

**REALIZING THE FLEXIBLE IMAGINARY:
CANADIAN IDENTITY
IN CONTEMPORARY THEATRE**

By

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Abstract

Using Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* and Michael Billig's *Banal Nationalism*, this paper searches for Canadian identity in five contemporary Canadian plays. The plays are from writers of different ages, genders, ethnicities and parts of Canada, and span approximately 25 years. The dramatic texts include David French's *Jitters*, Kelly Rebar's *Bordertown Café*, Joan MacLeod's *Amigo's Blue Guitar*, Djanet Sears' *Harlem Duet* and Camyar Chai, Guillermo Verdecchia and Marcus Youssef's *The Adventures of Ali and Ali and the Axes of Evil*. The paper determines, after much exploration of the plays' characters and their actions, that flexibility is the notion reinforced as the Canadian ideal. The multicultural, liberal, egalitarian nation of Canada imagines itself as able to shift or change whenever necessary. With respect to individual identities, group dynamics and inhabited spaces, this flexibility is requisite for Canadian citizens. The mimetic nature of theatre suggests it maintains an important role in the continual quest to discern the Canadian identity. In mirroring society, the theatre offers a clear indication of the perspectives which dominate the imaginations of Canadian playwrights and, therefore, their plays. The theatre and society will continue to reflect one another; in Canada, they will do so with flexibility.

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Introduction

The socially mimetic quality of theatre makes it a valuable means through which to explore questions of national identity and pride. Canadian theatre scholar Alan Filewod has recently written a fascinating book about the intrinsic connection between theatre and nation, exploring their relationship through Benedict Anderson's notion of the 'imaginary.' Filewod's *Performing Canada: The Nation Enacted in the Imagined Theatre* sets out to understand the complex relationship between nation and theatre, claiming that there is a "deep[er] conceptual structure, where the national imaginary embraces the theatrical imaginary" (Filewod x). Anderson's imaginary is employed to discuss how both theatre and nation exist as "loosely defined concept[s] having to do with collectively shared (but not necessarily harmonious) narratives and experience" (ix). This correlation suggests that the prevalence of Canada's national identity is deeply entrenched within the past and present of Canadian theatre. He further asserts that theatre, as a constructed performance, "integrates with its society through various mutually supporting structures," and so "it is barely separable from the 'totalizing ideologies of Canadian society'" (ix). Thus, if notions of national identity are embedded within the theatre, and the two possess an overarching alliance in their imaginary definitions, I would argue that Michael Billig's concept of banal nationalism can also be observed in the theatrical domain. Billig suggests that nationalism is continually reinforced in small, but infinitely important ways in all aspects of the everyday world, and is therefore adopted into the subconscious of a nation's citizens (Billig 6). In this paper, I will examine how the theatre portrays, explores, champions or repudiates the characteristics of this nationalism. Furthermore, if this nationalism exists as a fundamental aspect of Canadian identity, why is it so prevalent in the theatre? Building on Filewod's argument that nation and theatre are inherently linked, I intend to explore how the presence of an imaginary national ideal in the theatre serves a greater purpose in the construction of Canadian identity.

In order to determine whether this imagined standardization of national values and pride truly exists, I will use a cross-section of contemporary English Canadian plays. The plays I have chosen to examine as examples of national imagining or explorations of banal nationalism include a spectrum of styles, time periods, geographic origins, and playwrights. Four of the five plays have received significant Canadian accolades, including Dora Mavor Moore Awards and Governor-General's Awards; each play has received several productions

and four of the five have been included in Jerry Wasserman's two volumes of the seminal anthology *Modern Canadian Plays*. Chronologically, the list includes David French's *Jitters*, Kelly Rebar's *Bordertown Café*, Joan MacLeod's *Amigo's Blue Guitar*, Djanet Sears' *Harlem Duet* and Camyar Chai, Guillermo Verdecchia and Marcus Youssef's *The Adventures of Ali and Ali and the Axes of Evil*.¹ I intend to locate within the aforementioned texts some common implicit ideas, which may not be immediately recognizable due to their prevalence in the realm of the banal. Using Billig and Anderson's theories, I hope to uncover examples of deep-seated national ideals that may exist on a subconscious level. At the centre of my analysis lie the content and characters of each play, with some discussion of mise en scene to expose supporting illustrations. The plays provide a multi-faceted lens through which to further examine imaginary constructs – those of identity, theatre, the nation and nationalism.

Identity is an elusive and complex concept, encompassing the construction and deconstruction, negotiation and defence of self-understanding, both in terms of groups and individuals. Although many different theorists have developed ideas about the formation of identity, I will rely most heavily on philosopher David Hume's interpretation, which suggests that the self is "a bundle of sense impressions, that continually changed as the individual had new experiences or recalled old ones" (Edgar 184). In conjunction with Emile Durkheim, who asserts that "the individual was a product of society [...so] a modern understanding of individuality [...] was a product of that particular culture," we may conclude that individual identity exists as a compilation of sensory impressions which have been determined by the culture in which one lives (184). Thus, one understands the world, and him/herself in the world, through his/her collective development process within a given culture. A fundamental aspect of that identity includes one's understanding of and relationship to the immediate space that s/he inhabits, as well as the surrounding philosophical and physical world.

If individual identity is composed of a collection of experiences and sensory reactions to the outside world, then the nation, as a key place for the formation of culture, can be understood to have a strong influence on the way one understands oneself. Of course, each individual within that nation will remain an autonomous being, but in the same way that one may belong to a family or religious group, one also belongs to a nation. That is, individuals, though independent of one another, maintain a sense of common identity through specific shared aspects of these belief systems to which each individual subscribes. Although every person may choose to ally him/herself with only certain elements of the

common vision, the theories of the renowned anthropologist Benedict Anderson and prominent sociologist Michael Billig assert that nationalism, as a core element of national identity, involves less conscious choice than we readily recognize.

Anderson's *Imagined Communities* and Billig's *Banal Nationalism* have led me to believe that nationalism is not a dirty word. Based on their theories, I would assert that all people who live in an established nation maintain a sense of nationalism, and it is virtually irremovable from one's identity. I believe that this is due to the nature of nationalism, as defined by Anderson and Billig: it is infused in everyday life to such an extent that its presence is indiscernible and therefore deeply entrenched within each citizen's identity.

The concept of nation as it is being used in this paper is based on Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, which has been a mainstay in sociological and anthropological discussions around nationalism since its first publication in 1983. Anderson claims that a nation is "an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (Anderson 6). It is imagined in the sense that "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (6). In order for such an otherwise unconnected group to foster a sense of community, the group must work to ally itself by way of specific images, ideas and beliefs.

The way in which a nation is imagined is integral to its citizen's cohesion. According to Anderson, the nation is imagined as limited because of its "finite, if elastic boundaries, beyond which lie other nations" (7). That is, it must have distinct, if arbitrary, borders to separate itself from other nations and their identities. He also claims it is imagined as sovereign because the concept of nation arose during a time when religion dictated the order of society; thus, the nation has come to symbolize organization established outside the constraints of religious hierarchy (7). Finally, a nation is imagined as a community because its fundamental roots are seen as a "deep, horizontal comradeship [...] regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail" (7). Thus, the affiliates of a nation conceive of themselves as inherently connected to one another, possessing something distinct from other nations, which is common to all its members; these people comprise a community in a limited and bounded space. The manner in which a nation imagines itself allows it to be distinguished from other nations; this is national identity.

Michael Billig builds on Anderson's *Imagined Communities*. He asserts that notions of the imagined community are encouraged through the dissemination of "a whole complex set of beliefs, assumptions, habits, representations and practices" (Billig 6). It is through everyday reminders of affiliation, on television and in newspapers, that national identity is created and affirmed for citizens, thereby resulting in a sense of national pride. Billig claims that "the metonymic image of banal nationalism is not a flag which is being consciously waved with fervent passion; it is the flag hanging unnoticed on the public building," for nationalism is not only created through the extraordinary, but also in the realm of the banal (8). That is, concepts of national identity are flagged to members of the nation with such regularity that they are consistently forgotten or overlooked. National ideology becomes so entrenched in everyday rhetoric by politicians and media that citizens are not required to conjure it up on their own. "It is argued that these habits are not removed from everyday life, as some observers have supposed," states Billig (6). Instead, "Daily, the nation is indicated, or 'flagged,' in the lives of its citizenry. Nationalism, far from being an intermittent mood in established nations, is the endemic condition" (6). Because these national ideologies are so deeply ingrained, the individual citizen is subconsciously receiving information that reminds him/her of his/her national affiliation on a consistent basis. Choosing to filter out subconsciously transmitted messages is difficult even when one is made aware of them, but according to Billig, most people would not even recognize these markers as proponents of nationalism.

Billig's book is essentially an exploration of how nationalism is not simply developed and propagated in periods of crisis or by fervent jingoists. He claims that national pride and loyalty are deeply rooted in the subconscious of all a nation's people, making it easy for politicians to call upon that patriotism readily, so that although the feeling may lie dormant for periods, it is easily evoked because of the regularity with which it is flagged in every day life. An example of such a banal reminder can be seen in daily news broadcasts. In a recent CBC presentation called "Your Turn with the Prime Minister," Prime Minister Paul Martin repeatedly referred to the collective 'we' -- to be understood as 'we - Canadians.'² The referral to 'us,' 'we,' or even 'the country,' all of which are consistently used by politicians, sports fans, the media, and consequently, the general public, creates an immediate sense of communion among all those Canadians who watch.³ These assertions work to establish a sort of in-group that is self-aware, though not conscious, of its Canadian-ness.

