultural symbols through 'prestige of the image' rhetoric. In the first case, I will look at Linda Griffiths' portrayal of Pierre Elliot Trudeau in *Maggie and Pierre*. In the second case, I will look at David Fennario's portrayal of René Lévesque in *The Death of René Lévesque*. In the final case, I will look at Allan Stratton's portrayal of William Lyon Mackenzie King in *Rexy!* The first two cases will each illustrate a Canadian politician's tragic pursuit of his political ideals. In the third case, I explain Stratton's unique take on what it can mean to be a 'great' politician in the context of the Second World War. I will, however, begin by explain the theoretical grounding of my method: this involves a brief survey of works in the study of biographical theatre and historiographic models. This in turn will provide a framework to determine playwrights' rapport with archival material and hagiography, to examine how dramaturgical techniques are employed to reflect, construct and deconstruct tendencies in known conceptions of politicians, and to identify the use of 'prestige of the image' rhetoric in creating the political figure.

Chapter 1 Literature & Method

Biographical Theatre & Dramatic Figure

In his essay “Does the Past have a Future” Kenneth Dewar analyzes the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation’s early 2000s documentary-style dramatization of Canadian history titled *Canada: A People’s History*. He considers the series an important case study of how blurring lines between the goals of scholarly history and that of populist entertainment are becoming increasingly common. Mark Philips suggests that this is an example of a new historical genre emerging because of specialists’ ever expanding “norms of critical distance,” an expression that refers to the “self-imposed rules about how much detachment or immediacy is appropriate in approaching their subjects” (qtd. in Dewar 3). Elizabeth Eisenstein emphasizes that the increased amount of easily available information about the past is challenging historians “to derive order and coherence” in their accounts. With Philips and Eisenstein’s work in mind, Dewar concludes that people are less interested in the overarching theories of academic history and are beginning to favour experiential history (Dewar 4).

Philosophers and historians studying the popular reception of history is nothing new. J. H. Plumb, in his book *The Death of the Past*, distinguishes between ‘the past’ and ‘history.’ ‘The past’ is a telling of previous events that is edited in support of current, dominant power structures. Plumb’s ‘history,’ on the other hand, is a strictly critical process aimed at “understand[ing] what happened, purely in its own terms and not in the service of religion or national destiny, or morality, or the sanctity of institutions” (13). Plumb argues that ‘history’ has been slowly overtaking ‘the past’ as the dominant method of articulating previous events in Western cultures for the last three hundred years (12). David Lowenthal, however, disagrees

with Plumb in his book *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*. He discusses the growing use of 'heritage' to engage the general public in historical accounts. 'Heritage' is a form of 'the past' that is particular to an individual or group of individuals and is understood in opposition to others. Lowenthal states that "heritage relies on revealed faith rather than rational proof. We elect and exalt our legacy not by weighing its claims to truth, but in feeling that it *must* be right" (2). Significantly, the value of heritage is determined by its present usefulness, not its truth-value. As Lowenthal says, heritage is "gauged not by critical tests but by current potency" (127).

The growing popularity of experiential history, emphasized by Dewar, is a product of heritage's appeal to current potency. As institutions (national, religious, community-based, etc.) seek to enforce their current social significance, they generate 'heritage' retellings of the past by engaging the most popular forms of communication. These are often cinematic, literary, or theatrical accounts that rely on personal experiences. In his article Dewar emphasizes the experiential nature of cinematic representations of the past: "Ensclosed in our seats in the darkened cinema, peering (it seems) into the past, we are invited to suspend, or at least to subordinate, our critical faculties in favour of opening up our senses and emotions to what is depicted on the screen" (4). In this sense, the theatrical and cinematic experiences differ very little: both forms can retell history by creating the illusion that the audience is living or reliving the historical moment.

These increasingly common experiential forms of historical account offer a new set of challenges for both the scholar and the general audience. In academia, the assembly of facts tends to be governed by an explicitly stated methodology, ideology, or theory. The reading audience can discern the intended message and the scholar is well aware of the goal with which the historical account is invested. The reader is hence afforded the opportunity either to align

him or herself with or to oppose the perspective and subsequently, the account. By contrast, in the experiential historical account, the decisions made when crafting historical facts into narrative are not solely based on explicit argumentation but also on the aesthetic elements specific to any narrative. Certain facts may be deliberately omitted or manipulated in order to create an engaging story. And, unlike the academic historical account, the experiential account does not invite debate regarding the successful articulation of the past. The willing suspension of disbelief that enables experiential history makes it difficult for the audience member to retain the sense of critical distance necessary to evaluate the historical legitimacy of the account.

This same growing popularity of experiential history has resulted in the increased use of ‘microhistory,’ defined by Dewar as small, intimately focused historical accounts (Dewar 4). These are understood in opposition to traditional history that tends to explain events through theories that transcend a single historical occurrence. Tracing a single individual, troop, or town through the Second World War better serves the audience seeking an experiential understanding of history than accounts that deal with overarching theories and the complexities of simultaneous events. The historical portrayals that I will analyze can be considered microhistories that focus on single individuals in particular situations that are indicative of the significance of their role in a society. These portrayals are examples of biographical theatre.

Ursula Canton credits “the omnipresence or seemingly un- or little mediated representation of reality in nearly all media” (2) for increasing the popularity of biographical theatre in recent years. As cameras make it increasingly easy to record daily events, the audiences’ taste for theatre that is explicitly tied with or inspired by reality has grown. Biographical theatre, along with documentary and verbatim theatre, seek to satisfy these tastes. Canton looks to the 1968 abolition of the Lord Chamberlain’s Office and the end of censorship in the United Kingdom as a trigger for biographical theatre in the English-speaking world (4).

But more than any other shift, Canton identifies the move towards postmodernism as a driving force behind biographical theatre. As this aesthetic challenges empiricist history, biographical theatre provides a venue to call into question the “clear dichotomy of factual Truth and fiction” (Canton 9). This study will also examine biographical theatres’ function according to this dichotomy.

Despite the growing visibility of biographical theatre in recent years, it is not a new practice. Canonized playwrights as old as Shakespeare and Schiller proposed works that could fall under this label (Canton 2). Biographical theatre can take many different forms. It may trace a particular figure over a prolonged period of time or simply depict a single figure in a single situation. It might be told from the perspective of an individual who encounters the figure, or it might unfold under the guise of an autobiography where the figure narrates their life to the audience. Regardless of the methods employed to communicate biographical elements or elements perceived as such, all manifestations share a common feature: they make use of a dramatic figure based on or inspired by a real person.

At this point, it is important to note that scholars like Manfred Pfister have defined the dramatic figure in opposition to a ‘real person’. While the ‘real person’ is an autonomous being that may engage in any number of possible actions, the dramatic figure is limited to the function it serves in the play. The dramatic figure is finite and limited to the information contained within the play. This distinguishes the dramatic figure from a ‘real person’ as they “cannot be separated from their environment because they only exist in relationship to their environment and are only constituted in the sum of their relationship to that environment” (Pfister 161). The dramatic figure is understood in terms of its purpose while the ‘real person’ possesses autonomy and, thus, his or her existence may contain coincidental, irrelevant, and contradictory material. The biographical stage figure, a variation of the dramatic figure, has a more complex relationship

with a 'real person.' As such, Pfister's definition has limited usefulness in this study. He points out a longstanding notion that plot takes precedence over dramatic figure by citing critics from Aristotle to Brecht (160): the biographical drama, however, subverts this by making the plot subservient to the biographical figure. It achieves this by deliberately blurring the lines that traditionally separate 'dramatic figure' and 'real person.'

Käthe Hamburger talks about the necessarily fragmentary quality of the dramatic figure, as opposed to the literary figure. Dramatic figures may appeal to us because our relationship with them can "be seen as an approximation to the conditions of reality under which we actually perceive our fellow human beings in the real world" (Pfister 162). Of course, this fragmentary nature leaves gaps in the reader's understanding of the character that they try to reconcile by referencing personal knowledge of the person who inspired the figure. It is through this reconciliation that the biographical figure becomes of particular interest because the receptor is invited to cite sources of information outside the world of the play, some of which he or she might consider personal. In other words, audience members are expected to fill in these gaps with the information drawn from the life world and their perception of it. Each audience member's relationship with the biographical character is both varied (depending on the differing information they have available from their real world experience) and complex (as there may now be contradictions between the world of the play and real world information). It is also possible that this relationship works in the inverse: audience members may fill in gaps in their knowledge of the real world with information from the world of the play.

One must note the importance of Freddie Rokem's work in this area. In exploring possible relationships between audience member and biographical figure, he emphasizes how the human body becomes the critical link connecting the present in the theatre and the past event being depicted:

[T]he actors serve as a connecting link between the historical past and the “fictional” performed *here* and *now* of the theatrical event; they become a kind of historian, what I call a “hyper-historian”, who makes it possible for us – even in cases where the reenacted events are not fully acceptable for the academic historian as a “scientific” representation of that past – to recognize that the actor is “redoing” or “reappearing as something/somebody that has actually existed in the past. (10)

Biographical theatre encourages referencing individual perceptions of historical knowledge but also permits and even encourages subjective historical manipulation.

History as Narrative & Historiography

‘Life World’ and the ‘World of the Play’

The relationship between the ‘onstage act’ and the ‘offstage truth’, or ‘fact’, has long piqued the interest of scholars and practitioners alike: from Harold Pinter’s often-quoted 2005 Nobel address where he states “Truth in drama is forever elusive. You never quite find it but the search for it is compulsive. The search is clearly what drives the endeavour. The search is your task.” to famed Canadian playwright Tomson Highway’s article “Fact Does Not Interest Me Nearly As Much As Fantasy” where he claims:

You, as writer, are morally responsible to them, your characters, just simply from the viewpoint of making them as real as possible. You don’t tell false stories. You don’t lie. To your audience or to your friends or to anyone. Truth, that is the ultimate moral responsibility of the writer. (308)

Whether it is explicitly stated or implicit, each playwright has his or her own epistemological (or ethical) method that governs the connection between his or her work and the surrounding world. However, these methods of telling the ‘truth’ can differ considerably from traditional academic methods.

The pursuit of truth, and what exactly ‘truth’ means, becomes increasingly pertinent when the world created by the playwright is articulated as an intentional representation or reading of the life world. I, like Ursula Canton, will “follow Willmar Sauter’s terminology that establishes a contrast between the world outside the theatre, the everyday context of the spectators called the ‘life world’, and the one that is created on stage, the ‘world of the play’” (19). The relationship between these two worlds can be understood along a spectrum: at one end of this spectrum the worlds are identical, at the other end completely dissimilar.

World of the Play is identical to Life World	World of the Play is completely unlike Life World
Pole of Extra- Theatricality	Pole of Intra-Theatricality

Sauter describes these two poles as being extra- and intra- theatrical, respectively (Canton 19). The absolute extremities of such poles are, of course, theoretical impossibilities. A world at the extra-theatrical pole would fall in direct contrast to most canonical definitions of theatre, performance, or theatricality itself, all of which rely on some distinction from the ‘life world’. A world at the pole of intra-theatricality would be completely incomprehensible to us, having no reference point in the ‘life world.’ These terms are, in fact, tools that allow critics to articulate to which degree a play references the ‘life world’ when representing events or characters.

Canton’s extra- and intra-theatrical poles help anchor our discussion at the converging point of two fields of study: dramaturgy and historiography. While dramaturgy scholars address, amongst other things, the creation of ‘theatrical worlds,’ the historiographer studies the ability and potential limitations of written, spoken, and visual accounts of the ‘life world.’ Canton’s spectrum suggests scholars’ ability to assess, or at least examine, the relationship between the

two. Of course, the field of historiography is more than a simple evaluation of accounts in terms of their ability to reflect the ‘life world.’ It is also a forum for discussing what it means to articulate historical truth, how historians approach the retelling of history, and whether such an enterprise is, in fact, at all possible or laudable. An understanding of biographical theatre’s tendency to present the politician as dramatic figure begins here.

To discuss historiography, I begin with German historian Leopold Von Ranke. As one of the central figures in empiricist history, Van Ranke’s approach, sometimes referred to as ‘Rankean history,’ has been the dominant historiographical model since the late Nineteenth Century (Wolff 267). It suggests that accounts can accurately describe historical events or subjects when supported by empirical evidence. Consequently, it suggests a correct version of history can be articulated. There exists a tension in contemporary historiography between this approach and an increasingly accepted postmodernist view of history: championed by Hayden White, this contemporary approach calls into question the existence of a single correct historical account by emphasizing the subjective nature of any and all historian’s work. These two approaches, empiricist and postmodern, give us two different criteria to judge the relationship between the ‘life world’ and the ‘world of the play’, and the relationship between the politician and the dramatic figure.

The ‘Artist-Historian’

Hayden White’s definition of a ‘historical work’ helps explain a grounding concept of the present study, that being the playwright’s role as historian:

I will consider the historical work as what it most manifestly is – that is to say, a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse that purports to be a model, or icon, of past structures and processes in the interest of *explaining what they were by representing them*. (1973, 2)

By this definition a number of plays can be categorized as historical works. Thus, I will consider the playwright, who creates historical works, as an ‘artist-historian.’ If a historian is an individual who works with empirical evidence from the past for the purposes of presenting it publicly as a historical work and an artist is someone who works with a given material (clay, paint, words, etc) to create an aesthetic experience, then the ‘artist-historian’ is someone who uses selected empirical evidence from the past as his or her material to create an aesthetic experience for the public. Considering empirical evidence from the past as potential artistic material provides insight on the processes of manipulating, editing, and reconstructing this data to create an aesthetic object, or the play text. In general, this process consists of three steps: 1) selecting the empirical evidence, 2) constructing a narrative at least in part based on this material, and then 3) plotting that narrative into a dramatic structure. Significantly, this historiographic process resembles the one outlined by White and Ricoeur when describing the task of the historian.

‘The Chronicle’ and ‘Documentary Phase’

In his book *Metahistory*, White details five tiers of conceptualization within the historian’s task: the chronicle, the story, the mode of emplotment, the mode of argument, and the mode of ideological implication. The first of these levels, the chronicle, which White considers one of the “primitive elements” (1973, 5), deals with the most elementary work of the historian. A chronicle is a selected list of historical events organized into chronological order. Yet, by selecting or grouping these particular events, the historian is enacting the first stage in telling a story. The chronicle “aspires to narrativity” through selection of these particular events but “fails to achieve it” because it “breaks off *in medias res*, in the chronicler’s own present; it leaves things unresolved” (White 1980, 9). This differs from the step that precedes the historian’s task:

the annals. Like the chronicle, the annals is a list of events in chronological order but without having gone through the selection phase that positions them “*as if* real events appeared to human consciousness in the form of *unfinished* stories” (White 1980, 9).

Similarly, Ricoeur presents our contemporary relationship with the past in three broad steps: our individual memories; the translation of these into representative forms through a historiographic process; and finally the interpretation of these representations by individuals (xvi). The middle step, or the historiographic process, is initiated by the documentary phase. In this documentary phase, the task of the historian begins when he or she approaches the archives with a question or set of questions (Ricoeur 177). The archives have been established through a process of recording the testimony of numerous individuals that position their memories in the context of a particular space and time (Ricoeur 167). These archives are like White’s annals: when the historian comes with a particular question or hypothesis, they draw from these archives historical data that become the documentary proof for their historical work. As White suggests, Ricoeur is outlining how the historian selects events that *want to tell a story* through their function as potential answers to the historian’s questions or validating tools for their hypothesis.

Playwrights who intend to represent history onstage go through a similar process. They begin with a question, an area of interest, or some organizing framework through which they filter existent historical accounts and the archives or annals. From this, they invent a series of dramatic actions to be included in their written text. This is their first step in framing history. The ‘artist’ component of the playwright’s role as ‘artist-historian’ suggests that certain events may be entirely invented. The critic can then begin to examine a play through its employment of empirical evidence and seek indications of authorial intention when framing or manipulating said evidence. In other words, by its very nature the biographical drama will involve both the historical and the fictional: the audience must be provided at least a minimal historical reference

to establish the connection between the dramatic figure and the ‘life world’ individual being portrayed; while, inversely, the impossibility of perfect historical reconstruction necessitates a minimal quality of fiction. This idea of the ‘playwright in the archives’ is a tool when analyzing the playwright’s historiographic process or method and begs a series of questions: which historical events have they selected to represent? Which historical events have they selected to leave out? And, which events are pure inventions?

“The Narrative” and “Explanation and Understanding”

The second step of the historiographic process involves the ‘narrativization’ of history. According to White this process includes the creation of the second “primitive element”: the story. The story is created when the historian connects the historical events in the chronicle using inaugural, transitional, and terminating motifs. The story is considerably different from a chronicle because it implies progressive change and conclusion as opposed to the open ended nature of events listed in chronological order. Thus, the work of the historian, beyond that of selecting the historical events as inspirational source material, is to determine how to position these events in relation to one another (White 1973, 6). Through this process the historian is fulfilling the Kantian “demand for narration in historical representation” (White 1980, 10).

White believes:

The very distinction between real and imaginary events, basic to modern discussions of both history and fiction, presuppose a notion of reality in which “the true” is identified with “the real” only insofar as it can be shown to possess the character of narrativity. (1980, 10)

By ‘the true,’ White refers to a metaphysical principle that is identified with reality when the particular conception of ‘the real’ allows us to organize historical events as referents into a

narrative form complete with a plot and a closure that, White says, “give[s] reality the odor of the ideal” (1980 24).

A more precise definition of how White uses “narrative” is embedded in his criticism of the history as a field of study. He understands narrative as the product of the story-maker constructing plot points out of a series of events. This allows White to question whether or not historians ‘discover’ stories buried in history: “Narrative becomes a problem only when we wish to give real events the form of a story. It is because real events do not offer themselves as stories that their narrativization is so difficult” (1980, 8). He argues there is a critical act of invention specific to any historian’s work. They provide meaning to a selected collection of historical events by ordering them and thus communicating, sometimes implicitly, their global and perceived importance through a process of positioning. That is to say, the narratological order is not predetermined in the historical events themselves. Thus, the historian’s task is one of creating history rather than relaying history.

Ricoeur and White concur on the fundamental stages of the historiographic operation yet differ in uses of terminology. While White associates ‘narrative’ with the act of conceiving history through ordering events, Ricoeur associates ‘narrative’ with the act of recounting history. White’s narrative comes into existence when the historian orders events into a structure with a beginning, middle, and end – a story arc – as an act of conceiving the past in a framework. For Ricoeur, this process of conception, which he terms as “explanation and understanding,” precedes the narratological act that is strictly a function of the transmission of an explanation or an understanding of history (Ricoeur 186). For the purpose of my argument, I will side with White’s use of the term because it takes into account the intentional fictionalization of certain elements of the historical account that occurs in the work of the artist-historian – or playwrights – I will be examining.

Despite the difference in terminology, Ricoeur's use of "explanation and understanding" implies the same process that White describes as 'story construction.' The historian begins drawing connections between preserved referential materials, selected during the documentary phase, through the use of the connector 'because'. In this sense, the historian is always implying a consequential logic to justify the interconnectedness of the selected events – answering the question 'why have these events been selected?' This process allows us to "keep the historiographical operation in the neighborhood of approaches common to every scientific discipline" (Ricoeur 182). The historian is approaching the material with a model (an understanding or explanation) that arises from the scientific imagination. This model, like any physical, biological or chemical hypothesis, is then justified through a documentary process. The historical account takes its fully realized transferable form in the third step as a combination of model and documentary proof.

Ricoeur provides two criteria to identify when a model and documentary pairing is a historiographical operation rather than a sociological or anthropological enterprise. The first is that it addresses human interaction (Ricoeur 182). This may mean the interaction of two or more individuals or groups or the interaction of an individual or group with a particular condition (natural occurrence, technology, virus, etc.). The second criterion is that the historiographic operation always deals with temporal changes or differences (Ricoeur 183). By this Ricoeur means that history is interested in human qualities that change over time. This allows historians to construct historical hierarchies where events fit into small series, which themselves fit into larger periods, which fit into epochs, and so on. These hierarchies are constructed and justified by the historian during the phase of "understanding and explanation".

The implication of this second step in the historiographical operation is a layer above documentary proof. I adopt White's term, calling this layer 'narrative,' while Ricoeur calls it

“understanding and explanation.” It is here that the distinction between fact and fiction dissolves. While the historian and artist are different in regards to their treatment of factual events, their ability to construct fictional events and their goals, they are similar in their capacity to suggest a model of connectedness between documentary – factual or fictional – events. In this sense, the artist and the historian must each present an account that is credible to their respective readers and spectators. Thus, the reader asks what kind of causality has the playwright used to connect the selected events? And, does the resulting narrative, in his or her view, come across as a credible explanation for the sequencing of selected events? The evaluation of these narrative connections is one of the various criteria used by theatre critics when discussing the credibility of the world of the play.

“Emplotment, Argument, Implication” and the “Representative Phase”

The third level of the historiographic operation as modeled by White and Ricoeur, which I will apply to Griffiths, Fennario, and Stratton’s plays, is the level of transmission. It is at this level that the historical document is actually produced; or, articulated in written form. It, however, is not necessarily limited to this traditional method of transmission, as demonstrated by the increasing acceptance of oral history. Theatrical representations of history are positioned somewhere between literary and oral traditions.

White argues that while on the narrative level the historian answers questions about the connectedness of events, on the third level there are:

[q]uestions of another sort: “What does it all add up to?” “What is the point of it all?” These questions have to do with the structure of the *entire set of events* considered as a *completed* story and call for a synoptic judgment of the relationship between a given story and other stories that might be “found,” “identified,” or “uncovered” in the chronicle. (White 1973, 7)

According to White, one way of explaining the ‘point’ of a story is through an analysis of its emplotment. When he discussed ‘emplotment,’ he means the archetypal narratives – known and previously described by anthropologists or specialists of literature – that govern the organization of events into plots. Inspired by Northrop Frye’s work on the subject, he offers forth Romance, Satire, Comedy, and Tragedy as the four most prevalent forms, but admits others exist (1973, 7). Romance “is fundamentally a drama of self-identification symbolized by the hero’s transcendence of the world of experience” (1973, 8). The archetype of Romance deals with a characters’ victory over some evil, dark element of the world. Satire, on the other hand, deals with the inadequacy of humans to cope with the surrounding world (1973, 9). Comedy, according to White, is defined by the reconciliation of a conflict which leaves the figures “purer, saner, and healthier” because the conflicting “elements are revealed to be, in the long run, harmonizable with one another, unified, at one with themselves and the others” (1973, 9). Tragedy also involves reconciliation but one rooted in the “resignation of men to the conditions under which they must labor in the world” (1973, 9). I will return to these modes of emplotment when examining the construction of biographical accounts by playwrights.

While White’s third level of analysis of the historical account deals with identifying emplotment, Ricoeur is primarily preoccupied with delineating aspects of representation of history beyond the writer or playwright. For Ricoeur, it is at this point that narrative comes into play. While determining the causal connection between events occurs during the phase of understanding and explanation, articulating this causality, in accordance with Aristotle’s rules of probability and reason, happens in the third historiographic phase (238). He believes audiences or readers of history seek “narrative coherence” in historical accounts. This means the historian must articulate their understanding of the past in the same terms as a fictional author or playwright; namely, reasonable event cohesion, character, and moral code. “Narrative

coherence” is different from the cohesion found in nature and the teleological connection explained by his second phase because it is strictly concerned with “coordination between multiple events, or between causes, intentions, and also accidents within a single meaningful unity” for the comprehension of the audience (Ricoeur 243).

Rhetoric is an aspect, beyond narrative, that comes into play when representing history. This is where Ricoeur turns to the ‘prestige of the image,’ an aspect that studies the expectation of establishing a ‘world’ in historical discourse. While witnessing a fully ‘fictional world’, the audience may willfully suspend their disbelief; however, the case is not as clear in historical-representation. The audience expects the ‘life world’ (that the historical-representation is attempting to engage) to align with their personal knowledge or knowledge from other historical accounts (261). It is at this juncture that Ricoeur begins to point to the influences of power structures or hegemony in historical accounts. To what degree are historical accounts tailored to permit, uphold, or deconstruct particular power structures? This question, Ricoeur concludes, lies on the periphery of “how far [...] critical epistemology of the historiographical operation” can reach (270). To give an example of how these peripheral questions drive the desire to clearly articulate the historiographic operation, he turns to the concept of ‘greatness,’ which “belongs to the two registers of politics and anthropology” (270) but is determined by the “portrait effect”, a subset of the “effect of representation”. Ricoeur is assigning the role of ‘making great’ to the act of representation; in doing so, he is emphasizing the significance and relevance of our exploration of the historiographic operation.

I intend to explore the implications of the historiographic operation, as articulated by White and Ricoeur, in dramatic representations of Canadian politicians: candidates for the political and anthropological quality of ‘greatness’ granted or retracted through a ‘portrait effect’ of representation. Using the three levels of historiographic operation, I will approach the play-

text as a historical account. On the first level, questions regarding the artistic material arise: What historical events has the playwright selected to represent? What fictional events have been combined with the historical events? What major historical events have been left out or altered? And, what primary sources has the playwright used? On the second level: How does the playwright make use of causality? How is the proposed causality supported by the fictional events? At what point in time does the playwright begin and end this representation and why is that significant? Finally, on the third level: how does the playwright present this material in the form of a ‘historical document’? How has the playwright employed Ricoeur’s narrative, rhetoric, and images? Which of White’s rhetorical methods (emplotment, argument, or implication) is used and what variation of this method?

Historiographic Levels	White’s Historian	Ricoeur’s Historian	The ‘Artist-Historian’ Playwright
Pre-Historian	The Annals	The Archive	Source Material
First	<p><i>“The Chronicle”</i> The Historian selects events and invests them with pre-narrative qualities.</p>	<p><i>“Documentary Phase”</i> The Historian approaches the archive with a question.</p>	<p><i>“Artist Material”</i> The Playwright selects and creates events to be depicted.</p>
Second	<p><i>“The Story”</i> (also, <i>Narrative</i>) The historian connects events using inaugural, transitional, and terminating motifs.</p>	<p><i>“Explanation and Understanding”</i> The historian proposes model to justify interconnectedness of events.</p>	<p><i>“Narrativization”</i> The Playwright conceives dramatic figure as sum of relations to selected events.</p>
Third	<p><i>“Emplotment, Argument, Implication”</i> The historian creates a meaningful historical document through one of three methods.</p>	<p><i>“Representative Phase”</i> The historian converts explanation and understanding to literary narrative, rhetoric, and image.</p>	<p><i>“Dramaturgical Phase”</i> The playwright constructs play to showcase dramatic figure.</p>

Methodology

Before I turn to selected dramatic representations of Canadian politicians, I wish to layout a framework for approaching these texts. This framework will facilitate an exploration of Ricoeur's 'prestige of the image' in the context of modern political figures by utilizing the historiographic levels previously established in reference to the artist-historian's work. On these historiographic levels, I will consider the specificities of biographical theatre as a form of experiential history. In doing so I will demonstrate how these playwrights take historical events as their 'artistic material' and use Ricoeur's rhetorical combinations of 'readability and visibility', 'narrative and icon', and 'absence and presence' to deconstruct mythic conceptions around politicians in favour of granting or retracting a contemporary quality of 'greatness'.

I will begin my analysis of each piece by considering the 'artistic material' used when writing the text. This involves examining the portrayal of particular events, dialogues, and characters in the play in relationship to other documented accounts. I will also take into consideration any explicitly stated methodology on the part of the playwright, when this information is available. This will reveal the playwright's rapport with empiricist history, contemporary hagiography and fictionalization.

In the second section, I will look at the playwright's construction of his or her 'artistic material' as narrative. These narratives will be examined using White's forms of emplotment, argumentation, and ideological implication and Ricoeur's 'Explanation and Understanding'. I will explain how Griffiths, Fennario, and Stratton use incompatible personal and public lives, the pressures of delivering in political office, and the personal struggle for legacy, respectively, as the conflicts within which these characters pursue 'justice.'

Finally, I will look at how these playwrights have structured their plays as attempts to position the audience in relationship to the political figures 'they think they know.' This will involve exploring the use of framing devices and narrator figures. Ultimately, I will demonstrate how the dramaturgy employed in portraying these politicians can be understood in terms of Ricoeur's 'prestige of the image' rhetoric.

Chapter 2

“Pierre Elliot Trudeau” in *Maggie & Pierre*

Linda Griffiths’ *Maggie & Pierre*

Pierre Elliot Trudeau, one of Canada’s longest serving Prime Ministers, has been portrayed on stage, television, and in film a number of times: examples include Michael Hollingsworth and Video Cabaret’s 1996 *Trudeau and the FLQ*; the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation’s 2002 miniseries *Trudeau* and its prequel *Trudeau II: Maverick in the Making*; George Elliott Clarke’s 2007 opera *Trudeau: Long March, Shining Path*; Brooke Johnson’s 2007 monologue about Trudeau titled *Trudeau Stories*; and numerous times in satirical television shows such as *Royal Canadian Air Farce* and *This Hour has 22 Minutes*. Linda Griffith’s *Maggie & Pierre* is one of the earliest and most recognizable representations of Trudeau. It first previewed November 30th 1979, just months after Trudeau’s loss to Joe Clark in the May election, and premiered February 14th, 1980 at Toronto’s Theatre Passe Muraille, just days before Trudeau’s re-election on February 18th, 1980 (Griffiths 5, 1999).