Billig suggests that Pierre Bordieu's concept of 'habitus' can further explain the process by which citizens are practicing their banal identity without being conscious of all its attributes. Billig claims that "if banal life is to be routinely practised...it occurs when one is doing other things, including forgetting" (42). To summarize the Bordieu theory:

'habitus' expresses well this dialectic of remembering and forgetting. The 'habitus' refers to the dispositions, practices and routines of the familiar social world. It describes 'the second nature' which people must acquire to pass mindlessly (and also mindfully) through the banal routines of daily life. (42).

Thus, if notions of nationalism are evoked with such regularity in everyday life as to become naturalized or *second nature* within citizens' world views, then this nationalism must exist in all aspects of life that comprise a country, including its politics, values, and art. If Billig's theory is correct, then nationalism should exist on a subconscious level in everything.

This nationalism, this pride in the homeland, stems from an ideally and collectively imagined notion of nation. As Canada has developed from a colonial to an independent state, it has continually sought an identity; this identity has most often been distilled through comparison with value systems in other countries. Specifically, Canada has long looked to the U.S. to determine what it does not want to be. So, in the development of such a set of ideals, Canada has determined its own set of social value systems, by which it would, ideally, like to be recognized. According to Billig, "to achieve a positive identity, groups will tend to compare themselves positively with contrasting outgroups" (66). These, in turn, become stereotypes by which the ingroup may positively recognize itself and thereby maintain its existence. In order to disseminate such an identity, the attitudes and behaviours must be enacted regularly, in all facets of life. So, the collective imagining of an idealized set of values and conduct is reinforced to a nation's citizens in the realm of the banal, in order to develop and promulgate a national identity and national pride.

The following chapters examine the five selected plays in detail, relying heavily on the characters and their dialogue to analyze the presence of recurring tropes and their relevance to national identity. The first chapter looks at the prevalence of personal insecurity, which develops in each character for different reasons. Through the maintenance of group equality, the characters are able to regularly enact various attitudes to combat such feelings in different ways. Chapter Two observes the reconstruction of the characters' social units, particularly by re-imagining the roles of family members or enacting

different personas with particular family members in an effort to achieve a desired outcome. Chapter Three examines the journey that is common to all the characters: the quest for home. All of the plays are set in liminal spaces of sorts, physical and psychological 'in-between' spaces, which make it easier for the characters to change as needed.

To me the most evident overarching ideal that prevails in each of the plays is the notion of flexibility. Whether this flexibility allows an individual to combat feelings of insecurity or unearth new details about him/herself, it enables the characters to change their perspectives on themselves, each other and the world in which they live. More importantly, this flexibility allows those perspectives to continue to change and shift, as needed. In each character, in each family, in each place, the most predominant similarity is the desire and ability to shift, reconfigure or change. The imaginary nation involves several qualities that connect the citizens of Canada; within that identity lies a banal nationalism, a key source of which is the capacity to remain flexible. This elastic model has existed throughout the nation's history: although the French and English settlers of Canada initially battled against one another, they eventually accepted the co-existence of their cultures. This has since broadened vastly and Canada now embraces cultures from all around the world. It has become a principle which is reinforced with such regularity in the everyday world that it is intrinsic in the plays of this research. The prevalence of this ideal in all aspects of the plays suggests that it is a notion which is crucial to the alliance of Canada's citizens. Flexibility is the national ideal and it is dually reinforced: it exists in the realm of the banal, so it is reflected on the stage; this staged portrayal of such ideals then works its way back into the psychology of the citizens who witness the plays. The mimetic cycle is complete as the national ideal is flagged both explicitly, as characters physically portray different personas, and implicitly, as they psychologically inhabit new roles. This notion of flexibility is then accepted and recycled into the world of everyday Canada.

Chapter One

Managing Insecurity: The Need for Individual Flexibility

The exploration of nationalism via the theatrical domain requires a bit of historical background. Through his discussion of various theatrical endeavours in Canada ranging from *The Theatre of Neptune* in 1606 to Garth Drabinsky's musical theatre monopoly of the 1990s, Filewod shows how Canadian theatre offers "a constant historical citation and recitation of the postcolonial crises of authenticity and displacement" (xvii). He articulates the commonly evoked trope of national maturity, with Canada continually cited as a 'young' country. Yet, as Filewod explains, "Canada is no 'younger' than Italy or Germany. Like them, it is a product of nineteenth-century liberal nationbuilding, but unlike them, Canada could not legitimize the national state by a mythic invocation of racial unity" (2). This is a valid and intriguing point: although Canada is, like other nations, historically 'young,' it has the less common distinction of having a very diverse population, ethnically and culturally. Canada's history lies in the founding "two solitudes" of the French and English. Eventually, the two solitudes gave way to many solitudes, as Trudeau proclaimed Canada a 'cultural mosaic,' the outcome of which was the adoption of the Official Multiculturalism Act in 1971 ("Multiculturalism").

The implementation of the Official Multiculturalism Act has resulted in continually high rates of immigration. New people welcomed onto Canadian soil are encouraged to maintain their native languages and cultures. While the presence of various cultures within a single nation can certainly work to encourage cultural exchange and tolerance, it can also result in an increased anxiety about the stability of a national identity. As people living in a country that aims to embrace a broad spectrum of differing qualities and ideas, Canadians often feel uncertainty about the true identity of their nation. This, in turn, presents obstacles for people trying to comfortably discern individual identities. So how does this insecurity impact people? More importantly, what strategies have they devised to combat such feelings?

Alan Filewod cites American theatre scholar Rosemarie K. Bank's concept of "*theatre culture*: the notion that peoples in a culture stage themselves and perform multiple roles" to address the idea that "theatre is a practice that cannot be separated from the

multiplicity of fields in which culture operates" (Filewod 5). The interplay between cultural and national representation may be virtually indiscernible. Within this finely interwoven relationship, we may, however, elicit themes that seem to arise simultaneously, indicating that a nation reflects the theatre and vice versa. I believe that the attitude that prevails in the plays can be collectively termed flexibility.

In the plays I have chosen, each of the characters is plagued by a sense of personal self-doubt, which results in an attempt to alter or shift the self. Although there are elements beyond the state of the nation affecting the characters' self-consciousness, surely the omnipresence of insecurity in everyday life has contributed to this state of uncertainty. Canadians live in a nation defined, in part, by its mosaic population: diversity is embraced and encouraged by the government and the people of the nation. Furthermore, in the last twenty years, Canada has also made significant strides in promoting gender equality and tolerance of homosexuality through governmental policies. This widespread support for differences trickles down into the banalities of everyday life, which reinforces the principle of diversity with such regularity that, ideally, it shifts from rhetoric to practice. That is, the diverse ideal is so heavily entrenched in the realm of the banal that people will move from upholding the ideal philosophically to actually practicing the acceptance and encouragement of diversity. I would also suggest that supporting diversity innately promotes an egalitarian society: differences are embraced and everyone is equally respected. Furthermore, if people maintain positions of equality, they are more likely to test out new attitudes, as there is less risk involved than if the group were more distinctly stratified. Equality seems to provide the ideal condition for people to explore themselves in pursuit of self-fulfillment. Thus, the promotion of diversity and equality results in insecurity brought on by a lack of a singular identity and the fear or discouragement of making people into heroes. More importantly, singularity and individuality do not seem to be desirable ideals.

As a result, the characters in the plays often occupy multiple roles in their attempt to change their own perspectives and eventually enable personal fulfillment. David French invites an examination of people who are commonly plagued by insecurity: his play is about artists. French himself openly admits to his own feelings of insecurity, indicating that he used to go backstage before performances and throw up (Bemrose 1988). Because of this, he claims that he is "the perfect guy to write a play about actors called *Jitters*" (ibid). In *Jitters*, we meet several characters openly struggling to be reassured of their identity. This

notion is most explicitly treated when one of the older male actors, Phil, tries to assert himself against another actor's petty personal attack. In doing so, he offers insight into his individual battles: "He wants to undermine my confidence," Phil proclaims, "... but the laugh's on him. I don't have any!" (French 49). Although Phil's insecurities have developed for a myriad of reasons, including an overprotective mother, the national sense of insecurity has surely had an impact on him as well. *Jitters* offers several acerbic observations about the state of Canadian pride or confidence, all of which culminate in the suggestion that there is no such thing. As the playwright Robert states on opening night, "They hate success in this country. They punish you for it" (50). Such a comment makes the claim that a pervasive feeling of insecurity exists among Canadians caused by a lack of individual encouragement; if one is punished for being successful, then anxiety is sure to arise from that sense of uncertainty. These characters are forced to enact more than one identity simply to maintain any sense of self: although they long for success and the pride that accompanies it, they are assured that such confidence is not well received in Canada. In this, we see exemplified the lack of praise for individuals, the choice not to celebrate one person. The characters are aware of the impossibility of individual success in Canada, because to make one person a hero implies that someone else is not as successful – hero-making is not encouraged in the egalitarian Canadian society. Everyone in *Jitters* seems aware of the parity that must prevail among all: no one can be singled out as better than anyone else. I would suggest that this equality provides the ideal conditions for self-exploration, allowing characters to try out different personas, as needed. Whether the characters truly believe in their abilities or not, they often outwardly proclaim humility, making it apparent that they are modest. This is not the sole persona adopted by all characters, though, as each one works to find which roles work for him/herself.

Interestingly, the problem of insecurity is recognized by all of the characters in the play, though not all of them feel convinced that the solution lies in the land of pride and success: the United States. Early in the second act, Patrick argues with Jessica, and their conflicting views about leaving Canada to work in the U.S. become more evident. Jessica claims that she's "got the guts to work outside this country," while Patrick finds comfort on the less dangerous stages of Canada (44). After all, as he tells Jessica: "I make a damn good living here. I have my pick of roles. I may not be a star, but who is in this country?" (62). Patrick is obviously masking his own personal longing for validation. By choosing to play at humility, he obligingly enacts an acceptable persona. That is, in a country in which

everyone must be accepted, no single individual should be put on a pedestal, and Patrick embodies this notion. He is a model example of the encouraged Canadian identity: though he desires a confirmation of his ability, as evidenced by his suggestion that George, the director, tell him he's "a helluva great actor" (98), he tries to mask this aspiration, claiming "...not everyone feels that compulsion to outshine" (62). Patrick wants validation, but he tries to cover this. His insecurity outweighs his desire for validation and he assumes an attitude of humility.

The answer to this problem of Canadian insecurity is provided for many characters by the imminent arrival of the important American producer, Bernard Feldman, who is considering taking the show to Broadway. If this move occurs, the Canadian artists may find self-assuredness in America. In the U.S., pride, success and individuality are embraced, encouraged. And not everyone hides his/her anticipation of Bernard Feldman's arrival in the same way that Patrick does. Some characters openly admit that they are depending on Feldman's arrival to make them successful. Never is this more apparent than in the discussion between George and his assistant, Susi, after she takes a phone call.

George: Don't tell me. If it's bad news, I don't want to hear.

Susi: The babysitter just called. Your wife's in the hospital. She tripped on the way down the steps and broke her leg.

George: Oh, God, I thought you were going to tell me Feldman couldn't make it.

Susi: You never let me finish. He just called from the airport. His plane was late getting in. Soonest he could be here, he said, was forty minutes. (100).

George's reaction indicates how truly important Feldman's presence really is -- apparently it is more important than George's wife being taken to hospital. This sentiment becomes apparent as each of the characters finds out that Feldman is not coming. Even if Phil does receive "the best reviews of [his] life... nothing will happen... Feldman was [his] only hope: he was an American. Down there they embrace success. Up here it's like stepping out of line" (139). Phil's proclamation that being successful in Canada is apparently frowned upon provides another example of the egalitarian attitude which is encouraged in Canada. If one actor were more successful than another, inequality would arise. It seems a better prescription is to maintain a sense of insecurity: it keeps one humble and in line with the rest of the company.

Jitters bitterly proclaims that insecurity is a part of the Canadian identity, and that only by moving south of the border can this self-consciousness be put to rest. At the end of the play, though Feldman does not arrive, George reassures Phil that "he's not the only producer in New York" (139). There will surely be other opportunities - *American* validation is still an eventual possibility. These definitive indications of insecurity represent just how deep-rooted these ideas truly are. All of the characters have a longing to reconcile their feelings of insecurity, but they recognize that the only means by which they can do so is to venture to the United States, where people take pride in their success, as opposed to masking or discarding any personal sense of confidence.

This presents an idea that is quite deeply ingrained in the characters' activities and dialogue. The characters portray a definite sense of insecurity throughout the play; I would argue that this feeling is an aspect of the Canadian identity. Given that playwright David French also openly admits to his own feelings of insecurity, it seems reasonable to draw a correlation between life and art. Furthermore, the characters are expected to maintain an individual sense of flexibility: in order to combat that impeding insecurity, the characters display humility at times, scorn at others and occasionally refute the value systems of the U.S. in their attempt to keep their insecurities at bay. It is also interesting to observe the sense of equality that the characters have: although they do each want to be singled out for praise, they are not surprised when it does not occur. As Jessica says, "I have never walked out of a show in my life. The day I decide to let down my fellow actors I guarantee you will be the first to know" (134). She clearly feels a great obligation to her group - although she was panned by the critics, she chooses to continue to work on the production, so as not to let down the group. The sense of group solidarity prevails, as it scorns individuality and obscures insecurity. Though I do not claim it is an allegory for Canada, *Jitters* certainly presents some keen reflections on national identity.

In Kelly Rebar's *Bordertown Café*, we encounter another cast of insecure Canadian characters. Again, the characters recognize their lack of confidence and they, too, are convinced that the U.S. offers a potential elimination of such feelings. Although the insecurity manifests itself in different ways than in *Jitters*, its presence is still definitely apparent. In Rebar's play, the contrast between the Canadian and American sense of national identity is prevalent. The audience is provided with an accessible contrast with the presence of Maxine, the American grandmother, among her Canadian counterparts

Marlene, Jimmy and Grandad Jim. The dialectical nature of the relationship between the Canadian and American sense of self offers an insightful perspective on national identities. Specifically, we see behaviour indicative of insecurity in the Canadians as compared to the confidence in the American.

Strong feelings of envy and inferiority are dredged up while Marlene and Jimmy await the boy's absent American father's return to Canada; these feelings of insecurity are difficult to control. One way that Marlene tries to defend herself is to scorn Jimmy's father Don's lavish gifts. She says that she does not want Jimmy "to grow up spoiled, but his dad shows up here with a top o' the line model" (47). It seems "Don was always showin' up with somethin' for that kid" – things that Marlene couldn't afford to buy for Jimmy (39). Obviously, Marlene is jealous of her American ex-husband's ability to give Jimmy things, which in turn makes her feel insecure, but she does not want to display this emotion. Instead, she defends herself by playing humility. Near the beginning of the play, when Marlene is first confronted with the possibility of Jimmy's leaving for America with his father, she says to her son, "I-I-I'm not sayin' it's any great shakes livin' here" (32). By acting meek, she tries to gain Jimmy's sympathy so that he won't leave her. Furthermore, enacting this role of humility enables Marlene to feel somehow in control of her situation. She knows that she can't expect to provide the extravagant American lifestyle that Don can, but she actually uses this to her advantage, "because [she] can put two and two together as good as anyone, even *if* [she] only got junior high" (49). Moreover, Jimmy sees an admirable value, humility, being portrayed, and he learns to adopt such an attitude himself.

Jimmy knows that it is an admirable quality because not only does Marlene enact humility, but his Grandad Jim seems to embody it also: Jim is "just this perfect human-type guy...[that] no-one'll say a bad word about" (50). Although I would not argue that Jim is necessarily insecure, he certainly takes on the modest role that Marlene so readily portrays. When confronted with Jimmy's praise, Grandad humbly says, "Oh, Jimmy, where you got such a silly notion of me," suggesting that he is just a regular old Albertan farmer and so is not worthy of acclaim (51). Thus, we see another example of how not to glorify or single out an individual. The play shows Jim as a truly ideal person -- a stereotypically humble, but wise, farmer. This persona then becomes Jimmy's model: he wants to be humble and good, like his mother and his grandfather. And it seems that Jimmy has been a good student;

throughout the play, his mother and grandmother praise him as a star hockey player, but Jimmy remains modest, as evidenced in the following scene.

Jimmy: Max, you seem to have this big idea that I'm someone at that school. I'm no one.

Maxine: You're more'n your mother was.

Jimmy: Well, I maybe am but I'm not no hero.

Marlene: I didn't have no time for friends when I was rushin' back home to work dinner shift, but never mind, I-

Maxine: You tell your coach you wanna try a-out for the team, he'll letcha, star player like you were last year. Huh, Mar?

Jimmy: Star.

Maxine: You were the best player on the team last year, the *league* – ask your grandad.

Jimmy: Grandad? –All Grandad said was my coordination was improving. I didn't even know my coordination was bad. (53).

This exchange indicates how Jimmy feels insecure about his role at school and on the hockey team. But Jimmy masks his insecurity with humility even though he is obviously a good hockey player. The scene also indicates the notion of minimizing individuals as heroes. It seems that he has learned lessons of equality and modesty from his mother and Grandad.

Jimmy's grandmother, on the other hand, embodies the stereotypical American attitude of arrogance. Unlike the modest Jim, Maxine brags to Jimmy about all things American, claiming that everything in the U.S. is better than that of Canada, as she tells Jimmy: "I was raised down there, I know how they think – *me*, us, we're first, we're best" (52). This attitude is further exemplified in Maxine's discussion of her baseball skills: "All Americans can [play ball], they're the best baseball players in the United States, 'er the world - I was lead pitcher for my team, that's how good I was" (38). Clearly, in *Bordertown Cafe*, the attitude of a Canadian is different from that of an American. Humility is a favoured Canadian reaction to feelings of insecurity and becomes an attribute staunchly assigned to the occupants north of the 49th parallel.

Like the characters in *Jitters*, Marlene and Jimmy of *Bordertown Café* hope that the appearance of an American figure will somehow validate their lives. After all, as Maxine

claims, Canada only has the West Edmonton Mall, and “that shoppin’ cenner don’t hold a candle to Disneyland” (48), while the U.S. has so much more to offer, with “fairs bigger’n anything you’d ever find up here [in Canada]” (38). Because they feel they don’t measure up to American standards, notions reinforced by Don’s nonchalance and Maxine’s criticism of all things Canadian, both Jimmy and Marlene feel inferior, which is then hidden by showing contempt for the American way of life or enacting humility. Marlene and Jimmy’s quest for fulfillment is a tortured one: although America offers potential happiness and excitement, life in Canada, where they have a home, family and a hockey team, is definitely safer. They choose to alternate between expressing their envy of American life at times, while masking it at others with humility and scorn. In the end, the characters decide to stay in Canada, where, as Jimmy claims, “we’re not caught up in spending a lot o’ money on houses, we’d rather...travel” (64). This idea that Canadians will travel seems to be yet another assertion of national humility: big houses would suggest a flaunted affluence, not at all suitable for the humble Canadian. Furthermore, traveling indicates the model of flexibility that we have seen in *Jitters* as well. Characters have to be able to move and change -- in this they are enacting the ideal Canadian identity. So, with derision of the American value system, Jimmy makes his final decision to follow in the footsteps of his noble, humble Canadian Grandad, instead of his confident, glamorous American father.