The play traces Trudeau’s romance, marriage, and crumbling relationship with the much younger Margaret Sinclair during his first term as Prime Minister. Narrated by wary journalist and Trudeau-expert Henry, the retelling examines the iconic couples’ relationship with the media, the Canadian public, and with each other, and how these three relations were fundamentally intertwined. As Griffith illustrates the swell and collapse of ‘Trudeaumania’ from within and outside the Trudeau family, the audience is left to contemplate the lines that separate romance from politics, idealism from the pragmatics of political life, and their own role in all of these. As I discuss the play, I will refer to the play’s characters as ‘Pierre’ and ‘Maggie’; correspondingly, I will refer to the historical figures as ‘Trudeau’ and ‘Margaret Trudeau’.

The text is the result of a collaboration between writer/performer Griffiths and director Paul Thompson. The two had previously worked together on *Les Maudit Anglais*, a collective creation about the lives of five Anglophones in Québec, and *Shakespeare for Fun and Profit* (Griffiths 7, 1980). *Maggie & Pierre*'s initial run, in which Griffiths played all three characters, earned her Dora Mavor Moore awards for Outstanding New Play and Best Lead Performance (Scott 84). This run was followed by a Phoenix Theater production at Marymount Manhattan College in New York presented from September 17th to October 11th, 1981. In this version, Eric Peterson joined Griffiths on stage in the role of Henry (Rich). Griffiths' solo version was also presented for five performances at Toronto's Royal Alexandra Theatre, and in Saskatoon, Vancouver, Montréal, Edmonton, and Calgary (Northof). Griffiths would return to the role for a 1996 Playwrights' Union of Canada fundraiser and for a Theatre Passe Muraille remount that premiered March 6th, 1997 (Kaplan 9).

As a testament to the lasting impact of Trudeau and the importance of this play in Griffiths' career, *Maggie & Pierre* has been published three times: originally in 1980 by Talonbooks with the subtitle '*A fantasy of love, politics, and the media*'; in 1999 as part of Griffiths' collection of seven plays titled "Sheer Nerve"; and, again in 2013 alongside Griffiths' *The Duchess*. The 1980 and the later versions of the script differ slightly, reflecting the evolving performance over the twenty-plus year period. The play was also adapted to film by Tapestry Productions in 1983 (*Maggie & Pierre* Dir. Martin Lavut).

In the following sections, I consider *Maggie & Pierre* on each of the three historiographic levels discussed in the first chapter. As I do so, I elaborate on the process of applying the model to a playwright's work. The result is a longer chapter that sets the groundwork for the subsequent two examples.

Griffiths' Artistic Material: Research, Improve, Edit

Griffiths uses a 'research, improvise, and edit' method to generate artistic material from archived documents and personal experience that show Trudeau as a tragic political figure. Using this material, Griffiths constructs a narrative that engages and challenges existing conceptions of the Trudeaus still resonating today. More specifically, she frames her retelling of the Trudeaus' relationship in a way that emphasizes the readability/visibility, narrative/icon, absence/presence dichotomies described by Ricoeur as 'prestige of the image' rhetoric. As I set out to consider the historicity of Griffiths' account of Trudeau, I will first look to the interviews, events, and dramatic figures she has used as inspiration for her writing. In doing so, I will explore *Maggie & Pierre* from its initial documentary phase – evoking the concept of 'the playwright in the archives' – since Griffiths' artistic material is drawn from a combination of empirical historical sources and subjective experiential history. The relationship between Griffiths' account and other historical records can be explored by tracing selected scenes from the published script back to available firsthand accounts of the portrayed events.

In order to proceed in a methodical fashion, I have generated a matrix for classifying the relationship between the portrayed material and existing empirical records. These relationships can fall into one of three categories: the material is documented in historical accounts; the material is the fictional creation of the playwright, thus evidently not from historical accounts; or, the link is ambiguous. Ambiguity occurs when the portrayed material is presented as historically accurate but is unverifiable against historical records. In such cases, the playwright's individual perspective, or even imagination, becomes the source of the material. It is not my intention to place a value judgment on this 'ambiguous' material, but to identify its existence in *Maggie & Pierre*.

Beyond identifying the portrayed material in previous historical accounts, there is the question of how the playwright makes use of this material. For example, it is well documented that Trudeau gave a speech at the 1968 Liberal Leadership Convention held at the Ottawa Civic Centre, which is portrayed by Griffiths in her third scene; however, there is still the question of how her portrayal of this speech relates to the original. Is it a verbatim account, an edited account, or an entirely unique account? In this particular case, Griffiths has edited the speech so that it retains a clear resemblance to the original: “Canada must be unified. Canada must be one. Canada must be progressive. And Canada must be a just society” (P. Trudeau “1968 Liberal...”) becomes “And there will be one Canada and that Canada will be progressive! We have no need to become a great military power, then let our power come from within. From a ‘just society’” (12, 1999) in Griffiths’ dramatic figure’s words. The horizontal categories in the chart reflect the possibility of a verbatim, an edited, or a completely transformed representation of verifiable acts.

Relation to Historical Record		
Documented	Ambiguous	Fictionalization
<p>Verbatim Representation of speech, event, or action matches documented historical accounts.</p>	<p>Possibility Speech, event, or action is not historically documented but does not contradict or alter historically accounts.</p>	<p>Imagination Speech, event, or action is an evident fictionalization but does not contradict or alter documented accounts.</p>
<p>Edited Representation of speech, event, or action deviates from documented historical accounts</p>	<p>Challenge Speech, event, or action is not historically documented and implies deviation from historical accounts.</p>	<p>Manipulation Speech, event, or action is an evident fictionalization and implies deviation from available historical accounts.</p>
<p>Transformed Representation of speech, event, or characteristic contradicts documented historical accounts.</p>	<p>Contradiction Speech, event, or action is not historically documented and contradicts documented historical accounts.</p>	<p>Alternative Speech, event, or action is an evident fictionalization and contradicts documented accounts.</p>

This chart serves as a tool to explore intertextual references as much as it does historical factuality. To proceed with an analysis of the playwright's function as historian, I will assume the position of the ideal knowledgeable spectator; however, it will, at times, be useful to recall that the audience is not necessarily equipped with the same gamut of references. The line between historically documented events and fictional events may be blurred from the audience's perspective.

Griffiths explains how *Maggie & Pierre* originated during an improvised scene about political leaders in preparation for *Les Maudits Anglais* (Griffiths 1998). During the improvisation, Griffiths would not let go of her interpretation of Trudeau and director Thompson encouraged her to start developing a solo piece based on the character. This evolved into a process where Griffiths would research Trudeau and develop themes and subjects for improvisations based on her research. These improvisations were then transcribed by a stenographer and 'structured' or 'dramatized' by Thompson to produce the final text for performance (Griffiths 1998). This 'research, improvise, and record' method proves a unique challenge to the 'playwright in the archive' by filtering all material through the improviser's memory and body on its way to the written text.

In fact, it requires a blending of any empiricist material uncovered during the research portion of the process with the more subjective personal experience, as described in White's conception of history. Three examples will serve to explore how both ends of this historical spectrum help define Griffiths' representation or 'reading' of Trudeau. Each example demonstrates a different position on the matrix: the first is an edited, well documented interview in front of the Parliament Buildings; the second is a possible version of a meeting in Tahiti; and the third can be considered an imagined dance based on Griffiths' own experience with Trudeau.

“Just Watch Me”

On October 13th, 1970, at the height of the October Crisis, CBC reporter Tim Ralfe and CJON-TV reporter Peter Reilly engaged Trudeau in an impromptu interview on the steps of the Centre Block of Parliament. From this exchange emerged one of Trudeau’s most recognizable and oft-quoted phrases: “Just watch me.” Griffiths captures and represents this famous interview, which lasted about seven minutes, in a brief scene toward the beginning of Act Two of her play. The manipulation of the original interview to produce this representational dialogue is indicative of Griffiths’ ‘research, improvise, and edit’ method.

It is more than likely that during her research, Griffiths – who consulted numerous film interviews amongst other speeches, video recordings, and newspaper articles – would have come across CBC’s now iconic video recording of this oft-quoted interview. The footage, filmed from behind the two reporters and not in view of their faces, may have set up Griffiths’ decision to amalgamate Ralfe and Reilly under Henry’s archetypal reporter character, at least for the purpose of creating dramatic tension in this scene. In a 2012 interview with the Playwrights’ Guild of Canada, Griffiths admits that Henry’s character is a catchall reporter based loosely on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation’s Henry Champ (Griffiths, “Playwright Series: Celebrating the 40th Anniversary of the Playwrights' Guild of Canada.”). Although Champ likely would have covered stories about Trudeau during his career, there is no archival evidence to suggest he was present at the time of this interview on October 13th, 1970. Furthermore, in the original archival document, the two reporters are difficult to distinguish from one another and pursue a similar line of questioning about Trudeau’s evocation of the War Measures Act (Ralfe). It is likely that a transcript or at least a viewing of this interview served as a starting point for Griffiths’ improvisation that would finally become a scene titled “October Crisis.”

While the original exchange is about fifteen hundred words long, the version included in the play is just slightly over three hundred. In cutting away eighty percent of the original exchange, Griffiths removes many of the specificities of the debate, particularly when it comes to Pierre Laporte, James Cross, and the function of the military and police during the Crisis. In the adapted and dramatized version, Griffiths retains many of the more recognizable lines such as “weak-kneed, bleeding hearts”, “just watch me”, and “they can just go on and bleed” (Griffiths 1999, 24). The structure of the dialogue is inspired by three separate segments of the original interview; each section itself encapsulates the original interview quite closely. Griffiths has, however, paraphrased the majority of the lines. For example, “And one of the things I have to give up for that choice is the fact that people like you may be kidnapped” (Saywell 72) in the original interview becomes “And that means I might have to take the chance that a guy like you may be abducted” (Griffiths 1999, 24). This paraphrasing appears the result of the improvisation process used by Griffiths and Thompson: Griffiths was likely aware of the dialogue and could partially recreate it from memory during her improvisations.

The interview follows a scene where Maggie and Pierre are “loll[ing] around letting their minds wander freely towards philosophy and the ways of the world” (Griffiths 1999, 22). During this previous scene, the two characters compare their idealistic versions of the world. Pierre claims “I’m going to lead us all into a Golden Age” (1999, 22) and “Discussion, philosophy and idealism creating a new order. We are on the threshold of a model of harmony and vitality for the world” (1999, 22). This discussion gives way to Pierre justifying the use of armed force to protect his cabinet. The juxtaposition of these two scenes alerts the attentive and informed audience member to the contradiction between Pierre’s words in the interview and the proposed utopia. To emphasize this paradox, Griffiths adds a critical line to the original dialogue: when asked by Henry “how can you protect everybody, without turning the place into a

Police State?” Pierre responds, “You can’t” (1999, 23). ‘Life world’ Trudeau never admitted the Government’s actions during the October Crisis constituted a police state. Griffiths’ positioning of this dialogue in relation to the previous scene and the addition of lines serve to demonstrate her process, characterized by layers of filtering and editing archival material.

Tahiti

Margaret Trudeau first met the future Prime Minister on her Christmas vacation in 1967 at the Club Méditerranée resort in Tahiti. Griffiths dramatizes this ‘love at first sight’ encounter as a way of introducing the characters of Maggie and Pierre. Maggie watches Pierre water ski while debating what to do with her life, until the soon-to-be answer to this question approaches her and introduces himself. The two exchange a list of future desires in a dream-like style of conversation that includes circular dialogue peppered with famous quotes from throughout Trudeau’s life. The dialogue sets up the dream-like ambitions at the root of their romance and, at the same time, the differences in their dreams that will become their downfall (Griffiths 1999, 11).

It seems that Griffiths found inspiration in Margaret Trudeau’s autobiography *Beyond Reason*. Published in 1979 just before the May election that saw Trudeau defeated and ousted from office, the book details the couples’ relationship and marriage, and provides considerable details of their, until then, private lives. Margaret Trudeau describes her first interaction with Trudeau:

There was a man skiing in the bay; I followed his progress idly, more than a little impressed by the ease of his performance. When later he came over to my raft we started a “What are you doing here?” and “What do you study?” conversation, that soon, casually, led to student rebellion, and Plato and revolution. (1979, 28)

In Griffiths’ internalized and then improvised version:

MAGGIE: Who's that? Who's that water skiing? Hey, he's pretty good. Is he trying to impress me? Of course he is. Men are so transparent. How old is he? Twenty-five? No, maybe a little older. I knew it. He's coming over...

PIERRE: Hello. What's a beautiful girl like you doing here all alone?
(1999, 11)

There are a number of indicators in the play that strongly suggest *Beyond Reason* was Griffiths' primary source material when conceiving this scene. Such as the autobiographical references to Trudeau having come to Tahiti to "read Gibbon's *The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire* and to decide whether to run for prime minister" (M. Trudeau 1979, 29) and Griffiths' blatant line "I'm reading *The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire* and deciding whether or not to become Prime Minister of Canada" (1999, 11). In fact, the scene is full of almost direct quotations from Margaret Trudeau's autobiography.

Although, it would seem that Griffiths is drawing in a near verbatim-style from Margaret Trudeau's memoirs, there are also a number of lines that contradict the source account. For example, where Griffiths has Pierre invite Maggie to explore "the challenges of snorkeling with me tomorrow at ten o'clock" (1999, 12), *Beyond Reason* claims "when he asked me politely if I would like to go *deep sea fishing* with him and told me to be at the dock at ten, I didn't bother to show up" (M. Trudeau 1979, 28) [italicization is my addition]. Perhaps Griffiths changes deep sea fishing to snorkeling because it seems more romantic and omits Margaret Trudeau not showing up because it would undermine her overt attempt to establish their budding romance. In Margaret Trudeau's account of their first meeting, she states that she was unaware that Trudeau was considering running for Prime Minister, was reading Gibbon's book, or even that he was a politician: "Years later I discovered that he had come to Moorea to read Gibbon's *The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire* and to decide whether to run for prime minister" (1979, 29); in

Griffiths' account they discuss all three outright. Oddly enough in Margaret Trudeau's expanded autobiography, *Changing My Mind*, first published in 2010, she says:

We talked about Plato and that age-old question of whether life was real or an illusion. He talked about the book he was then reading – Edward Gibbon's *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, a classic of the eighteenth century. Pierre was a good listener and easy to talk to. Soon we were going snorkeling together..." (25)

It is difficult to explain the slight difference in Margaret Trudeau's revised memoirs – which were unavailable to Griffiths when *Maggie & Pierre* was published in 1980 – but it does demonstrate the fluidity of memory as described by White and Ricoeur.

I consider this scene an evident fictionalization, as well as an account that manipulates other published material, because of the dream-like and referential elements of the dialogue. While the dialogue is based on or inspired by Margaret Trudeau's written memories, it does not come across as a genuine attempt to recreate the factual event but rather as a reference to their first encounter. Griffiths' circular and repetitive dialogue serves to emphasize their compatibility:

PIERRE: How much farther do you want to go?
 MAGGIE: Forever. And you?... I want to be world-renowned, to shape destiny, to be deliriously happy. You might say, I want it all.
 PIERRE: I want to be world-renowned, to shape destiny, to be deliriously happy. You might say, I want it all.
 MAGGIE: What did you say?
 PIERRE: I'm sorry, what did you say? (1999, 11)

This stylized and echoed representation of the scene is furthered by the inclusion of one of Trudeau's most recognizable phrases, as previously discussed:

MAGGIE: You heard what I said. Do you mean it?
 PIERRE: Just watch me.
 MAGGIE: No. Just watch me. (1999, 11)

This scene manipulates Margaret Trudeau's autobiographical account to facilitate its dramatization through dialogue. This in turns helps introduce the characters of Maggie and

Pierre as dramatic figures; that is to say, as part fictionalization and part celebrity-politician couple with which the audience is already familiar.

Dancing with Trudeau

Griffiths relies on personal experience as the source material in this final example of her use of historiographic principles. In a 1999 essay “Dancing with Trudeau” written just before Trudeau’s death, Griffiths describes one of the seminal moments when researching *Maggie & Pierre*. Attempting to become better acquainted with Trudeau, Griffiths snuck into the 1980 Governor General’s Ball that he was attending as leader of the opposition. Managing to secure a dance with him, the playwright explained that she was “writing a play about Ottawa” (Griffiths “Dancing”, 5). The two would spend much of the evening together dancing. This experience would become the basis for the seventh scene entitled “Grouse Mountain” in the play *Maggie & Pierre*.

The scene depicts the couple’s first ‘official’ date at the Grouse’s Nest restaurant in Vancouver. As with their encounter in Tahiti, Margaret Trudeau recounts this first date in her memoirs. While some of the material included in the scene, such as a run in with photographers, giving autographs and an invitation for dinner are drawn directly from the autobiography (M. Trudeau 1979, 42-44), there is other material drawn from Griffiths’ own meeting with Trudeau. In this sense, Griffiths’ embodiment of Margaret Trudeau is partially inspired by her own physical experience. When Griffiths functions as Rokem’s ‘hyper-historian,’ her body provides a ‘connecting link’ between the performance and Margeret Trudeau’s past, and between the performance and Griffiths’ past (Rokem 10). Upon meeting Trudeau before their first dance, Griffiths’ “was thinking, ‘He’s so little. He’s just a little taller than me’” (Griffiths “Dancing”, 5). This thought is echoed in *Maggie & Pierre* when Maggie answers the door to meet Pierre on

their first date: “*She opens the door*. MAGGIE: He’s so little, he’s just a little taller than me” (1999, 35). There is a similar doubling of Griffiths’ experience in the character of Maggie’s dialogue during their dance. In Griffiths’ account with Trudeau she recalls:

I giggled again. Trudeau smiled again and bent his head fetchingly to one side. “What are you laughing at?”
 “I’m just not used to dancing this way.” I wanted to squeeze him and feel his muscles.
 “You intimidate me when you laugh.”
 “I intimidate the prime minister [sic] of Canada!” (“Dancing” 6)

A very similar exchange is included between Maggie and Pierre:

MAGGIE: I can feel his body underneath the suit. Strong, but not like a football player’s. Flexible, like a dancer’s.
She giggles.
 PIERRE: What are you laughing at?
 MAGGIE: Oh, I’m just not used to dancing this way.
 PIERRE: You intimidate me when you laugh.
 MAGGIE: I intimidate the Prime Minister of Canada. (1999, 17)

Did Margaret Trudeau think Trudeau was little? Did Trudeau tell Margaret Trudeau she intimidated him? It is impossible to know. It is also impossible to know if Linda Griffiths’ account of her meeting with Trudeau is factual; however, it does appear that Griffiths is relying on a personal experience to inform her representation of the Trudeaus’ relationship.

In this example, where Griffiths presents new material that is supplemental to the documented accounts, there is a shift in the type of ‘playwright in the archives’; rather than basing a scene on an edited version of a well-documented interview (as in the first example), or on a fictionalized version of a documented encounter (as in the second example), Griffiths draws from personal experience, thus proposing new material to her readers and, eventually, the audience. In this sense, the research component of Griffiths’ ‘research, improvise, and edit’ process does not clearly adhere to the principles of empiricist history. By using her own

experience to inform her representation of Margaret Trudeau, Griffiths is directly engaging the subjective elements of the historian's work discussed by White.

The Trudeau Narrative: A Hero at 24 Sussex Drive?

Both Ricoeur and White identify the assembly of selected historical material into a defined order as the second step of the historiographic process. White refers to this process as a 'narrativization' of history while Ricoeur refers to it as the phase of 'explanation and understanding'. From the perspective of the 'artist-historian' playwright, the selection and inclusion of certain historical data and certain fictionalized elements is guided by a project or an overarching logic. As such, analysis of 'narrativization' provides answers to questions such as: Why did Griffiths select particular historical events for her portrayal and not others? Why did she decide to include certain personal experiences? What explanations for the Trudeaus' actions came out of and guided Griffiths' 'research, improvisation, and edit' method of creation? In order to answer these questions, I will consider the narrative elements in relation to Pierre's character ('the dramatic figure') and Prime Minister Trudeau's public reputation ('the political figure'). The questions are coloured by the distinction between the 'dramatic figure' and the 'political figure': What explanations does Griffiths offer to aid in a new understanding of Trudeau's time in office? How does Griffiths construct the narrative of *Maggie & Pierre* in order to comment on the lasting reputation of Trudeau?

In her introduction to the 1980 edition of the play, Griffiths admits that she is "part of a theatre movement that has taken Canadian mythology and hero-making, if not as its central issue, at least as its dominant theme" (10). By referencing White's definition of tragic emplotment of historical accounts, I will examine how Griffiths has selected and positioned her

artistic/historical material to facilitate this retelling of Trudeau. Pierre, the dramatic figure, is constructed as a tragic hero whose attempt to mediate between the demands of Maggie, the media, and his own ideals result in his failure to achieve true success in any of these areas.

Pierre as ‘Tragic Lover’

Griffith states: “I find the struggle of any two people trying to stay together heroic” (1980, 10). There is perhaps no more public a struggle and failure in Canadian political history than that of Margaret Sinclair and Pierre Trudeau’s marriage. As the only Canadian Prime Minister married or divorced during his time in office and with the media attention his relationship garnered, Trudeau’s romantic life was a public phenomenon like no other Canadian Prime Minister before or since. It is the public breakdown of his relationship more than any other narrative that Griffiths uses to define her portrayal of Trudeau.

Griffiths casts Trudeau as tragic figure by using his relationship with Margaret Trudeau as the defining element of his time in public office. White finds that the historical account adheres to the tragic archetype when the narrative suggests the “possibility of at least partial liberation from the condition of the Fall and provisional release from the divided state in which men find themselves in this world” only to have the protagonist realize the liberation was illusory (1973, 9). Tragic heroes then resign themselves to “the conditions under which they must labor in the world” (White 1973, 9). Pierre is liberated from the loneliness typical of his position as Prime Minister through his partnership with Maggie. In the tragic arc, however, the very condition that initially generated the loneliness, the public nature of his career, leads to the failure of his relationship, a relationship that may have offered salvation.

The presentation of their romance is structured in three stages dependent on the agreement or disagreement between the private truth (which is revealed to the audience) and the

media retelling of their relationship. The first stage shows a developing private relationship coupled with public fascination for the romance in the “Tahiti” (first meeting) and “Grouse Mountain” (first date) scenes. In the second stage, the private truth of the relationship – Maggie’s distaste for the role of Prime Minister’s wife and their crumbling relationship – is separate from their public image, because the general public is not yet aware of the problems in their relationship. This is demonstrated through Maggie’s internal monologues while meeting heads of state in “Diplomacy” (Griffiths 1999, 20), the couples increasingly differing ideological views revealed in “Visions in the Bedroom” (Griffiths 1999, 22), Maggie’s visions of herself as someone she does not want to be in “Walk Alone” (Griffiths 1999, 24), and their daily lives in “Boredom” (Griffiths 1999, 25). The final stage serves to demonstrate a shift towards public knowledge of their relationship’s break down in the climatic “Press Club” (Griffiths 1999, 26) scene, which then triggers a further and final conflict in “The Fight” (Griffiths 1999, 29).

This overall movement in their relationship is demonstrative of the tragic arc outlined by White. Pierre begins as a lonely figure – always surrounded by people but without companionship – illustrated in his dialogue with Henry: “HENRY: Don’t you have someone else you can talk to, like a friend? PIERRE: No” (Griffiths 1999, 18). Maggie is presented as the solution to this loneliness, in part, because of her removal from the Ottawa political arena. She represents the naïve and innocent counterpoint to Ottawa where “they’re only interested in perpetuating their own power” (Griffiths 1999, 16). However, despite the initial public interest in Maggie as 22-year-old flower child, expectations mount as she must fulfill the role of Prime Minister’s wife. This pressure comes to a head as Maggie, disembodied, watches herself become the Mrs. Trudeau she is expected to be. Pierre, perhaps ironically, encourages her to challenge these expectations: “The only way to stay alive is to avoid their wish to define you” (Griffiths 64,

1980). In doing so, Pierre pushes Maggie to make public her distaste for the role, ultimately forcing Pierre to choose between the self-defined Maggie or his own role as Prime Minister:

MAGGIE: Let's admit it; the Americans have always had more fun. Let's go there. No one was meant to live in this climate. Look at you. You're the epitome of a cold land. Let's go someplace warm, where people laugh and cry and hug and shout and dance in the streets. Come on, let's go. I'll pack the kids. We'll just go. Don't call anyone. Say it was all a mistake. Come on, look, we can still make it. I know you want to. Oh, please... Please... (Griffiths 1999, 30)

Pierre cannot consider this option without putting into question his own guiding ideology (which I will explore shortly) and is thus forced to return to the pre-Maggie loneliness. Maggie and Pierre share a dislike of Ottawa's political norms, which at first allows Pierre to find refuge in their relationship but ultimately makes it impossible for them to remain together.

Idealism: Reason Over Passion; Passion over Reason

According to Griffiths' script, the attraction between Maggie and Pierre is based, at least in part, on a strong sense of idealism. Their conversations use terms and expressions such as "wanting it all," "The Just Society," and "a Golden Age". Griffiths constructs their budding romance around these expressions, but offers little explanation of the precise meaning of the phrases: "I want to be world-renowned, to shape destiny, to be deliriously happy. You might say, I want it all" (1980, 19). It is unclear what is meant by "it all." By using these undefined phrases, Griffiths draws attention to the ambiguity of their optimistic visions for the future. It is not until the top of Act Two that Maggie poses the question: "So now you have me, and the country, and everybody's rooting for you, what are you going to do with the "all" that you've got?" (Griffiths 1980, 55). This spurs an exploration of the dramatic figures' differing dreams – dreams that Griffiths has introduced the audience to in previous scenes – as a defining moment in their relationship's breakdown. Pierre attributes most social problems to people who dismiss

reason in favour of passion, while Maggie holds that in the ideal society each individual would act only according to their passions. These ideals, once stated, become the guiding force for their actions and ultimately the beginning of the decline of their relationship. Maggie's final depiction is one of her famously dancing at Studio 54 on the eve of her husband's failed 1979 election bid (Griffiths 1980, 91). Pierre is last seen describing his relationship:

[T]hrough all those horrendous fights, my wife was at my feet, and she was crying and screaming and wailing and literally banging her head against the wall, and I stood there, frozen, in the classic pose of man, locked in my own gender, not knowing whether to go to her and comfort her, or leave because it's too personal to watch, or hit her, or what to do. (Griffiths 1980, 90)

In Griffiths' play, the specificities of the idealism that initially drew Pierre to Maggie are what eventually repel them. When Pierre is given the chance to accompany Maggie in her impassioned flight, he would effectively have to sacrifice his own form of idealism to do so, as well as his career.

Pierre & the Media

Pierre's struggle with idealism is not exclusive to his relationship with Maggie. Griffiths describes his strong ideological beliefs as a way to explain his growing conflict with the media. Every time that Henry, the embodiment of the media, speaks of Pierre, during his popular rise, it is with reference to his appearance or personality:

HENRY: Then, all of a sudden, out of the clear blue sky, comes this guy... and he's sexy and classy and brilliant and athletic and liberal-minded and adventurous! [...] He was a member of the ruling class that chose to rule. We were flattered. And because he was sexy and classy and athletic... we became sexy and classy and athletic. (Griffiths 1980, 24)

However, private Pierre, according to Griffiths' narrative, is interested in the very opposite of what excites the media:

PIERRE: I'm the first guy that ever walked into the House of Commons of this country with an idea... of how a whole society should work. Discussion, philosophy and idealism creating a new order. We are on the threshold of a model of harmony and vitality for the world.
(Griffiths 1980, 56)

It is the media's fascination with Pierre's image that gives him the platform to promote his ideal society in the first place, but at the same time it is this fascination that undermines Pierre's ability to engage the media in an intelligent discussion:

PIERRE: I speak issues and you write personality. And if arrogance sells newspapers, then I'm arrogant. You're not a political analyst, you are paid to make me look like a fool, and I'm sorry, I don't enjoy being made to look like a fool...
And I'm the one betrayed. I came in here with new ideas all laid out... You got scared and you retreated to your official position – "All politicians are crooks, they're just in it for another vote, they're trying to put one over on you." And you undermined the very basis of my credibility. You weakened the country I was trying to strengthen.
(Griffiths 1980, 79)

Griffiths ultimately uses the media's preferences for Trudeau's celebrity over his ideology to explain his political downfall.

It is useful, at this point, to consider how Griffiths' use of the tragic archetype to portray Trudeau correlates with Ricoeur's 'prestige of the image.' Again, when updating the 'prestige of the image' concept to align with contemporary leaders in liberal democracies, Ricoeur defines 'greatness' as the depth of the individual's pursuit of justice (Ricoeur 272). Thus, for an account to contain Ricoeur's 'prestige', it must depict the figure in their pursuit of justice. In the case of the tragic figure, the desire for justice is, at least in part, left unfulfilled. In Griffiths' account, Pierre pursues the amply named 'Just Society'. While Griffiths is content to only hint at the definition of Pierre's 'Just Society', it is sufficient to identify Pierre's goal. In this pursuit, Pierre is denied a public discourse or debate on his 'Just Society' because the media is more preoccupied with his private life, most significantly with his wife Maggie. In a way, the media

turns Maggie into his antagonist. Ultimately, Griffiths' narrative leaves Pierre resigned to his condition of loneliness, to an unfulfilled idealistic vision of Canada, and a life with a media primarily interested in his image and not his ideas.

The Journalist as Dramaturgic Function

Both Ricoeur and White contend that their historiographic levels are not sequential steps, rather they are simultaneous operations delineated for analytic and philosophical purposes. As such, when discussing the narrative told by Griffiths – one that offers the love of an anti-Ottawa establishment Maggie, the pursuit of a “Just Society”, and a frustration with a misguided media as the natural explanation for Trudeau's actions throughout his first term in office – I have touched on the dramaturgical structure used to present this narrative; primarily, the use of the tragic archetype. However, Griffiths also embraces Ricoeur's ‘prestige of the image’ rhetoric through the use of the ‘readability and visibility’, ‘narrative and icon’, and ‘absence and presence’ dichotomies.