Unlike *Jitters*, in which the characters are destined to continue to wait for validation, at the end of *Bordertown Café* the characters make a conscious decision to remain in Canada. And, more optimistically, they decide not to “chase after somethin’ unless it’s worth having” – and an American life is apparently not worth the chase (63). So, in Rebar’s play, Canadian values defeat American allure, but that allure does not disappear. David French’s play, on other hand, closes with much more cynicism, though it is significant that the characters stay in Canada, destined to live out their moderately successful, insecure lives.

In a review of the Blyth Festival production of *Bordertown Café* in 1987, *Maclean’s* magazine theatre critic John Bemrose claimed that Rebar’s play was successful because it was capable of “provoking the thrill of self-recognition in the community” (Bemrose 49). This statement completely supports the argument that the theatre operates as a mimetic art form, allowing Canadians to see themselves represented on stage. Moreover, it reinforces notions of national identity, confirming for the audience the imagined ideal: Canadians may be insecure, but their flexibility allows them to combat such feelings. They recognize their

own insecurities in the characters on stage and see them utilizing humility or derision as coping mechanisms. Bemrose went on to say that the play represented the Blyth Festival at its best, as "it deliver[ed] a healthy dollop of comedy while reflecting unobtrusively on the relationship of Canadians with their flashier American cousins" (49). These statements support the suggestion that the theatre is working mimetically to reinforce notions of national identity.

As we move into the 1990s, we see that insecurity is still a prevalent issue for Canadian characters. In *Amigo's Blue Guitar*, the Canadian characters are affected by their inability to carve out clear roles for themselves. And, yet again, we find an American character present, offering a quick contrast between the traits of Canadians and Americans. As the matriarchal figure in the play, Martha is an American visiting her son's family in western Canada. At numerous points throughout the play, Martha implicitly invokes her American citizenship in her denunciations of specifically Canadian ideas. For example, in Martha's first scene, she informs the family that she "brought two turkeys up for Thanksgiving," even though her granddaughter, Callie, informs her that the family "already had Thanksgiving last month" (MacLeod 230). But there is to be no discussion about this and Martha begins planning for the celebration of American Thanksgiving with her Canadian family. Martha then naively asks about the stove: "Is it in the metric too?" implying that she would not be able to cook using "the metric," and thus, this difference is not a good one (230). Yet even though her husband is dead and her son and grandchildren live in Canada, Martha seems content to stay locked into her outsider position as an American, choosing to maintain her home near Portland, Oregon. There seems to be no feeling of insecurity within Martha. Instead, she comfortably converses with Elias, the refugee from El Salvador, making faux pas without reservation, and singing a Tex-Mex style song by Kitty Wells in order to show off her (lacklustre) Spanish. Unlike her grandchildren, Martha feels no sense of instability about her identity: she is definitely comfortable with who she is.

Martha's Canadian grandchildren, on the other hand, are both overwhelmed by their insecurities. These characters want to do something important in the world, such as enable refugees to come into Canada, yet they remain incapable of doing anything to save themselves from their own insecurities. When Sander drops out of school in favour of becoming a first aid attendant, he answers his father's question: "What is it that you care about, Sander?" with a single word reply: "Nothing" (249). This shows Sander's inability to

remain focused on any one thing, opting instead to work on several different things: he drops out of college to get his first aid certification, chooses not to work with his father on the fishing boat in hopes of working at a mill or logging camp instead, and then virtually abandons Elias once he arrives in Canada. This myriad of activities suggests Sander's attempt at flexibility: he is trying out several different personas in hopes of finding one that works for him; in the meantime, he enacts various roles as required. But Sander shows signs of his insecurity as well. He does not think he is very good at anything, which is partly why he continues to seek out new things in hopes of finding fulfillment. Perhaps this idea is reinforced by Sander's father, who chastises him for plagiarizing an essay and suggests that he is "as organized as a two year old" (233). These kinds of statements do not aid in building Sander's confidence and likely work to reinforce his insecurities. As a result of these feelings, he questions his role in the family and in the world. Owen also works to encourage Sander's humility when he tells Sander: "Elias [...] must be appalled by the privileges you have, the choices" (249). Owen indicates that Sander should be humble and grateful for the opportunities that are available to him, instead of taking his good fortune for granted. Although Sander remains unsure as to which persona he should enact or what it means to be a Canadian, he defiantly asserts to his American grandmother that "I was born here [in Canada]! [...] I am not, repeat, not an American!" (246). He goes on to berate the American government, claiming that it is their actions which have resulted in Elias' torture and jail term. In doing this, Sander is attempting to discern his own national identity through the negation of another.

Unlike her brother, Callie has worked to define herself through scholastic endeavours, with which she finds success. Yet success in one arena of life certainly does not ensure the same scenario in another. Callie's insecurities become apparent in her pursuit of unfulfilling romantic relationships. Having developed insecurities about herself because of negative relationships with men like Roddy Glass, who, as Sander claims, eventually "dumped [her] for the stupidest woman on the entire west coast," Callie continues to abate her uncertainty by acquiring a new romance (241). However, Callie's attempt to develop a relationship with Elias is also unsuccessful -- they have a brief affair based on sex. Although Callie had hoped Elias would really love her, she comes to learn that Elias is still in love with his girlfriend Marina from El Salvador. In fact, Elias lies to Callie to get her assistance in the sponsorship of Marina, further sinking Callie into the depths of self-doubt and insecurity. Callie's insecurity is most obvious when she dishonestly tells Elias that she

was born in a boat. Apparently, Callie feels so overwhelmed by her insecurities that, as Jerry Wasserman points out in his introduction to the play, she “insists without irony, ‘I was born!’” (Wasserman 226). Clearly, Callie is sensitive to her own lack of confidence but is unsure as to how she may overcome this. She tries to be flexible: she learns about Elias’ culture, she tries to sponsor a refugee as well, she tries to embark on numerous relationships, but ultimately Callie has not yet found the roles that work for her. When Elias suggests that they not tell the rest of the family about their spending the night together, Callie immediately assumes that it is somehow her fault. Her insecurities again become apparent while in bed with Elias, when she says, “You didn’t want this. You didn’t want this to happen” (MacLeod 244).

As the play closes, it seems that neither Callie nor Sander has found the best means to negotiate this insecurity in a positive way: they enact humble roles occasionally and they attempt to remain flexible, but they are not entirely successful. At the very end of the play, Sander does seem to find a way to reconcile his feelings of insecurity by comforting Elias and truly listening to him. He realizes that flexibility is truly a key to fulfillment: instead of seeing the world in black and white, Sander begins to observe the multiple shades of grey. In doing this, perhaps Sander has started to discern a national identity – he chooses flexibility and Canada, both of which are imperfect, but may save lives. The play’s final scene, in which Callie and Martha learn of Marina’s disappearance, shows the potential for Callie’s insecurities to take over: the reality of a world in which people do not love you, people lie and people even disappear may be too much for Callie to bear. She is unsure about how to cope with such sadness. But while Martha is unwilling to recognize even the possibility of someone being lost, claiming, “People don’t just disappear,” Callie, through Elias, has become aware that, “Yes, Grandma, they do” (256). Her realization about the potential tragedy of the world has forced her from her land of dreams: she can no longer claim she was born in a boat or hope that the Salvadoran refugee will fall madly in love with her. In this awakening, Callie recognizes that the world is not solely about her. As she says, “I never meant her [Marina] any harm,” we recognize that Callie has made a significant discovery (256). Her personal insecurities are less important, as she, like her brother, grows to understand the need for flexibility: people must be able to change and grow in order to help each other through life in this sad world. Like French and Rebar, MacLeod ends the play on a note of cynicism, with the characters’ futures as yet undetermined. Like the actors

in Toronto and the farmers in Alberta, this fishing family from the west coast, and their Salvadoran refugee, adopt attitudes of flexibility as a means for negotiating their insecurities.

MacLeod once quoted a negative review of *Amigo's Blue Guitar*, in which the critic claimed the play,

might have been more interesting if MacLeod could move away from the stereotype of passive, self-deprecating Canadians...and create a family with a little more moxie. Then – without being political in a silly way – it might be possible to underline that both they and Elias come from small and powerless countries, and that this has helped to shape their personalities in a profound fashion. (MacLeod 1998 9).

As this was a first production of the play, MacLeod was logically disappointed and, in the article from which this quote was taken, she discusses the overpowering insecurities that she dealt with following the review. I find it very interesting that more than one of these playwrights has commented on her/his personal insecurities in conjunction with discussions about their plays. This leads me to believe that my suggestion about national insecurity may, in fact, be plausible. Surely, if we consider Billig's ideas about the persistence of a national identity in the real of the banal, it would seem that we are finding evidence to show the prevalence of insecurity in the playwrights and their dramas. And in considering Filewod's arguments about the overlap of theatre and nation, this notion of insecurity seems to prevail both inside and outside the theatre. Thus far, both the playwrights and their characters have dealt with their insecurities through adopting flexible attitudes: the playwrights have persevered to write more plays in different styles, while their characters have persevered to change their attitudes toward life in Canada.