Griffiths' dramaturgy is best understood through her use of Henry as the narrator figure and the mediated journalistic process as the play's principal framing device. The play begins with Henry, talking on the phone with an unheard and unseen figure, debating whether to retell his experience with Maggie and Pierre Trudeau in a new article. He elects, after some struggle, to do so in a final attempt to free himself from his role as ‘tortured journalist’ “haunted by two giant figures” that he has followed his entire career (Griffiths 1999, 10). In doing so, he invites the audience into his memories and imaginings: memories that have been structured by his role covering the Trudeaus' actions for the media.

The play is told in nineteen vignettes. These involve either Henry's direct contact with the two figures, scenes that take place behind the closed doors as imagined by Henry in a non-realistic manner, and scenes where Henry directly addresses the audience. Each of these detached scenes references the audience's most common point of contact with politicians, the news story. At only a few minutes long, each scene dives into the middle of ongoing action. The characters Maggie or Pierre will occasionally directly address the audience to clarify their position in the action, similar to an interview embedded in a news report:

PIERRE: Getting off at the railroad station... a spontaneous demonstration, thousands of hands reaching out to touch me, rip off pieces of my clothing, women throwing themselves at my feet. People laughing, crying, kissing, fainting. It's not a leadership campaign, it's more like a coronation! (Griffiths 1980, 21)

This continues for a paragraph before Pierre abandons his direct address to the theatre audience in order to speak to the delegates of the 1968 Liberal leadership convention. There are also occasions where Henry will frame the scene, reporter style, with the necessary information to place the action in context: "You know, she was nineteen years old, and it was one of those bright white light days in Tahiti, with the waves gently lapping against the raft..." (Griffiths 1980, 17). Immediately after this, the performer transitions from Henry into Maggie speaking in Tahiti.

Having the same performer play all three characters furthers this attention-to-framing technique. In the first scene, the audience is introduced to the performer known as Henry. Henry, who is set to retell his experience with the Trudeaus for the audience, seems to embody the other two characters in the subsequent retelling. Moments of ambiguity, where the script indicates the performer is 'playing' either Maggie or Pierre but is still speaking in the tone of Henry, enforces this character-within-the-play device. At the top of the fifth scene, for example, Maggie speaks of herself in the third person:

MAGGIE: It wasn't as if she was timid or afraid, it was as if, as she went toward what was expected, she went just a little too far, beyond the delicate point of naturalness, giving everything she did and said a strange air of falsity that she herself questioned at every turn. (Griffiths 1999, 13)

As mentioned previously, Eric Peterson joined Griffiths onstage for the production of *Maggie & Pierre* at the Phoenix Theater in New York, allowing Henry to be divided, for the first time, from the two Trudeaus. In an interview with the Playwrights' Guild of Canada, Griffiths admitted, "it wasn't the right choice" to split the characters between two performers. Perhaps this was Griffiths recognizing that in doing so she dismantled one of the most important dramaturgical devices in the play.

The bridging of Henry's narrative role as journalist with his dramaturgical role as narrator serves to implicate the audience in the tragedy. The journalistic tone of the play reminds the audience of their most common point of contact with these figures: through the news media. As discussed, *Maggie & Pierre* criticizes the new media because of their desire to report on thrilling and dramatic events rather than Trudeau's vision for the country. This is at least in part what Griffiths presents as the cause of the tragic outcome of their relationship and Trudeau's dream for political change. As such, it suggests that the audience's need to peer into the lives of their public figures partially explains the tragic outcome. Henry's complicity with the audience in his role as narrator reinforces the implication. From the first scene, where Henry decides to retell his story during a direct address to the audience, to the final scene, where Henry admits his loss of objectivity, he emphasizes that his reason for continuing to discuss the couple is "Everybody watched. Like voyeurs or like the circus" (Griffiths 1999, 10). The audience is implicated in the tragedy by way of their own fascination with the figures.

Having one performer play Henry and Henry's descriptions of Maggie and Pierre highlights the dual absent and present nature of Trudeau in the retelling. While Henry speaks

directly to the audience, it is evident that Trudeau is physically absent. The dialogue with the audience is typically guided by the narrator's inability to escape the ghosts of the Trudeaus despite his physical separation from them. In this way, Henry's internal conflict is rooted in the absence yet, at the same time, presence of the Trudeaus. When Henry is embodying the Trudeaus, the audience's attention is again drawn to the 'present-absent' dichotomy that is perpetually engaged in the theatre: one where the performer becomes an icon of Trudeau for the audience, while at the same time their existence as Pierre is contained within the narrative. The fragmentary nature of the scenes further facilitates this iconic or visible perception of the figure. When the audience is presented with a scene that is not immediately contextualized by the narrative of the play as seen up to that point, they are invited to use their personal experience or knowledge of Trudeau as context. In this way the audience must equate the performer with the politician to an even greater extent than they would when the context is provided. In these moments the performer becomes a visible icon for the politician the audience already knows. As the scenes progress to the point where they are understood for their function in the larger framework of the play, the dramatic figure is conceived as serving the narrative goals set out by Griffiths and acquires the quality of readability that Ricoeur discusses. The readability of a dramatic figure refers to the audiences' ability to conceive of them as an agent within a series of events in the narrative (Ricoeur 262). Ultimately, the 'rhetoric of praise' identified by Ricoeur in his analysis of prestigious images – a combination of readability and visibility, narrative and icon, and presence and absence – is apparent in Griffiths' doubling of characters, attention-to-framing devices, and fragmentary scenes.

Conclusion

In his final monologue to the audience, Henry contextualizes his struggle with the Trudeaus' story in the ongoing search for Canadian heroes:

I'm the guy who can't stop watching. What can I offer to a land suffering from amnesia? Just two small giant figures, the kind like you hold in the palm of your hand.

(He holds out his hand as if holding two small figures, then blows on his hand, as if sending them out to the audience.) (Griffiths 1999, 34)

He calls Canada a "land suffering from amnesia" as a nod to the inability of the Canadian people to remember 'heroes' drawn from their collective history. In this way, Griffiths is both explaining Canada's lack of heroes and offering Trudeau as a response to this need. As Henry offers the imaginary figurines in his hand to his audience, Griffiths offers the dramatic figures in her play to her audience as a temporary hero to hold on to in this amnesiac void. The dramatic figure is, itself, an impression of Trudeau that Griffiths has constructed from historical sources including verbatim transcripts, published accounts, non-realist imaginings, and personal experience. These sources have been assembled to represent Trudeau's life as a personal, public, and ideological tragedy. In the tragedy, Griffiths uses Henry as a framing device to draw attention to the audience's own complicity in the downfall. Collectively, Griffiths' selection, assembly, and presentation reveal a prestigious image of Trudeau as a hero who was tragically unable to attain his dream of a 'Just Society' because of the Canadian public's persistent and overbearing hunt for just such a hero.

Chapter 3 “René Lévesque” in *The Death of René Lévesque*

David Fennario’s *The Death of René Lévesque*

If Trudeau is the foremost champion of Canadian nationalism, as Samuel LaSelva suggests in his article “Re-imagining Confederation”, then René Lévesque can be seen as the counterpoint, urging “Québeckers to erase from their collective memory those aspects of their identity which tied them to other Canadians” (699). Lévesque first gained popularity in Québec as the host of Radio-Canada’s *Point de mire* towards the end of the 1950s. His status helped him win a seat in Québec’s National Assembly (*Assemblée nationale*) in 1960 as part of the provincial Liberal Party. Lévesque solidified his role as leader of the separatist movement by founding the Parti Québécois in 1967 and the election of this party, which made him Premier of Québec, on November 25th, 1976. During his time in office, the 1980 referendum on Québec sovereignty was defeated. He remained in office until his resignation in 1985.

Lévesque’s legendary conflict with Trudeau is captured in the National Film Board of Canada’s miniseries *The Champions*. Lévesque has also been portrayed in a 1994 television series and a 2006 Canadian Broadcasting Corporation Miniseries, each titled *René Lévesque*. For the purpose of my examination of tragic, prestigious portrayals of Canadian politicians, I will look to David Fennario’s *The Death of René Lévesque* which chronicles Lévesque’s political career during the 1960s, 70s, and 80s from the perspective of four individuals who worked with, for, and against him. During the retelling, a statue of Lévesque, and the associated art gallery in Montréal’s Place Desjardins office and shopping complex, come alive. The marble Lévesque speaks the politician’s words as the four recount Québec’s adoration or respect for his dream and their disappointment in his tragic failure to fix the system that made his dream impossible.

In 1990, Fennario approached then artistic director of Montréal's Centaur Theatre, Maurice Podbery "with the idea of doing a play on René Lévesque" (Fennario 9). Despite concerns of political response to the piece, Centaur produced the only professional run of the show to date, opening on February 5th, 1991. This version was directed by Paul Thompson and was fiercely criticized by francophone media (Reid). After the harsh reception, Fennario set aside his professional career that included plays such as *Balconville*, *Nothing to Lose*, and *Moving*, to work with amateur theatres (Sprung). It was not until 2003 that a revised version of *The Death of René Lévesque* – the focus of this chapter – was published.

While Lévesque and Trudeau may represent opposing views in regards to one of the most defining issues in Canadian identity, their theatrical manifestations, by Fennario and Griffiths respectively, construct similar historic retellings that use combinations of factual and fictional historical material, tragic archetypes and framing devices to achieve a prestigious image. In the following sections, I will demonstrate how Fennario's treatment of history in his representation of Lévesque is similar to Griffiths' treatment of history in her representation of Trudeau. Ultimately, Fennario uses fictional characters to mediate selected historic events for the audience in order to cast Lévesque as a tragic figure whose Marxist dream of a utopian Québec, like Trudeau's dream of a 'Just Society,' is undermined by pragmatic economic realities. As a biographer of Lévesque, Fennario depicts a man that dies not from a heart attack but from "the death of his dream" (Fennario 70). In this perspective, it is possible to read this play not as "a controversial attack on the premier for abandoning his leftist principles" (353) as Jerry Wasserman claims, but rather as a prestige-building depiction of a tragic figure who is unsuccessful in his pursuit of justice for the citizens of Québec.

Fennario's Artistic Material: The Archive Contextualized

Two co-existing epistemic approaches to historicity mark Fennario's play: a verbatim approach employed when the figure of Lévesque speaks, and an imagined set of characters speaking of their fictional experiences with Lévesque in plausible and factually verifiable situations. This combination allows Fennario to present Lévesque's career as a tragic struggle against the forces of – in Marxist terms – the bourgeoisie. In this way, Fennario is able to present a play dedicated, “to the members of the Union des Forces Progressistes,”³ as a “weapon in this struggle” (Fennario 11). Not surprisingly, Fennario structures the play's narrative to emphasize the worker's experience of the politician over possibly more academic historical accounts. In this section, I will demonstrate the existence of these two typically opposed historiographic epistemologies in *The Death of René Lévesque*.

Lévesque Verbatim

Fennario makes use of Lévesque's documented speeches throughout the play. These speeches, drawn from the historical record and translated from French to English by Fennario,⁴ are indicated by the use of quotation marks in the text. This choice helps anchor Fennario's retelling of Lévesque in the archive. These speeches, however, are contrasted with moments where Lévesque's character speaks in the present time of the retelling. In these moments, Fennario departs from the archive.

³ The Union des Forces Progressistes was a left-wing political party in Québec that merged with Option Citoyenne in 2006 to form Québec solidaire party.

⁴ I recognize that translation is a complicated interpretative process, but the decisions made by Fennario in this respect will not be the focus of my discussion.

For example, Fennario uses Lévesque's well-known acceptance speech after the election that brought the Parti Québécois to power; on November 15th, 1976, the Parti Québécois celebrated their successful campaign at the Paul Sauvé Arena in Montréal:

Sounds of the grand rally at the Paul Sauvé and LÉVESQUE trying to
restrain the crowd so he could talk.

LÉVESQUE: "Je pense que... je pense que..."

Cheers.

LÉVESQUE: "I don't think I need to say to what point I am incapable
now of making any comment on the extraordinary gesture of
confidence which was un hoped [*sic*] for..."

Cheers.

LÉVESQUE: "I must tell you with all my heart that we hoped, but we
didn't expect it like that this year. I have never, I have never thought
that I could be so proud to be a Québécois as this evening." (54-55)

In comparison, the translated version of the speech broadcast on CBC Radio that evening went as follows:

I don't have to tell you. It's difficult (*he says. Mr. Levesque having a
great deal of trouble getting himself heard by the party faithful
tonight.*) I don't have to tell you how happy I am to receive this
incredible acclaim. I have to tell you frankly we hoped with all our
hearts but didn't expect it like that this year. I never. I never thought
that I could be so proud to be a Québecker as I am tonight. (Grant)

Lévesque's speech goes on for a few more paragraphs that Fennario does not include. The text is drawn from a recording of the speech that Fennario translates to English. Quite evidently, from this English language version, Fennario selects only certain portions for his text. This Montréal-based playwright worked in a similar fashion when citing Lévesque's speeches after the unsuccessful 1980 referendum ("1980: 'Non' to sovereignty in Québec referendum") and to the Economic Club in New York City (Rogers).

There are, however, moments when Fennario abandons the use of speeches drawn from archival material. When Lévesque is speaking with the other characters, the dialogue is original. Thus, it fits into the category of 'imagined alternative' introduced earlier. Take, for example,

Lévesque's first words where he differentiates himself from the historical figure he will later embody: "Yes, yes, I suppose I'm dead, I died, *mort*, I, René Lévesque or rather the demise of the said named person has been reported which leads one to assume that, yes, I have indeed quite probably died – *dodo*" (Fennario 20). Fennario also uses Lévesque during these 'present time' moments to subtitle the scene or capture the spirit of the dialogue in short expressions that are often repeated many times: "*Le grand Noirceur [sic]*" (25) when the other characters discuss the Duplessis era; "Jésus" (26) as they recount their allegiance to the Catholic Church; or simply "Hélène" (69) when Hélène discusses their relationship.

Fictional Counterparts

Four characters join the figure of Lévesque in the play: Jean-Louis Demers, Jacques Beaubien, Gérard Martin, and Hélène Duguay. Each contributes to Lévesque's personal and political narrative, told by Fennario, through their own supposed experience with the Quiet Revolution, Lévesque's government, and the separatist movement. These characters, which provide the majority of the text, are inspired by people who surrounded the 'life world' Lévesque. Fennario uses a different standard of historical accuracy for these characters than he uses for his René Lévesque. While Fennario's representation of Lévesque includes material from the archive, the other characters are only references to 'life world' individuals. This may, in part, be explained by the paucity of established historical accounts detailing their contributions to Québec society during the time. These characters serve the primary function of framing the representation of Lévesque, rather than as participants in the action of the play, thus justifying Fennario's 'two-tiered' approach to historical accuracy.