In *Harlem Duet*, the British-born, Canadian-raised playwright Djanet Sears introduces us to yet another cast of insecure characters. *Harlem Duet* is a (p)re-telling of Shakespeare's *Othello*, featuring Billie as the black wife that Othello had before (Desde)Mona. Interestingly, in this play the majority of characters is American, though there is still an important tie to Canada. The protagonist, Billie, is a graduate student living in Harlem, who grew up in Nova Scotia with her American father and Canadian grandmother. Her single father was an alcoholic, who "couldn't carry the weight" after Billie's mother died (Sears 358). This initiated the move to Canada, where Billie's grandmother was able to help look after her and her brother Drew. The relationship between Billie and her symbolically named father Canada is rather hostile: she holds a deep-seated grudge against her father,

who was an alcoholic and also had an affair with a white woman. Now sober, Canada comes to visit and claims, "I wish things between..." suggesting that he would like to resolve their issues and develop a new relationship (358). It is worthwhile to note that Canada, Billie's father, represents a way for her to reconcile some of her earliest insecurities. Surely the impact of early traumas including the loss of her mother, the move to a new country, her father's alcohol abuse and his affair with a white woman, ingrained in Billie much self-doubt. Having observed her father replace her mother with alcohol and a white woman, Billie was shown ineffective coping mechanisms and developed uncertainty about her own role as a black woman in a North American world dominated by white people. It is also important to note that Billie is considering leaving Harlem to head back to Nova Scotia: "I could go home," she tells her landlady Magi (352). Although it seems Billie has spent the majority of her life in New York, she still considers Canada home. Thus, the freedom offered by both the place and the person called Canada is significant. As a means of dealing with her various insecurities, Billie can repair her relationship with her father and/or move back to Nova Scotia. Either way, Billie's Canadian insecurities need to be combated in some way; perhaps she needs the flexibility that Canada invites in order to allay such self-doubts.

These deep-rooted insecurities have been further compounded by the emotional rejection of her husband and the awareness of her marginalized status as a black woman. Having witnessed the usurpation of a black woman by a white woman in her past, Billie is perhaps not entirely shocked when Othello decides to leave her for a successful white woman called Mona. Whether or not she is surprised, Billie is most definitely sad and angry about Othello's leaving, and this further feeds her feelings of insecurity. But for Billie, enacting humility as a means of countering the insecurity is not useful, for she has been made to feel humility on a regular basis, simply living in the world:

When I go into a store, I always feel I am being watched...When someone doesn't serve me, I think it's because I'm Black. When a clerk won't put change into my held-out hand, I think it's because I'm Black. When I hear about a crime, any crime, I pray to God the person who did it isn't Black. I'm even suspicious of the word *Black*. Who called us Black anyway? It's not a country, it's not a racial category, it's not even the colour of my skin. (349).

Clearly, Billie has lived her whole life in a world of insecurity, always wondering if people were stereotyping and judging her because of her skin colour. As a means of compensation, I would suggest that Billie has adopted an attitude of flexibility. Although it

has been a difficult journey, she has worked hard to succeed and plans to complete her graduate degree, no matter what. Furthermore, although she lives in a logical world, studying social sciences at university, Billie also dabbles in the world of mysticism, developing potions with the intention of poisoning her ex-husband. She also exhibits an attempt to be flexible as she considers moving on, even after the traumatic loss of her husband. She is, unfortunately, not entirely successful in her attempt to be flexible. Her insecurities are not kept at bay, and Billie tries to poison Othello, which results in her eventual arrival at a psychiatric hospital.

Harlem Duet also offers a very explicit flexibility, as the main characters, Othello and Billie, actually play three different characters spanning time. These characters occupy an alternative imaginary space in which they play "He" and "She" (the Othello and Billie of 1860) as well as "Him" and "Her" (the same characters in 1928). Textually, this implies that the characters are reliving the past of their ancestors, through the present of their own lives, each distinguished by the aforementioned character name. In the staging, the shift would only be apparent by the dialogue and the setting, as the characters engage in discussions about their love and the difficulties they encounter without names ever being used. This would make the identities of the characters infinitely more malleable and provide visual evidence of this flexible ideal enacted.

Sears, like the other playwrights discussed thus far, has also been recorded admitting her personal feelings of insecurity. When asked in a 2004 interview whether or not she reads reviews, Sears replied:

I try and stay away from them unless people put them in right in front of me, because I think that even though I start off as a playwright wanting to create something that is very meaningful or looks at issues that are very hard or issues that I'm concerned with, by the time opening night comes around all I want is for people to like it.
(Buntin).

Sears' own insecurities as an artist make their way into the play, manifesting in each of *Harlem Duet's* characters in different ways. Also, like the other playwrights and their plays, we see an attempt to negotiate those feelings by maintaining a sense of flexibility – trying out different personas in order to allay insecurities and change perspectives. Sears has also been quoted commenting on Canadian identity: "We are neither this nor that," she says, "we are both. I think it's hard to form one definitive identity that is based on so many things,

but I think that's the wonderful thing about us, about Canadians" (ibid). I believe this offers a beautiful summary of the ingrained ideal I am trying to locate textually: in the realm of the everyday, the imagined national ideal may in fact deal with insecurity, but it does so with flexibility. This we see reflected again in both the world on stage and the one outside the theatre's doors.

In *The Adventures of Ali and Ali and the Axes of Evil*, the characters' level of insecurity is treated in a very different way. Ali Hakim and Ali Ababwa have just arrived in Canada from the fictional Middle Eastern country Agraba. Both characters display varying degrees of insecurity, but they seem quite aware of their capacity to counter those feelings of uncertainty by staying flexible and performing different behaviours. *Ali and Ali*, as a self-reflexive piece of theatre, readily makes use of notions of flexibility and performance. That is, this drama is quite explicit in its treatment of these ideas. For example, at one point in the play, Ali Ababwa goes into the audience in an attempt to find a spouse. Although he presents himself as a heterosexual male, he understands the liberal Canadian mindset, stating he could consider marrying a man: "Is OK, I am very open-minded" (Chai et al 102). But the text is not without pointed commentary. Although there is a great deal of humour throughout the play, there is also a sense of the truthful cultural stereotyping that still occurs in Canada, as in Ali Ababwa's monologue:

Typical. You Canadians. You're so nice and liberal and I support same-sex marriages and when you walk down the street and see a woman with a dot on her forehead, you think that's pretty cool and maybe you even have dot envy. But when it comes to blue Agrabians, well that's a whole different story now, isn't it? Oh, yes you believe blue Agrabians should share the same rights and privileges as you and no you would never discriminate against blue Agrabians and yes you think hate-crimes legislation should be rewritten to include blue Agrabians but do you think blue is sexxxxxxyyyy? (102-3).

In this speech, Ali's insecurities are present, which seem to come about as a result of some accurate ideas about Canadian society: ideologically, all cultures are embraced, but in reality prejudice can still be a problem. Some Canadians would agree with Neil Bissoondath, who argues in his book *Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada* that the government view of cultures as being about festivals is an oversimplification that leads to easy stereotyping (4-5), while others support the mosaic ideal ("Multiculturalism").⁴ These are issues that logically affect all postcolonial, multi-

cultural nations. And, although the fact that they are being treated with humour suggests the nation has arrived at an awareness of these issues, it does not erase their existence. A Canadian audience may recognize the flexible ideal, and this ideal may slowly be coming to fruition, but it still only exists philosophically for some people in Canada.

Insecurity and flexibility become important tropes in the play at other points, as well. The storyline of the play involves Ali and Ali touring a play. At the beginning, they indicate that they have just arrived at the Vancouver East Cultural Centre, where they are supposed to be presenting, according to Duncan, the theatre manager, "an ethnic family drama that offers you a window onto our nation's cultural diversity yet resonates with universal themes [...] to facilitate ongoing dialogue for personal and intercultural exploration" (Chai et al 48). On the theatre manager's command, Ali and Ali quickly portray a stereotypical ethnic-style family drama, in which a Chinese-Canadian boy and his father argue about the difficulties of being bi-cultural. In this, the national insecurity issue is treated quite explicitly, as Charlie, the Chinese-Canadian teenager, angrily exclaims to his father:

Do you understand what it's like to feel like a fruit - a banana - yellow on the outside, but white on the inside? Do you feel your soul ripping because there are two people battling inside of you? [...] I'm a chink and I'm proud!...I'm Canadian dammit! (50-1).

This dialogue clearly shows the high level of insecurity felt by those who supposedly embody the 'Canadian Dream' (52). As Sears indicated, it is a difficult position of dichotomy that one must inhabit in order to retain two distinct cultures, but it is a part of being Canadian. Upon encountering feelings of insecurity, one may combat those feelings by trying something different: remain flexible in order to find a persona that does work – one may even try to 'be both.' Furthermore, the fact that this notion has been satirized in a play within a play highlights its significance in the realm of Canadian drama. Surely, if the idea is being used as fodder for humour, if the scenario is evoked with such ease, it must be a stereotype which is readily available for scrutiny by the audience. Were this notion not so heavily ingrained in the minds of the audience, its humour would be lost, and it would appear to be inappropriate ethnic discrimination.

The insecurity prevails on another level as well. Duncan, the theatre's manager, who makes several appearances throughout the play, is Scottish-Canadian. It seems that he has lived in Canada long enough to have taken on the appropriate level of insecurity and humility. True to stereotypical Canadian form, Duncan prefaces his audience confrontation

with an apology, and then interrupts Ali and Ali's third ethnic family drama (this one about Native Canadians). When Ali states that Duncan, "as a member of the dominant culture...[has] a totalizing and homogenizing gaze that erases difference," the theatre manager quickly and defiantly proclaims that he "won't have the kind of language in [his] theatre!" (83). Duncan recognizes his role in society; as a Canadian, as an immigrant, as a cultural facilitator, he must ensure that he does not offend anyone. This overt caution coupled with the required determination of Canadians to obscure their cultural backgrounds, to be both cultures without giving too much credence to either, has instilled in Duncan a sense of self-doubt and, thus, insecurity. This becomes most apparent when he is invited to expound on his own Scottish history. In telling the story of William Wallace, Duncan is overwhelmingly passionate and excited; after all, "it's validatin', you know," he says, "to have your own people, their history, their sufferin' up here on the stage" (91). It is only through due respect being paid to all cultures that Duncan believes the play will be successful. Duncan's insecurity, brought on by his need to ensure that there is no homogenization occurring, becomes the basis for his guidance of Agrabian actors and their theatrical endeavour.

At the end of the play, Ali and Ali remain in Canada. Their simultaneous dream can be interpreted in two ways: either there will be a beautiful and peaceful return to their home country of Agraba, or they will stay and create their own Canadian-Agraba. These characters display flexibility, both implicitly in their own perception of the surrounding world and explicitly as they literally perform different identities to perhaps enable them to truly embody the ultimate flexible 'Canadian Dream' suggested by Sears (52). By staying in Canada, they may be able to be both cultures. Thus, they will overcome their insecurities by challenging stereotypes and enacting different personas, as necessary.

As the most recent and the most self-reflexive play chosen for this study, I would suggest that *Ali and Ali* provides the most provocative example of the overlapping imaginary in nation and theatre. The play offers examples of implicit and explicit commentary on the identity crisis brought on by a multi-cultural nation, as well as insightful satire on the delicate relationship between performance, nation and identity. By literally performing different identities on stage, Ali and Ali are able to evoke a discourse which relates to the political, social and theatrical world. Unlike the other plays in this research, *The Adventures of Ali and Ali and the Axes of Evil* literally walks off the stage into the audience, and its characters

partake in actual conversation with members of the audience. They are speaking about national identity to "People in Real Life Canada;" in this, I think we see a clear example of the nationalist ideal of flexibility truly working in the realm of the banal, both on stage and off (Chai et al 20).

Each of the playwrights presents a unique exploration of Canadian identity, with its implications of insecurity and flexibility. Logically, in a nation with more than two founding cultures which has been further fractured to multi-cultural, a definitive sense of national identity is difficult to distil. As elucidated by Alan Filewod, theatre and nation seem to co-exist, maintaining open borders between their practices of performance and notions of insecurity and flexibility. I believe that the imagined ideals that have Canadians endowing their stages and their lives with a pervasive nationalism are built on a seemingly contradictory humble pride in the egalitarian model, which is the ideal condition for remaining flexible both in theory and practice. The plays and their playwrights have shown an insecurity indicative of a multicultural nation. The means by which the writers and their characters negotiate these feelings of insecurity is the adoption of flexible identities that enable them to change their perspectives as necessary. In a nation of such great diversity, flexibility seems a logical way to unify.

Chapter 2

One Big Alternative Happy Family

Having established that the characters in these plays often exhibit a visible level of insecurity, I have suggested that they try to allay those feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt by adopting flexible attitudes. Yet although they may disguise or obscure these feelings of uncertainty, their methods do not seem to offer complete fulfillment. Relationships provide another means to deal with such insecurity. In each of the plays, we see characters interacting with various social groups, most of which can be seen as an alternative family structure of some kind. These social groups allow the characters to further understand and develop their identities by fulfilling certain emotional needs. I would suggest that, as with their personal mechanisms for coping with insecurity, the characters adopt flexible attitudes within their social groups. Moreover, the other group members allow these shifts, as each character subscribes to a similar hope: that maintaining flexible attitudes will allow them the freedom and support necessary to achieve their needs and desires by shifting or changing their roles within the group. The group settings are like a microcosm of the greater world around them: as in the world outside the home, the characters enact various roles depending on the need they are aiming to fulfill. This practice with shifting their positions or behaviours then enables them to function more successfully within the broader society.

The family metaphor has long been incorporated into discourse around nation. In both the realm of the everyday and in the world of academia, the nation is often compared to a family. Making this comparison is a way for a vast and complex idea, like a nation, to be understood more accessibly. Furthermore, the family on stage has often stood as a symbol of the nation, with children reacting to their parents like citizens might behave towards their governments or colonized people might revolt against their colonizers. This metaphor is useful when we consider that the members of a real-life family ideally strive to support one another and harmoniously co-exist. Although, as in a nation, this may be more a fantasy than a reality, in working through familial crises members learn more about themselves and each other -- and the same can be said for a nation: the hope is that everyone will live together harmoniously. Although these notions may exist only in the imagined world, this ideal is part of the mechanism which allows members of a nation to imagine themselves as

inherently connected. According to Anderson, this “deep... horizontal comradeship” (Anderson 7) is a key aspect of the alliance of citizens within a nation. Like an idealized family, a nation imagines itself as a unified group, maintaining an amicable co-existence.

Although it involves the promulgation of a sweeping generalization (which has been discussed at length in the past), I will venture to suggest that the families in the plays of this research may operate as allegories for the imagined nation. Taking into consideration that these plays are not intended to represent the whole of Canadian dramaturgy, it is still noteworthy that they each present an alternative family working to enable and encourage the success of its members, while providing some kind of a home for the group to inhabit.

As mentioned, all five plays provide a depiction of a family; none of these families, however, subscribes to the stereotypical nuclear family structure. Instead, each provides an alternative family unit which allows the characters opportunities to enact different roles. In *Jitters*, there are two alternative family units available for this discussion – that of the theatre company and that of the play-within-the-play. In both families, characters play multiple roles and make use of the flexible structure to aid in their individual journeys of self-fulfillment. *Bordertown Café* consists of a more traditionally defined family unit than the theatre company of *Jitters*, in that everyone is related; it consists of single mother Marlene and her son who share their daily lives with Marlene’s parents. These characters all make use of negotiable roles within that family to meet their individual emotional needs. Similarly, the family in *Amigo’s Blue Guitar* is somewhat more traditional – there is a father and his two children, but no mother. Instead there is an occasionally visiting grandmother and a resident refugee. These characters also enact a variety of roles in their personal pursuits of self-fulfillment. In *Harlem Duet*, we see a very loosely constructed family unit, involving both related and unrelated people, in which a grown woman’s family consists of her landlady, her brother and his wife and child, as well as a returned absent father and, on the periphery, an ex-husband. Finally, *The Adventures of Ali and Ali and the Axes of Evil* features two men who act as family to one another because they are a touring theatre company; they do talk about other family members who exist elsewhere, but they have only each other on a daily basis. Ali and Ali also physically portray satirical families in the plays-within-the-play. Thus, each of the plays provides ample material for discussion about the pervasiveness of the idea of alternative families. In this, I suggest we can consider a correlation between the

family on stage and that of a wider Canadian society: both imagine themselves as unified harmonious alternative families, which allow for individual and group flexibility.

Jitters is a backstage comedy, which involves a cast of nine characters: four actors, a playwright, a director and three technicians. The group is working together to produce a new play called *The Care and Treatment of Roses*. Thus, the play involves two alternative families of sorts: the family of theatre workers and the family of *The Care and Treatment of Roses*. Each family has characters playing the roles of parents and children. However, unlike a traditional nuclear family in which single characters enact these roles, the *Jitters* family and the *Rose* family offer greater flexibility, enabling characters to play, for instance, a patriarchal role when interacting with one character, then shifting to inhabit the characteristics of a child when communicating with someone else. These families are also unlike the nuclear family in their composition, possessing several parents at some points, a single parent at others or occasionally no parents at all. Perhaps the type of people who exist in the group is what makes this flexible family constitution possible. After all, these are theatre artists, whose livelihoods are based on their ability to play or create make-believe. It is very interesting to note, though, that these alternative family structures exist in *both* worlds of the play. That is, both playwright David French and the character of the writer in the play, Robert Ross, have created worlds that make use of these alternative style families.

The *Jitters* family provides lots of space for characters to explore their individual identities. George Ellsworth, the show's director, is most often found enacting the patriarchal role. George handles his position as the head of the family quite well, ensuring that things are organized and that his family is looked after. His fatherly duties are seemingly endless: every member of the cast and crew consults him at one point or another seeking both his advice and his approval. Though the actors try his patience, George calmly addresses each matter brought to him. For instance, one of the actors, Phil, complains about virtually every aspect of his costume: the pants, the collar, the shoes, and even the hairpiece that the actor himself requested. In response to this lengthy series of complaints, George simply listens and makes the necessary adjustments. Like a father, George recognizes that Phil is feeling insecure, and is willing to appease him in order to avoid a conflict, as can be seen in the following exchange:

George: Then tell Wardrobe to take Phil's pants away for the run-through.

Peggy: There's nothing wrong with his pants.

George: I know that, but let him think they've been worked on. He'll drive us crazy, otherwise. (French 18).