Hélène Duguay, for example, functions primarily as a storyteller. Arguably the key narrator in the piece, she is "separate from the others" (Fennario 16) and the only character who

announces her intent to narrate Lévesque's story: "It's me that finally has to tell the truth about René" (Fennario 21). She is a member of the Parti Québécois and Lévesque's romantic interest. In this way, she purports to offer a special wealth of private knowledge on Lévesque and often unveils historical-Lévesque's personal feelings on certain subjects. The figure of Lévesque is unable to do this because of Fennario's decision to cite archival speech when creating his dialogue. Historical-Lévesque's public discourse was primarily limited to political rather than private matters.

The name 'Hélène Duguay' does not overtly reference someone publicly associated with Lévesque. However, the specifics of this character's relationship with Lévesque suggest that she was inspired by the former premier's second wife, Corinne Côté. The historical Lévesque began seeing Côté in 1970 (Poliquin 155). Duguay explains, in the play, how she and Lévesque began dating during the October Crisis (in October 1970). Both Côté and Duguay are from rural settings, the Lac-Saint-Jean region (Paulin 21) and Saint-Anne-de-la-Pérade (Fennario 22), respectively. Both Côté and Duguay meet Lévesque for the first time in 1968 at l'Université Laval: in the case of Côté they met at a signing of Lévesque's Option Québec (Paulin 21), while Duguay and he meet at the founding of the Parti Québécois (Fennario 36). Throughout the play, there are numerous other indicators that suggest Duguay is based on Côté; although, major moments in the historical couple's life go unmentioned in Fennario's text, such as their April 12th, 1979 marriage. Despite the numerous indicators that Côté inspired Duguay, why does Fennario not name the figure accordingly? Rather than imply that he was attempting to accurately represent Côté's opinions, Fennario allows himself the artistic freedom to imagine how a female force in Lévesque's life may have experienced their relationship. In short, Duguay's speech is not limited by the epistemological principles established by Fennario through the use of Lévesque's reenacted speeches.

The implication is twofold. The audience is provided access to archival text that, albeit translated, may evoke personal memories of recognizable expressions from the life-world Lévesque. Take for example his 1976 victory speech discussed above. The narrating characters are then able to provide context for this speech – context that purports to come from a privileged position of knowledge – which may colour the audiences’ reading of the archival material. After Lévesque’s boisterous victory speech, Duguay says:

We had won. The dream had come true. We were there. It was happening, but why did I go home with a scared feeling inside of me somewhere. Be happy, Hélène, I told myself, but I couldn’t sleep that night. I got out of bed where René was sleeping and went and looked out the window. Stood there in my nightgown asking myself what I was afraid of. (Fennario 55)

This excerpt questions the celebratory tone of the archival material to suggest even at this early point, there was cause for concern. Thus, Fennario has used imagined text, delivered through one of his fictional characters, to position the archival material as an introduction to the tragic outcome that follows.

The Lévesque Narrative: Is another Québec Possible?

Fennario uses an assembly of fictional and archival material to construct a narrative biography of Lévesque that is both a private and public, tragic struggle. The play is the public struggle of a leader to build a new and ideal society for his long oppressed fellow citizens coupled with a private struggle to maintain his social principles in the face of economic hardship. In terms of Ricoeur’s ‘prestige of the image,’ these dual struggles are illustrative of Lévesque’s career long pursuit of justice: where the Duplessis era is described by the narrating characters as unjust for French language citizens, Lévesque is portrayed and described as the potential saviour. In the end, however, his inability to deliver many needed changes stem from his moral and

political principles, the same ones that helped him rise to power. As Fennario recognizes in his introduction to the play, the narrative is unintentionally structured as a Sophoclean tragedy.

Fennario's fictional characters begin their version of Lévesque's career by exposing their own backgrounds during the oppressive Duplessis era. The characters describe how the existing social power structures unjustly favour Anglophones. Martin describes his workplace as "a place where being French meant you were just a piece of shit walking on two legs" (25). It is implied that Duplessis serves the Anglophone-dominated business interests. This is done using a worldview "sanctified by the [Catholic] Church and [Québécois] historical experience as a people, that life is something to be endured" (23). Lévesque, however, appears as champion who opposes this situation: Demers says, "Nor did he hesitate to challenge in a humourous [sic] vein the role that Duplessis played as an accomplice of St. James Street" (28). Hélène takes this further recalling how he was a symbol of hope when she was a child: "And when I lay in bed scared of the dark, I'd try to remember his voice, his eyes" (28). Fennario paints Lévesque as the hero who will fight for the interests of the proletariat, composed principally of francophone citizens. This image swells as Lévesque's political career and movement grow culminating in his election to the Premiership in 1976.

Fennario thus portrays Lévesque as a public symbol for a Québec freed of exploitation and possibly an independent nation throughout the October Crisis and the *Front Commun* strikes of 1972. On a more personal level, Lévesque is portrayed as an individual who speaks his mind: "Imagine telling the *New York Times* that he thought the Americans should get out of Vietnam" (52), and clearly he has his own style: "And people liked him, they really did – in those suits that looked like he slept in them and the cigarettes he insisted on smoking, even in the presence of the Queen" (51). Once in power, these public and private traits that define him, are quickly challenged in Fennario's climatic scene, a speech to the Economic Club in New York. Lévesque

must convince investors of the viability of Québec's economy under his leadership. Instead, and against the advice of his staff, Lévesque arrives in rebellion wearing "fluorescent blue Wallabies in clashing contrast" (58) and delivers an un-vetted speech on the political sovereignty of Québec. This action, typical of the types of actions that saw him elected to office, is met with "wave after wave of laughter" from the bankers and instant economic difficulty for Québec. Unwilling to "wear a monkey suit" for the bankers, the rest of Lévesque's time in office was limited to a public struggle to control government spending.

Gregory Reid identifies Lévesque's blue Wallabies as a central icon of the play in his short review (139). His decision to adorn these shoes, which contrast with the venue and his audience, symbolizes his rebellion against all potentially hegemonic and oppressive power structures, but also symbolizes the moment of defeat for his dream of a utopian Québec. In fact, these shoes become emblematic of everything that had Québécois embrace him as their hero and, at the same time, emblematic of the failure of his ability to bring his dream to fruition, thus resulting in 'the death of René Lévesque'. From this scene forward, Lévesque is no longer the hero of Québec but the unwilling agent of a corrupting economic force. Despite having overcome all the political obstacles of being elected in Québec, in the play Lévesque is painted as the victim of a global economic system that opposes his ideal of a utopian Québec.

Ultimately, Fennario's Lévesque is defeated because of his unwavering belief in his ideals in the same tragic fashion as Griffiths' Trudeau. Ricoeur's contemporary 'greatness', a necessary quality of prestige, exists in Fennario's Lévesque and his attempt to build a modern French language society in Québec. However, Lévesque's efforts are tragically defeated by the conditions in the world around him over which, it would appear, he had no control. Fennario goes so far as to suggest that Lévesque, the emblem, dies with his dream. In the final scene, Hélène says: "He became what they wanted and then they used him against us. Used him against

himself, I would say, having known him” (69). The use of the externalizing ‘they’ carries the implication that the Lévesque of the denouement is not Lévesque at all, but the consequence of a retelling of his narrative by a corrupt bourgeoisie. In this way, Fennario’s assembly of archival and historical material, contextualized by his fictional characters, functions not as a criticism of Lévesque but as a critique of the dominant economic system’s ability to corrupt political ideology.

Fennario’s portrayal shows both the decline of Lévesque and the decline of the Lévesque’s government. Significantly, Sanford Borins, in his book *Governing Fables*, identifies the combination of personal and organization decline as a characteristic of a tragic portrayal (Borins 9). Lévesque’s personal characteristics, namely his boldness and rebellious nature, result in the decline of his own political career, but also in the decline of the provincial economy, the pursuit of sovereignty, and the Parti Québécois. Likewise, it is the faltering of the province during his tenure as premier that instigates the end of his political career, his relationship with Duguay (although, historically not with Côté), and possibly even his life.

Icon and Narration

Like Griffiths, Fennario employs many of the rhetorical methods outlined by Ricoeur in his representation of Lévesque. Where Griffiths created the reporter-narrator Henry, Fennario has used four storytellers, each having a personal relationship with Lévesque, to build the play’s narrative. In this case, the moments of re-enacted history are limited to short sections of speech and performed by a statue-like or iconic version of Lévesque. The majority of the dialogue is delivered in the present of the storytellers, which serves to frame the moments of re-enacted history presented as memories. This dramaturgical approach makes clear the doubling of

‘presence and absence,’ ‘narrative and icon,’ and ‘readability and visibility’ called for by Ricoeur, as demonstrated by the use of the double-level narrator model, the presentation of Lévesque as a statue and the inclusion of photographs in the stage directions.

Using a two-tiered narrator structure draws attention to framing devices used in the retelling. On the first narrator-level, Duguay exists in a space shared with the audience, as she prepares to deliver a speech about her former lover’s life. On the second narrator-level, Demers, Beaubien, and Martin exist in the world of the Place Desjardins offices along with the statue of Lévesque. The play begins with a television broadcast about the erection of a statue of Lévesque in the Place Desjardins. Demers, Beaubien, and Martin are in the world of this broadcast. On the other hand, Duguay is able to contextualize the broadcast while watching alongside the audience. In a sense, she narrates the broadcast to the audience. Before the broadcast ends, the statue of Lévesque comes to life. This initiates Demers, Beaubien, and Martin’s retelling of Lévesque’s career. The four characters describe previous moments, some of which are enacted by the statue of Lévesque. Thus, Fennario has created three different present time periods with which the audience can engage: that of Duguay, that of the broadcast, and that of the recounted stories. Forcing the audience to pay attention to three different time periods has the effect of drawing attention to the relative absence of each period. In Duguay’s world and the world of the broadcast, Lévesque is absent. This absence is then filled visually with an icon of Lévesque: the broadcasted images (for Duguay) and the statue (for those in the broadcast). These icons are then brought to life by the readable or audible narrative delivered by Duguay, Demers, Beaubien, and Martin. In the recounted stories, the absent element is the audience. The audience is reminded of this because they can only understand or access this world through the doubly framed narration.

The decision to have Lévesque first appear as a statue is a clear attempt at including the seemingly contradictory concepts of ‘presence and absence’ and ‘narrative and icon.’ The statue onstage poses itself as an inherent contradiction to the audience. It is an inanimate object meant to capture the essence of the historical figure, but at the same time, is enacted by a performer in the present time of the theatre. Thus, the audience must understand the statue as possessing a number of different functions: it is ‘Lévesque the historical figure’, a statue of the historical figure, a statue enlivened by the narrator’s memories, and an actor in the theatre. In this way, Fennario has generated tension between the present, visual, iconic Lévesque and the narrated, readable, absent Lévesque. In the reality of the theatre, the enlivened statue, the inanimate statue, and the ‘historical Lévesque’ are all absent and only the performer is present. In the reality of Duguay’s narration, the enlivened statue is present while all the rest are apparently absent. This logic is repeated (or recycled) and defines each subsequent reality, those of Demers, Beaubien, and Martin’s narration. This dramaturgical approach is destabilizing, in as much as it never allows the audience to adopt a single relationship with the historical figure, the dramatic figure, or the performer because they are constantly holding both a present and absent understanding of each.

A series of photographs onstage depict different moments in the history of Québec from the Duplessis era (‘La Grande noirceur’) to the Economic Summits of 1997. These photographs function in a similar, multilayered way as the statue. They are a depiction of actual historical events, part of a gallery presented at the inauguration of the statue, they light up with Duguay’s narration of certain periods, and they would provide the back drop in the actual theatre. More than this, they challenge the audience’s suspension of disbelief by placing archival material onstage in the fictionalization of the broadcaster, the narrators, and the theatre itself. By seeing the photographic image of Lévesque over the shoulder of the performer representing Lévesque’s

statue, the audience is constantly reminded of the prismatic and paradoxical contradictions with which they must contend in order to engage historical material. These contradictions are exactly what Ricoeur emphasizes as necessary qualities in the prestigious representation of any historical figure.

Conclusion

In the final moments of the play, the narrators sing “*Gens de pays*” while the statue of Lévesque transitions into a statue of Duplessis completing the tragic trajectory. This Lévesque, says Duguay, is not “the René we love” (20). It is a representation of Lévesque who, in Fennario’s account, has been corrupted by the economic forces that influence and control those in power. But the implicit argument of the play is that the Lévesque they love, the embodiment of a dream for Québec, does not have to be dead. Hence Fennario’s dedication: “*Un autre Québec est possible*” (5). It is possible to read Fennario’s depiction of Lévesque not as a criticism of the politician, but as a vindication of his dream and a repurposing of his career as a cautionary tale, in the form of a heroic struggle, of the risks in opposing the economic powers in the pursuit of justice. Fennario’s engagement with Ricoeur’s rhetorical principles through multilayered narrators, the statues, and photographs ensure the audience is engaged with the past events, but always aware of the contradictions inherent in such a pursuit.

Through *Maggie & Pierre* and *The Death of René Lévesque*, both Griffiths and Fennario adopt the role of artist-historians to create tragic dramatic figures in their prestigious accounts of famous politicians. Both playwrights rely on an epistemological approach to the portrayal of history that has them combine direct archival material with fictional framing devices. This combination allows the artist-historians to present the historical material through the use of a tragic archetype and as a comment on the conditions of the world surrounding the political figure

that served to inspire their plays. In doing so, they both present a case for the politician's inclusion as a hero in the search for Canadian identity. But on an even greater scale, they comment on the conditions in Canada which leave the politician's goals unattained and lead to the politician's personal downfall: in the case of Trudeau, it is the media's obsession over a Canadian hero that inhibits his ability to achieve the 'Just Society'; in the case of Lévesque, it is the servitude to an American master-economy that kills his dream for 'another Québec.' In the following case, I will, instead, consider a situation where the playwright depicts the politician's successful, although unorthodox, pursuit of a different form of justice.

Chapter 4 “William Lyon Mackenzie King” in *Rexy!*

Allan Stratton’s Rexy!

William Lyon Mackenzie King was Canada’s longest serving Prime Minister, from 1921 to 1930, and again from 1935 to 1948. Most recognizable as Canada’s leader during the Second World War, King struggles with conscription in Allan Stratton’s play – the first published script inspired by this Prime Minister – titled *Rexy!* (Mallet qtd. in Conolly 286). The play is sourced from detailed diaries that King maintained from 1893 to his death in 1950: a source of nearly daily entries about his personal, political, and spiritual life that total in excess of fifty thousand pages (*The Diaries of William Lyon Mackenzie King*).⁵ Adapted from these entries, Stratton’s play makes an argument that King’s leadership style – although very unique amongst world leaders – was the ‘right thing at the right time’ and justifies his inclusion amongst the ‘great’ politicians of the Second World War.