In this way, George also reassures the rest of the cast and crew intermittently throughout the play. In a later scene, George's role as the father becomes even more apparent, as he explains the psychology of the actors to the playwright: "...If I spend too much time with Jess, he says I'm neglecting him. If I do give him special attention, he gets insecure and says, 'Why don't you work with her? She's the one who needs it'" (24). George is aware that he needs to protect and nurture the egos of the actors in the same way a parent would nurture a child's. Furthermore, he recognizes that his actors are very aware of favouritism, which is yet another indication of the family dynamic that exists in *Jitters*. When Jessica argues that her complaints about the state of the dressing room "...are legitimate complaints, not the whimsy of some delinquent child," George replies, ironically, "Sorry, love, I wasn't aware that I..." indicating that although he plays the role of the father convincingly, he apparently does so unwittingly (121). This position is not, however, set in stone. When sensing that the situation calls for a different tactic, George is not averse to inhabiting another role, inviting his cast to function on an adult level: "Jess, wait, wait. Let's not be rash. I know you're upset, but can't we all sit down and discuss this like adults?" (129). In this, George recognizes that his fatherly role is not necessary or welcome and may be interpreted as patronizing. Instead, he chooses to appeal to Jessica's rational side, recognizing that an adult would be able to see the potential consequences of hasty decision making, while a child may not have such foresight. Furthermore, implying that Jessica may be acting like a child could work to insult her just enough to make her recognize that she is behaving childishly, thereby forcing her to remedy the problem and act like a mature and thoughtful adult. Thus, we see George quickly shifting from one familial role to another in order to best accommodate the crisis.

Particularly adept at shifting from parent to child to sibling is the play's leading lady, Jessica Logan. When interacting with the director, as previously indicated, Jessica, a 50-year-old woman, often assumes a childlike role, searching for approval and attention from the fatherly George, who, incidentally, is described as 30 years old. On the other hand, when she is in conversation with her acting partner, Patrick, she plays a sibling role, battling egos with him to the point of physical threats: "If I were a man, I'd take you outside and pummel you" (121). Clearly, these two have a well-established sibling rivalry. The notion of flexible roles is explored even further, as Jessica assumes the role of the mother in the play-

within-the-play, *The Care and Treatment of Roses*. Playing a single mother to a grown son who is embarking on a new relationship, Jessica is challenged to inhabit yet another set of traits in order to convey her character on stage. In her life offstage, Jessica is actually a mother, so surely her role in *The Care and Treatment of Roses* is made easier for her. However, it is interesting that although she plays a sibling role with Patrick, and a child with George, she acts as a mother toward the rest of the cast and crew. When her on-stage son, Tom, for example, arrives to a show drunk, Jessica, like a concerned mother, helps to dress him backstage. Her ability to shift from one role to another enables her to attain what she needs from other people with much greater ease than if she were to act, per se, as a mother to all the company members all the time. This would not allow her fragile ego the stroking it requires from George or the battle she appreciates with Patrick. The other major characters of *Jitters*, including Robert, Patrick, Tom, Nick and Phil, operate in a similar fashion. Phil is of particular interest, as a 44-year-old man about to get married who clearly still receives much nurturing from an overprotective mother. Phil shifts from child to sibling, but never quite seems capable of invoking the role of a parent, except in the play-within-the-play, in which Phil portrays the ultimate patriarchal figure: a priest. Phil seems to have recognized how useful the child role can be in his real life, as it ensures that his ego is stroked regularly and his sense of insecurity is somewhat abated. Furthermore, when he gets to inhabit such characters as a priest on stage, perhaps he finds it a cathartic experience in which any fatherly urges he may have are fulfilled.

The world of *Jitters* is not ideal: the characters have some difficulty getting along with one another and they are not entirely fulfilled professionally. However, this alternative family does manage to create a successful production of *The Care and Treatment of Roses* and, when they finish their petty squabbling, they do help each other out. In shifting their attitudes or roles within the family, they are able to connect with one another in different ways. This flexibility of the family structure allows them to attain their personal emotional needs: the theatre company makes it possible for the characters to obtain things that they may not be able to get at home or even on stage.

Interestingly, alternative family structures exist in all three realms of *Jitters*. I would suggest that Billig's notion of banal nationalism is observable in this. The concept of alternative families is so pervasive that it reaches into all three levels of the theatrical world of *Jitters*: on stage in *The Care and Treatment of Roses*, off stage in *Jitters* and even

beyond the characters' family of the theatre company to the families that they have outside the theatre space. The presence of this idea of alternative families on every level indicates that it is not only significant, but also quite deep-seated. This, in turn, reaffirms its important place in the imagination of the nation.

As in the world of *Jitters*, the insecurity that plagues the family of *Bordertown Café* is difficult to escape. The characters work determinedly to resolve these feelings, partly by enacting different familial roles to assuage that uncertainty. Furthermore, like French's alternative families, Kelly Rebar has created a family structure that does not consist of a father, mother and their children, as in the stereotypical nuclear family. Marlene and her seventeen year-old son Jimmy live in the back of the little restaurant that she owns, a meagre home in which they have to "Scotch-tape the rips in the leatherette..." (Rebar 34). The café is not far from the family farm: Marlene's parents Maxine and Jim live there, and Marlene and her son still trek to the farmhouse in order to take a bath. The family seems to function as a single unit most of the time, although the familial roles that each person plays are far from clearly delineated. As Jerry Wasserman states, the characters of *Bordertown Café* "operate within an unorthodox family structure where, as [Marlene] says, 'we're none of us what we're supposed to be... Mom's like my daughter half the time, Jimmy's more of a brother'" (Wasserman 28). In working to understand their places in the world, these characters first must attempt to discern their places in the family.

The family of Bordertown, Alberta works hard at everything. Whether it is in the café or out in the field, these characters put in long days. And they do it with each other. Grandad Jim acts as a quiet overseeing father figure: his presence may not always be seen, but his advice is certainly observed. Jimmy clearly regards his grandfather with great respect, but he also works side by side with him on the farm, almost like a peer. Jimmy is trying to gain recognition as an equal contributor to the family. Both Marlene and Maxine work at the cafe while Jimmy and his grandfather work the farm.

The role of the child is one that is not easily or readily abandoned for many people, particularly in dealing with one's parents. Marlene exemplifies this point: she struggles with her insecurity as a single divorced mother who runs a business with her mother, Maxine. As a teenaged mother, Marlene was forced to grow up very quickly in many ways. Ironically, this motherly role is most apparent when Marlene is dealing with Maxine, as opposed to

when dealing with her son. The two women often seem to switch roles, as is evident in Marlene's response to her mother's unfruitful search for her camera:

[I]t's right here, starin' you in the face...I clean this drawer out one day and you're messin' it up the next and I happen to have a bone to pick with you about this very sort o' thing – you were in my unicorn collection yesterday, it was not how I lef' it and you better come clean right now, Max. (Rebar 39).

A mother would usually chastise a child in this way, as opposed to a child scolding her mother. Marlene and Maxine do not perform their inherent roles, but instead choose to trade behaviour patterns; this is most likely due to personality differences, as Maxine is the more carefree and exuberant, the more childlike, of the two. However, Marlene does assume her prescribed role as a child when she deals with her father. For instance, Marlene asks her father to tell Jimmy that his American father plans to come to Canada to get him, instead of telling him herself: "...Dad, please - please will you - so that he knows and everything like that?...I can't talk to that kid, I never could, and you know that" (40). This statement shows Marlene acting as a child with her father - she wants him to deal with an awkward situation instead of confronting it herself.

We also see in this Marlene's difficulty in acting as a mother to her son: she often plays a role rather like a sibling with Jimmy, as opposed to that of a mother. As Marlene's insecurity arises, brought on by the feeling that she has failed to provide adequately for her son, her attitude toward Jimmy becomes more like a sibling: she and her son argue quite a bit. When Jimmy asks if he should take the truck, Marlene answers, "See what I care-", a reply that sounds far more like that of a sister to a brother than a mother to her son (48). Such banter exists all through the text, as Marlene and Jimmy enact these sibling roles. This is due, in part, to the fact that they are close in age – Marlene had Jimmy when she was seventeen, Jimmy's age in the play. Although their sibling style behaviour is seen throughout the play, the characters also shift back to mother and son at times. We see this in a scene in which they fight about whether or not Jimmy should go to the States with his father: "Well, how 'bout tellin' me if I'm comin' or goin' Marlene?" says Jimmy (34). Marlene tries to regain some sense of authority as she tells her son, "And you can quit callin' me Marlene" (34). Jimmy seems to want to retain his sense of sibling equality with his mother by calling her by her first name, but he also has a strong desire to be given advice by his mother: "Just tell me what to do," he says (34). The ability to shift from one role to another

with such ease indicates that the characters are making use of the flexibility of their familial structure to get what they need individually.

The absence of Jimmy's father has surely had an impact on the way the family operates. This is particularly evident in Jimmy's rather Oedipal behaviour towards his mother, whom, as mentioned, he often refers to as Marlene. Jimmy is clearly not the average teenage boy: he spends his hard earned money on a pair of diamond earrings for his mother and then uses his summer savings to put a down payment on a bathroom that Marlene wants. Furthermore, Jimmy got himself into a fairly serious car accident because he was daydreaming about "takin' Mum to classy restaurants" (50). Finally, at the end of the play, Jimmy tells his father that he has "already told Mum [he'd] take her to Hawaii...figured she'd like to see the place" (64). In this we see Jimmy enacting a partner role with Marlene, as opposed to that of a son. Clearly, all of the characters in *Bordertown Café* perform different familial roles in order to achieve their desired goals.

Though *Bordertown Café* does not offer the range of alternative families provided by *Jitters*, it certainly presents an atypical family which retains a malleable structure. As in *Jitters*, the family may not be perfect, or even particularly happy, but the characters seem to have developed strategies for attaining what they need or desire from their respective families. They rely on the other members of the group for physical and emotional support, which they obtain by maintaining flexible identities within a flexible familial structure. This relates to Hume and Durkheim's notion of the self, which they suggest is constantly shifting in reaction to our ever-changing sense impressions of the world around us (Edgar 184). Thus, if individuals are products of their surrounding worlds, it would follow that these characters reflect the Canadian world around them: a world that promotes and embraces flexibility. Certainly, it would seem that at least the playwright Kelly Rebar's impressions of the world around her have made their way into the play. Canadian sensibilities seem to encourage flexibility in thinking, with respect to both the individual and the family.