Stratton’s play traces King’s pursuit for Canadian autonomy in a global political economy and for personal recognition in a historical period dominated by British and American figures. Beginning with his admiration for Hitler before the Second World War through Canada’s first ‘autonomous’ declaration of war and to his struggle with the debate surrounding conscription, King is shown as an unorthodox and idiosyncratic leader preoccupied with his own significance. Stratton, however, presents King’s interactions with other political giants – although guided by the likes of his dog and dead mother – to have saved and even strengthened

⁵ These diaries would also become the principal source for Michael Hollingsworth’s 1993 play *The Life and Times of Mackenzie King* and King’s portrayal in the CBC and National Film Board of Canada’s 1987 docudrama *The King Chronicles*.

the Canadian nation. In doing so, Stratton portrays King as an eccentric Canadian equivalent to Winston Churchill or Franklin D. Roosevelt.

The play opened February 10th, 1981 at Toronto's Phoenix Theatre. It won Stratton the Chalmers Award, Canadian Authors' Association Award, and Dora Mavor Moore Award for Best Play. As testimony to its enduring importance, *Rexy!* has also become a regular piece programmed by professional and community theatre groups alike across Canada, including Halifax's Neptune Theatre ("Actor in Neptune production *Rexy!*"), the Ottawa Little Theatre ("The Private becomes Public"), and Montréal's Segal Centre ("Productions & Awards"). It was published in 1981 by Playwrights Canada, in 1984 as part of *Modern Canadian Drama's* first volume, and in 1991 with *A Flush of Tories* (Stratton's play about John A. Macdonald) in "Canada Split."

The King Narrative: Ghosts, Bombers, and Conscription

The narrative that Stratton constructs around King demonstrates a distinct variation on 'greatness.' King's pursuit of justice is less idealistic than Trudeau's or Lévesque's. While Trudeau pursues a 'Just Society' and Levesque pursues 'another Québec,' King focuses on upholding the status quo, and ensuring that Canada makes it through the Second World War as a single nation. This reflects his role as wartime leader: instead of striving to change society, the wartime leader struggles to prevent its collapse. For King, this required balancing the competing interests within his government and Canada more broadly, a challenge that his unique, if not peculiar, approach was well suited to handle. Because Stratton proposes a form of 'greatness' that is distinct from that offered by Griffiths or Fennario, I will examine the narrative surrounding the figure of King before I discuss his method for adapting King's diary.

Stratton's play seeks to position King amongst the large historical personalities of the time, including Winston Churchill, Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, and Franklin D. Roosevelt. Implicitly, the play asks whether King is comparable in historical stature to these grand political figures. Stratton answers by illustrating King's unique, unorthodox, and idiosyncratic style of leadership, which involves seeking guidance from the ghosts of his ancestors, confiding in his pet dog, and manipulating his political colleagues. The play uses a method of emplotment that White calls 'comedic' to address the difference between King and the traditional image of a Second World War leader, strongly informed by Winston Churchill. While the play initially emphasizes this difference, King's unique leadership is revealed to, in the end, have kept French and English Canada united following the Second World War, to have helped Canada achieve autonomy on the global stage, and to have assisted in defeating the Axis powers. The narrative also shows King's personal desire to be remembered by history to be fulfilled, perhaps as much for his unorthodox methods as the actual results of his actions. In this sense, the conflicting elements in the play – the seeming difference between the image of a leader and King's unique traits – are "revealed to be, in the long run, harmonizable with one another, unified, at one with themselves and the others" (White 1973, 9).

The conflict between King's unique leadership and the icon of a wartime Prime Minister is illustrated in the first scene of the play. King returns from a trip to Germany where he met with Hitler and British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain. Having taken a liking to Hitler, King claims, "Hitler himself may one day be known as the great peasant liberator of his people. Perhaps even the deliverer of Europe. A modern day Joan of Arc" (743). Unlike Churchill, King favours a policy of appeasement in an attempt to avoid war with Germany. Riverdale, the chief British liaison to Canada, describes his frustration with King's position, "Prime Minister King was an absolute bastard. Difficult, dangerous and maddeningly obtuse. 1939 – we all knew war

was about to break – but King? He knew better. Still favoured the old appeasement approach, of all things” (745). Even more difficult for Riverdale and other members of the Allied Governments to accept are King’s motivation for supporting appeasement and avoiding conflict with Hitler.

King draws parallels between Hitler’s interest in spiritualism and his own, “[t]here is little doubt in my mind that he’s a mystic. A fellow spiritualist perhaps” (742). He then proceeds, with his family friend Joan, to speak with the spirit of his grandfather, William Lyon Mackenzie, and ask him whether Hitler is dangerous:

KING: Grandpa?
 JOAN: Are you Remy’s grandfather?
Two knocks [Yes]
 KING: Will there be war, Grampa?...
Silence
 JOAN: ...Are you still there Mr. Mackenzie?
Two knocks [Yes]
 KING: Is the British policy correct? Cooperation and understanding? Is that the correct policy?
(Two knocks)
 Good, yes, thank you.
 JOAN: Is Mr. Hitler to be feared?
(One knock) [No]
 Mr. Hitler is *not* to be feared?
Two knocks [Yes]

King continues to seek guidance on important political and military decisions from spirits throughout the play. Stratton illustrates King’s atypical reliance on unusual sources for advice. Joan, one of the narrators, describes King’s relationship with his dog, “He loved that dog, talked to it about everything under the sun. In fact I daresay Pat heard more about war strategy than the Cabinet” (777). King’s peculiar reliance on these sources contrasts with his general rejection of advice from fellow politicians and military advisors, most notably his rejection of Ralston’s position on the need for conscription. By setting up this contrast, Stratton emphasizes King’s apparent lack of a rational approach to decision-making.

Stratton's portrayal also shows King to be preoccupied with appearances, at times above the substance of the work he is doing. In one scene, King describes selecting a bomber to fly him to Britain:

KING: (gravely) I intended to arrive on board a Canadian bomber!
 JOAN: That way if you fly over any U-boats you can bomb them en route.
 KING: Yes. The image *is* rather heroic, isn't it? Fitting too. Grampa Mackenzie on his horse and me in my bomber.
 JOAN: And the press!
 KING: Reports for days. And full of the highest commendations from Messieurs Churchill and Roosevelt.
 JOAN: It sounds wonderful.
 KING: And prophetic. (769-770)

In another scene, King negotiates with Roosevelt to ensure that he has "a prominent role in all group photographs" (776) at a conference he will host between the British and the American delegations. Pearson later describes King's nickname, "in the department he was known as 'the Flasher'" (778), a name that came about because of King's tendency to just arrive for the photographs. Again, Stratton's portrayal emphasizes the differences between King and what the audience expects from a traditional wartime leader.

However, abiding by the comedic archetype, Stratton ultimately reveals King's idiosyncratic approach to leadership to have been exactly what Canada needed to make it through the Second War World. Although the play's characters may question King's sanity and the audience may laugh at his unorthodox methods, the play ultimately validates his position within Canadian history. As I will demonstrate, both Canada and King personally benefit from King's leadership. This combination of organization and personal growth is described by Sanford Borins as a heroic "governing fable" (9).

Conscription and the debates surrounding conscription represent the major organizational, or national, conflict that King is forced to address throughout the play. The

contentious question was whether the Canadian Government would adopt a policy to forcibly register soldiers for overseas service. This issue divided English and French Canada, with the Anglophones in favour and the Francophones opposed. Early in the play, King recognizes this claiming, “*If war breaks out my greatest contribution to the effort might well be keeping this mess of a country together, English and French united*” (748). The Minister of Defense, Ralston, stresses that the military absolutely needs conscription, saying, “I’ve nothing against Quebec – so long as it’s in uniform. Volunteers are simply not sufficient. As minister of defence I can’t press the point strongly enough” (755). King, however, is able to rebut Ralston’s demands after consulting with the ghost of his grandfather:

KING: In the last war we fought and conscripted. It tore this country apart – riots in Montreal and a bill to secede proposed in Quebec’s own legislature. To fight and conscript again in defence of Britain.

MACKENZIE: Then resist the British buggers. (749)

When King finally gives in to the demand for conscription in his climactic address to the House of Commons, one of the narrators, Joan, describes the French and English positions: “they thumped till their hands had bruises: the English because he’d brought in conscription and the French because he’d won so much time for himself that now it was only a hop, skip and jump to peace” (800). While in individual scenes, King appears to be ignoring the issue presented by his military officers for fear of offending his francophone supporters, in the end his actions – and more particularly, his stalling tactics – appear justified. Thus Canada is shown to benefit from King’s action – or inaction – and the opposing positions become ‘harmonized.’

In the more complicated matter of King’s personal growth there is a similar reconciliation of issues and achievement of personal goals. King’s desire to be a heroic wartime leader and his atypical approach to leadership are revealed to be compatible. As Canada had benefited from his

methods, King earns his place amongst Second World War leaders. Joan describes King's position after the war:

He'd guided us through war and he'd kept us together and they loved him for it. And sure enough next election he won one final term before retiring, and this at a time when other war leaders like Churchill were getting dumped all over the place. It seemed like he could escape from anything. (800)

Despite his unorthodox qualities – often the product of Stratton's revisions to King's archival documents – the playwright validates King's significance and value in Canadian history through his originality for which he is perhaps best remembered. Stratton's play itself becomes a testament to King's importance because of its role in spreading King's diaries and, ultimately, King's historical narrative.

Stratton's Artistic Material: A Diary Revised

Robert Fulford describes King's diaries as “the only Canadian work of our century that someone will look at in 500 years” (qtd. in “A Real Companion...”). King wished the diaries destroyed but, instead, they were archived by the University of Toronto. Despite using this archive as his starting point, Stratton has demonstrated artistic license by editing the archival material to amplify King's idiosyncratic pursuit of historical significance and his unconventional political methods. Three examples will demonstrate the extent to which Stratton relies on King's diary as the source material. At the same time, they will illustrate how Stratton has adapted this material to fit his narrative of King as a unique and eccentric yet ‘great’ politician. In particular, I will look at King's late night meeting with General McNaughton, King's acceptance of Ralston's resignation letter, and King's discussion with Lord Riverdale about the British Commonwealth Air Training Program.

Late Night with General McNaughton

In a lengthy diary entry dated Wednesday, November 1, 1944, King describes inviting General McNaughton to the Laurier House where he offers him the position of Minister of Defense. He then describes the following day's cabinet meeting in detail where Ralston is convinced to resign in favour of McNaughton's appointment. This diary entry clearly forms the basis for two scenes in Stratton's play: the first, King's meeting with McNaughton and, the second, a cabinet meeting where King forces Ralston to resign. Certain portions of Stratton's text are evidenced strongly in King's diary, such as his invitation to McNaughton (27503), offering McNaughton Lieutenant Stuart's reports (27504), offering McNaughton the position as Minister of Defense (27505), having a cabinet meeting, referencing Ralston's previous letter supporting McNaughton, referencing Ralston's earlier offer of resignation, and finally accepting Ralston's resignation in front of the Cabinet (27513 – 27515). However, Stratton has added elements that are not present in King's diary, intended to emphasize the Prime Minister's eccentric traits.

In his diary, King explains setting up for McNaughton's visit:

Had him shown to the library; when he came in, I moved the circular arm chair over to where his back would be to the light and not have it in his face. Took my usual position at the table. While waiting for him to come, I had written out what the procedure for the day should be and the policy of the govt. as it would be referred to this afternoon in Council. (King 27593)

However, in Stratton's text, King is engaged in a discussion with an imaginary Wilfred Laurier when McNaughton enters:

KING: Oh Laurier, I am making the march to Calvary with you tonight. We have drunk from the same bitter cup.
(McNAUGHTON enters, unseen by KING)
 They hounded you in the Great War as they hound me now – the dogs of war.
 McNAUGHTON: *(quietly)* Mr King?

KING: *(still facing away from McNAUGHTON)* They don't understand that more is accomplished by preventing bad action than by doing good.

McNAUGHTON: *(clears throat)* Sir?

KING: *(beat, back still to him)* Is that you McNaughton?

McNAUGHTON: The maid said to come straight up. (794)

Stratton's decision to switch 'writing out procedure' to 'speaking with a ghost' in his adaption allows him to reveal one of King's eccentric qualities to McNaughton. Understandably, McNaughton struggles to see a Prime Minister who speaks to imaginary figures as a serious leader. King's reliance on the advice of ghosts (his mother, Laurier, and William Lyon Mackenzie) to make decisions, rather than the information presented to him by traditional sources (Riverdale, McNaughton, Ralston, Pearson) undermines his credibility in the eyes of other characters, and, possibly, the audience. King's reliance on and continuous engagement with these historical figures also highlights Stratton's suggestion that the Prime Minister was overtly conscious of his own position in history. Ultimately, Stratton has adapted this diary entry to amplify King's eccentric qualities, and to draw a contrast with the typical conception of a leader.

Ralston's Resignation

In the following scene, Stratton alters King's account of Ralston's resignation. King's diary describes a discussion where he justifies the need for Ralston to resign by referencing a disagreement over the feasibility of volunteer recruitment:

I then said that the people of Canada would say that McNaughton was the right man for the task, and since Ralston had clearly said that he himself did not believe we could get the men without conscription, while McNaughton believed we could, that he, Ralston, would have to tender his resignation, as he said at different time he would do if we pressed eliminating the conscription part. (King 27513)

Based on these reasons, Ralston agrees to submit a letter for resignation the following day (27514). Stratton's version of these events produces a considerably more manipulative version of King. Instead of having King discuss resignation with Ralston, he presents Ralston's withdrawn resignation letter from earlier in the play to the Cabinet. This comes as a surprise to Ralston. A bullied Ralston leaves the Cabinet:

KING: Mr. Ralston has assured me that he can do no more than he has done and that other, more drastic measures are now in order. After much painful reflection, I am forced to the conclusion that he is correct.

A few rumbling from the other Cabinet members.

RALSTON: Thank you sir.

KING: Yes, I would be loath to force any of you, my ministers, into a course of action to which you felt unable or opposed. With that in mind I have decided to surrender my opposition to his conscience.

RALSTON: (*rises, beaming, it's too good to be true*) Thank you, sir.

KING: I have accepted his letter of registration.

RALSTON: My letter of...

KING pulls RALSTON's Act One resignation letter from his coat.

KING: Mr. Ralston tendered his registration some time ago and sadly I have been forced to act on it. It is always hard to part with a colleague, especially one who has been so close, for whom one has such high respect, indeed affection. But these are times of war. The situation is extremely dangerous and conscience is all. Mr. Ralston, you are henceforth relieved of all duties. (798)

In this way, King's version of a logical argument for Ralston's resignation is supplanted with Stratton's imagined backhanded attack. Stratton portrays King using any methods necessary to achieve what he feels is best for the country.

The British Commonwealth Air Training Program

In King's diary entry dated Tuesday, October 17, 1937, he describes his meeting with British liaison officer Lord Riverdale, and other members of the British military staff. During the forty-five minute meeting, King and Riverdale discuss the British war effort and the potential of a Commonwealth-wide training program for air force pilots. This same discussion, in an

edited form, is played out in Stratton's text. While the diary is clearly the inspiration for the scene, it has been revised by Stratton to highlight King's ego and his desire to emphasize Canada's autonomy.

The account of this exchange in King's diary reads:

[Riverdale] went on to explain how necessary the training scheme was; to speak of it as "your" scheme, and to indicate the numbers that would have to be turned out from month to month, and the rapidity with which everything would have to be achieved. He then asked the Air Marshall to give me details.

When he had finished, I said to him very quietly that we all appreciated the position that Britain was in, and what she had accomplished. We were most anxious to help to the fullest extent.

We must recall, however, that there were limits to what we could do. We were but 11 million people. (King 20892)

In Stratton's adaptation of this entry, the Prime Minister is quite willing to remind the British officer that the Canadian Government will make their own decisions about participating in the war effort. King is not so much "anxious to help to the fullest extent" (King 20892), but determined to assert Canadian autonomy over the war effort:

RIVERDALE: We're also grateful for this training scheme of yours.

KING: *Your* scheme I believe. No need to be modest.

RIVERDALE: Yes. Speaking personally, training our pilots on your soil would be a worthy contribution to the British effort.

KING: The *Canadian* effort. Should we decide to make it. (759)

By repetitively referencing Canadian autonomy throughout the play, Stratton argues that King instrumentalized the war effort as a means to affirm Canada's position on the world stage, and his own significance as a leader.

King, later in the same scene, uses assistance in the training program as a bargaining chip to demand the British increase their purchase of Canadian goods. In his diary, King describes that they "carefully considered the matter of credits; that what we could do more would depend on what we could expect to obtain in the way of orders and assistance from Britain herself"

(King 20893). In Stratton's re-imagining, however, King does not so much "carefully consider"

(King 20893) as yell at Riverdale and then demand a British contribution to Canada:

KING: I appreciate your concern. But you seem to forget – this isn't *our* war.

RIVERDALE: What??

KING: Germany never threatened *us*; and we were certainly clever enough not to make treaties with Poland.

RIVERDALE: We've already apologized.

KING: AND THAT SOLVES EVERYTHING DOES IT? (*pause, then quietly*) This training plan unquestionably has merit. But before we can give it serious consideration we've got to take a hard look at financing, I'm afraid. It strikes me as passing strange that after Dunkirk you're not more in the market for Canadian guns, tanks, and what-not. And where are your orders for wheat? I suggest you substantially increase your rather spotty commissions of our goods – to help defray our expenses in this extravaganza of yours, you understand. (760)

Stratton's King goes on to demand that Riverdale issue a statement that Canada's contribution to the war effort is "more than sufficient" (761).

This scene illustrates King's preoccupation with his own political ego and historical image; a preoccupation that seems at odds with Canada's need for a strong focused leader who can make decisions in the context of the Second World War. Yet, it sets King up for a strengthened political image and Canada for a stronger international position. Thus, Stratton has adapted King's diary entry into a comedic plotment: there is at once a seeming conflict in King's methods and the groundwork for success. These three examples demonstrate Stratton's reliance on King's diaries and his approach to adapting them to match his narrative structure, which ultimately facilitates a prestigious representation of King.

"To die without leaving memoirs"

Stratton has engaged Ricoeur's prestigious qualities in his representation of King by framing the retelling with a set of narrators who remember their personal experiences of the man.

In setting up the play this way, there is a heightened awareness of the act of remembering and consequently retelling. I will explore this awareness – in Ricoeur’s terms of presence and absence, visibility and readability, icon and narrative – through the function of Stratton’s narrators and the final scene during which King discusses being remembered. This will demonstrate how Stratton has crafted a unique prestigious image of King. While he uses tools that are similar to those used by Griffiths and Fennerio, the argument he presents for ‘greatness’ is predicated upon a pursuit of justice that required balancing many interests and holding a nation together, rather than pursuing an ideal society.

Joan, Pearson, and Riverdale each function, at different times, as Stratton’s sparsely used narrators. They function as a partial response to the narrative’s fundamental question: whether or not King will be remembered by history. The narrators, based on known historical figures, serve to emphasize the affirmative answer given by Stratton and, by extension, the audience through writing and experiencing of the play. As they undergo the act of sharing their memories with the audience, McKinnie credits them with generating a tone “of reminiscence” that pervades the entire play. The narrators are not fixed in a specific moment of reflection, as they were in *Maggie & Pierre* and *The Death of René Lévesque*. They seem to reflect upon King’s life from a timeless speaking-position. This is not to say in the time of the audience, but rather from an atemporal position within the collective Canadian conscience. Nevertheless, they establish the division between present and absent elements sought by Ricoeur. The present elements in the play come from the time of remembrance, the time in which the act of remembering is taking place: this includes the present of the audience, the present in which Stratton wrote the text, and the present lived by the narrators. These times are contrasted with the absence of the remembered time. The absence of this time is not evidenced by the use of visual reminders such as the statues or gender reversed characters of the previous plays. Rather, King’s pursuit of personal legacy,

which is continuously evoked in the narrative, serves to divide the time of action that is prior to validation by historical methods from the time of remembrance that has embedded in it the act of legitimatization by history.

These divided times converge in the play's final scene. King, on his deathbed, asks, "What did I ever do?" (801). Joan answers King affirming once again Stratton's argument in favour of King's historical significance: "You kept us united" (801). She is both reassuring the dying Prime Minister and justifying her own version of his story. McKinnie claims "the play hides its own structural methodology, with all its implications for character, speech, and setting, behind the seemingly "natural" progression of its plotting and characterization." This holds true until this final scene where the structural methodology of the play is revealed, itself, to be a natural extension of the narrative. King, terrified of his lasting image, exclaims, "And to die without leaving memoirs. I can't. I have to discover the peaks. I have to prove they were there" (802). Stratton writes this line aware of his own function in discovering and presenting these "peaks." He goes on to reference King's diaries as a footnote for his retelling: "It's all in your diaries," says the ghost of King's mother (802). In this way the final scene presents the audience with an outline of the structural methodology of the play as a form of resolving King's internal conflict.

The methodology is no longer hidden but made overt. Stratton's compression of the narrative time, to what McKinnie calls "fable time," allows him to write the memoirs King never did. King's life between 1937 and 1950 is made readable by reflection only on the 'peaks,' in contrast to the exhaustive detail of his diary. King's final line, "[o]nce upon a time" (803), functions as a convergence of the edited narrative version of King's life that is presented to the audience and, the visible, iconic method of delivering this narrative. King is both the subject of the narrative and the narrator framing the story. Stratton has fully acknowledged in this scene

his role in representing King. The audience is forced to confront the act of reliving history when King – the iconic, visible figure – becomes one of the storytellers. The forced awareness of this act, as already mentioned, becomes the solution to the character's internal conflict.

Conclusion

It is important to note once again that Ricoeur's 'prestige of the image' requires two fundamental components: the use of the rhetorical qualities discussed above and the representation of the figure as a possessor of 'greatness.' And again, in contemporary terms, Ricoeur has defined 'greatness' as the pursuit of justice. This leaves in question whether Stratton's representation can be considered prestigious: do the rhetorical qualities discussed support a portrayal of King in a pursuit of justice? This is not an easy question to answer objectively because Ricoeur has intentionally omitted a definition of justice to allow space for the subjectivity necessary to any aesthetic evaluation. Ricoeur, in a sense, acknowledges that justice is context specific.

What is just in the context of a World War? Is it just to mandate conscription? These are the questions the Prime Minister struggles with throughout the play. Stratton acknowledges that the pursuit of justice is fundamentally different in the context of Canada during the Second World War than it was during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s when Trudeau and Lévesque pursued their visions of a just Canada and Québec, respectively. As King explains in the play, "They don't understand that more is accomplished by preventing bad action than by doing good" (794). Justice, for King, was holding the country together by keeping the Anglophone and Francophone communities happy. To achieve this, King had to avoid giving straight answers at times, had to mediate between his Ministers, had to ignore certain demands, and had to negotiate using any

means available to him. While these methods may, at times, seem the opposite of what a leader does, they were exactly what was required of King to reach a just outcome for the nation.

King's pursuit for recognition on the global stage and in the public eye is metaphorical for certain known issues underlying the Canadian pursuit for national identity. Gina Mallet in her Toronto Star review describes Stratton's King as "a little man fretting to strut on the world stage" (qtd. in Conolly 285). He is both afraid of how the rest of the world sees him and how history will remember him. Stratton attempts to put the little man's fears to rest by affirming his historical significance, and to answer the search for Canadian heroes by revealing King's great and unique role during the Second World War.

Conclusion

Canadian Icons & Future Inquiry

Diana Taylor, in her book *The Archive and The Repertoire*, makes the case for serious academic consideration of an embodied form of history, which she calls “the repertoire,” alongside more traditional written discourse, which she calls “the archive” (16). Griffiths, Fennario, and Stratton operate at the juncture of Taylor’s “the repertoire” and “the archive.” All three artist-historians use traditional archival sources, including autobiographical material and news media archives, to create non-traditional historical texts. These texts function as a blueprint for the embodied form of history that Taylor describes as the repertoire. Dewar’s experiential form of history and Lowenthal’s ‘heritage’ focused accounts each embrace the repertoire as a powerful form of historical discourse. Ricoeur’s ‘prestige of the image’ rhetoric explains how the two categories, the archive and the repertoire, can be combined in the representation of a political figure. Traditional written discourse is ‘narrative’, ‘readable’, and ‘absent’, while the repertoire is ‘visible’, ‘iconic’, and ‘present’. Griffiths, Fennario, and Stratton all utilize this combination to construct a portrait of a politician that attempts to affirm or reaffirm the politician’s position in a larger, active and identity-building Canadian historical narrative.

There is a long history of public figures using various forms of art to manipulate their image. Eugene F. Miller and Barry Schwartz provide numerous pertinent examples: Alexander the Great selected personal artists to spread his image across his empire to ensure he would be recognized anywhere he went; Queen Elizabeth I of England had agents to enforce particular standards for her likenesses throughout her kingdom, removing all images that did not comply; and, historical and contemporary dictators, including Louis XIV, Lenin, Kim Il Sung, and Kim

Jong Il, have gone to great lengths to control the use of their image (E. Miller 517). Political leaders in liberal democracies rarely have the same degree of control. The historians, academics, artists, and journalists who elect to reproduce their image determine how they are represented. This means that the image of these contemporary heroes are not necessarily defined by hegemonic forces, as they were in the case of Alexander the Great and Queen Elizabeth I; rather, they are constructed through representations articulated in various forms of media.

The corpus I analyzed was composed entirely of plays created by artist-historian playwrights working independent from organized political movements. However, as mediated politics becomes increasingly ‘personalized’ as Van Aelst suggests, or ‘celebrified’ as Luthar argues, there will be an opportunity to turn this grid of analysis onto the work created by, or in conjunction with, the political parties. How does the process of creation change when the politicians themselves, or their agents, become involved in telling the story? Under such circumstances, the politician of the liberal democracy may be able to exercise a level of control closer to that of Alexander the Great or Queen Elizabeth I. At this point, the historiographic grid may need to be altered. The narrative in these texts will not be focused only on capturing a version of the past, but on using that past to explain and justify a vision for the future. As Ignatieff explained, the politician’s personal narrative will be harnessed to gain standing in their community. The prestigious image of the politician in their pursuit of justice – should such a method be engaged in the future – will not be used solely to validate a position as a cultural symbol in Canadian history, but also in an attempt to legitimize a particular definition of justice for the future.

In his play *Proud*, Michael Healey portrays now former Prime Minister Stephen Harper. While he certainly was not working as an agent of the Harper Government, his play, when it was first produced in 2012, engaged with contemporary politics in a way the corpus examined in this

paper does not. Notably, Healey ventured to predict what the future in Canada would look like had Harper have remained Prime Minister over a long period. This exposes one of the limitations of this grid of analysis: its focus on representations of politicians in the past. The historiographic analysis relies on the playwright having some engagement with archival material. To adapt this method to consider forward-looking projections, one would need to analyze the playwright's justification for their vision of the future, rather than their vision of the past. This poses a challenge because the source material is likely to be imaginary and based in personal experience, rather than recorded in available documents. The question to ask would be, for example: why does Healey feel the world will look *this* way should Harper remain in office? Questions such as this one invite an even more polarizing political debate than the artist-historian's portrayal of the past. The discussion, in this situation, is not about who should be seen as a symbol of a collective past, but rather who will be a hero in the future.

This historiographic model, applied here to playwrights portraying Canadian politicians, can be applied to a wide range of historical representations. It has been useful to treat the playwright as an artist-historian. Doing so has allowed an investigation into the playwright's rapport with various levels of fact and fiction, and truth and imagination. Understanding this interaction is important as the forms of media that are available to political participants become increasingly diverse, now including traditional, social, and online medias. Readers and audience members ought to be aware of how storytellers use historical material for a variety of purposes and in a number of different ways. In this case, a range of historical material has been incorporated into the playwrights' work to position three politicians in broader collective Canadian narrative.

Maggie & Pierre, *The Death of René Lévesque*, and *Rexy!* each respond to the contemporary "need for/search for/fear of heroes" (M. Miller 188) by representing Trudeau,

Lévesque, and King as Canadian icons. As mentioned in the introduction, Ricoeur points to religious iconography and hagiography as one of the models for his ‘prestige of the image’ rhetoric. St. John Damascene, one of the leading advocates for the inclusion of holy icons in worship, describes an icon as “a model for and stimulus to moral behavior” (E. Miller 522). Damascene’s criteria can be adapted to a contemporary political context: where a religious icon presents a model or stimulus for an individual’s religious morality, the contemporary political icon presents a model or stimulus for a broader social or political morality. This is paralleled by Ricoeur’s adaption of the definition of ‘greatness’: in the religious context, ‘greatness’ was attributed to the icon who sought salvation; in the contemporary context, it is attributed to a political figure who demands justice. Thus, when Griffiths crafts a portrayal of Trudeau pursuing his form of “just society”, she is contributing to his iconic status in Canadian history by attributing a quality of contemporary ‘greatness’.

The attribution of ‘greatness’ by an artist-historian involves operation on the three historiographic levels I have demonstrated: first, a selection of archival evidence, hagiographical accounts, and fictionalized material; second, the construction of a narrative that explains the politician’s pursuit of ‘justice’; and finally, the use of Ricoeur’s ‘absences/presences’, ‘narrative/icon’ and ‘readability/visibility’ dichotomies to articulate the narrative. These steps produce historical works that inherently acknowledge the subjective nature of presenting archival material. The various framing devices intentionally reveal the personal experiences on which collective historical memory relies. While Trudeau, Lévesque, and King each have a wealth of representations in Canadian media and history, these three plays offer an important addition to the corpus of work that present these figures to Canadians and the world. Ultimately, Griffiths, Fennario, and Stratton have used these politicians as vessels for exploring an ongoing search for a national identity and, subsequently, as bricks in the edifice of this identity.

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