On the west coast of British Columbia, we encounter another family stretching the boundaries of the typical nuclear definition: *Amigo's Blue Guitar* features a single father and his two grown children, a visiting grandmother and a live-in refugee from El Salvador. As in Toronto and Bordertown, this alternative family from the Gulf Islands seems to encourage the characters to shift their roles in the group as they pursue personal fulfillment. In his

position as a single father, Owen must act as both mother and father to his children, a dual role with which he seems quite comfortable; he is both nurturing and authoritative. In talking about his son, Owen claims that he “would walk through hell for Sander. If I thought someone was going to harm him or hurt him in any way” (MacLeod 253). But he also seems to act as another sibling to his children occasionally. Sometimes, he is more like an older brother with his children, trying to impress them with his story about escaping from the U.S. during the draft and offering dating advice to his daughter Callie. In the presence of his mother Martha, Owen will also revert to his role as a child, continually dredging up his feelings of anger toward his father. Depending on the feeling that he wants fulfilled -- admiration from his children, attention from his mother or pride as a father -- Owen will enact the necessary role.

His children also enact different roles in accordance with their needs. Callie acts like both a sister and a mother to her younger brother Sander. Having been the only woman in a single-parent house for most of her life, Callie logically assumes some parental responsibility in dealing with Sander. Furthermore, Owen works on a fishing boat, so he is surely away for good portions of the year, at which time Callie would assume responsibility for her younger brother. She is particularly tough on him with respect to his schooling, acting quite like a concerned and upset mother. But after she hassles him about his choice to drop out of his classes and start taking first aid training, she feels bad: “I can help,” she offers, “I can help you with the first aid. School too” (232). In this parental role, Callie is firm but generous with Sander. She is also very protective of her brother, yelling at Elias when he tries to hurt Sander: “Don’t touch him! Don’t you go near my brother!” (242). Still at other times, she acts much more like a sibling, telling her father that Sander copied an essay from the encyclopaedia. This sibling rivalry is apparent throughout the play: Callie is obviously a much better student and Sander feels threatened by her success. This younger child role is the most prevalent one enacted by Sander; he acts as the somewhat rebellious drifting child with his entire family. Only when the family learns that Elias has lied to them, requesting his girlfriend Marina be sponsored as opposed to his brother, does Sander seem to take on a slightly different role. At this point he takes on an *older* brother role, confronting Elias about the pain he has inflicted upon Callie. Sander physically pushes Elias, as he accuses him: “You’re a liar!...And Callie’s got feelings too, you know. You hurt her” (254). This behaviour shows Sander shifting from the petulant, misbehaving younger brother to the protective older brother in order to assert his concern for his sister. This position also enables Sander

to obtain a sense of power and usefulness, something that he lacks in other areas of his life. Clearly, the familial role changes enable each of the characters to work towards fulfilling their varying personal needs at different points in time.

In *Elias*, we observe a different phenomenon. I would not suggest that he enacts specific familial roles in the same way that the rest of the family does; he has just arrived and has not yet observed the flexible family dynamic at work. As the newest member of the group, Elias is uncertain as to how he should act. Furthermore, he is a guest in the home and he has come to Canada under difficult circumstances -- he fears for his life. Owen, Sander and Callie all treat Elias rather like a foster child: they want him to be impressed by his new family and grateful for his surroundings. Elias initially accepts this role, displaying much appreciation for his room: "Thank you. Thank you Sander. Good night Callie" (237). But after a short time in Canada, he chooses not to shy away from the truth. "They are very angry here with the refugees," he tells Owen, "...I have no other place to go. Eleven countries I am apply to before Canada..." (148). The longer he stays with the family, the more frustrated he gets with their attempt to maintain his status as a victim, as someone who needs to be saved. He recognizes that Callie finds validation and excitement by being romantically involved with him and he truthfully confronts her: "This is not a true thing you are wanting...[You do not love me.] You love these terrible things that I remember" (251). When Elias comes to realize that the family does not want him to change his behaviour, to leave his victim status behind, he decides to exploit the family's desire to save, lying to them in hopes of bringing his girlfriend from El Salvador. But the family is angered by Elias' shifting attitude. "How stupid do you think we are?" (254), Sander asks Elias. "Did you think [Marina would] just walk off the plane one day and Grandma would set an extra place for supper?" (254). The family wants to maintain their right to alter their behaviour as needed, but they are reluctant to allow an outsider the same privileges.

In *Amigo's Blue Guitar* I believe we see an important issue brought to light. If we are indeed looking at these families as allegories for Canada, MacLeod's play highlights a bitter reality: although the ideal may be one big flexible alternative happy family, is such an attitude prevalent in practice? With the shift of the two solitudes to Trudeau's cultural mosaic, has the national identity in fact just been further fractured? The insecurity discussed earlier likely stems from this splintered demographic face of Canada, and although the imaginary nation longs for acceptance of all cultures, is it actually possible to

build a nation of nations? I would suggest that we have seen several examples of banal nationalism at work in these plays, and that ideal does indeed seem to be based largely on the notion of flexibility. Although *Amigo's Blue Guitar* seems to show that the model has not yet been achieved, the play's self-awareness can be seen as a step towards recognizing the imaginary ideal. The big alternative family has not yet figured out how to co-exist entirely, and although there may be too much self-satisfaction gleaned from welcoming refugees, we can see Canadians putting forth a very real effort into fulfilling this nationalistic goal.

The nationalistic dream of acceptance exists in a very different way in *Harlem Duet*, largely because it is set in the U.S.. However, both playwright Djanet Sears and protagonist Billie have strong ties to Canada. If, in fact, we accept the presence of the flexible banal ideal as Canadian, then the family values in the play seem exemplary. *Harlem Duet* investigates yet another way to construct a family unit and allows its members to enact different roles so as to meet individual needs. As a woman in the midst of a divorce, Billie clearly needs loved ones around to nurture and love her. The family that acts as her support network consists of people who are both blood relatives and not: her landlady, Magi; her sister-in-law, Amah; her brother Drew; her niece, Jenny; her father, Canada; and her ex-husband, Othello. With each of these people, Billie plays a different role; sometimes she is a wife, other times a sister, sometimes she is a child and occasionally she is a mother. Moreover, her family members will enact different roles as well depending on their affiliations.

As with the families in the other plays, both Billie and the family member with whom she is interacting may choose to play more than one role in their communication. For instance, when Amah arrives at Billie's apartment, she sees Billie and, literally like a concerned mother, proclaims, "Child, you look so thin," before she sits Billie down, like a child, to begin work on her hair (Sears 343). This scene shows Amah and Billie physically and emotionally enacting a mother-daughter relationship, with Amah standing over Billie, directing Billie to hold the oil while Amah fixes her hair (345). Within the scene, the women talk about Amah's daughter. Billie asks, "How's my baby?"—it seems she is like a second mother to her niece, with whom she shares special meals and songs (344). Billie even reminisces about a time when she stood with Othello, while she held baby Jenny: they were approached by a man on the street who referred to them as "[t]he perfect Black family," suggesting that Billie has always seen herself as a kind of mother to Jenny (344).

Furthermore, she is quite concerned that Jenny does not see her in her present state; Billie claims she is "...tired. Exhausted...[Jenny'd] feel it in me" (344). This role as a mother to Jenny fulfills for Billie a position that she would not otherwise have access to, as she miscarried her own baby. So, even while she acts like a child with Amah, she is aware of her role as a mother to Jenny. This notion is further complicated when Magi asks her where she will go if she moves out. Billie replies: "I might go.....stay with Jenny" (352). It seems Billie sees her brother's house as a place where she is needed -- where her surrogate daughter lives. Amah continues to enact her maternal role with Billie throughout the play, even at the very end when she visits Billie in the hospital. Amah gives Billie advice about how to begin healing, through forgiveness, and asks how the doctors are treating her. Billie, in her wounded emotional state, remains a child with Amah in order to fill the role of the absent parent in her life.

Although Billie allows herself to be nurtured like a child by Amah, she occupies no such role with her father, Canada. Instead, she again assumes her more motherly role, which her father recognizes, as evident in his statement to Amah, "Billie's been taking good care of me" (359). Canada tries to arouse in Billie some sentimentality toward her immediate family, reminding her of how difficult it was for him to raise the children after their mother passed away. But Billie refuses to enact the child role for her father, opting instead for a position of authority and even some hostility, as she calls to mind a white woman with whom she remembers her father had an affair. She further asserts her independence from her father, suggesting he should not come over the following day. She then refuses Amah's offer to visit their home for a meal with her father and responds to his kiss on the forehead as he says, "Good to see you, Sybil – Billie," with an abrupt retort: "Well, it certainly was a surprise [to see you]" (359). Later in the play, Canada tries again to garner a daughterly response, inviting Billie to share a meal with him; upon her refusal, he offers to make her some tea. Finally Billie bluntly articulates her feelings to her father:

I don't –don't need any tea. I don't want anything to eat. I'm fine. I'm sorry. I don't – don't mean...to be like this...But I haven't seen you in God knows how long...And you just show up, and expect things to be all hunky dory. (363).

She is unwilling to participate in Canada's dream, in which she forgives him all his past sins and allows herself to become his child again. Playing this role would not satisfy Billie's need to assert her independence or her feelings of frustration with her father, though she eventually does choose to allow her father to be a part of her life.

With Othello, Billie plays yet another role. His presence clearly incites great passion in Billie: anger, sadness, frustration and love. This diverse range of feelings requires a diverse range of roles, and Billie enacts several when confronted with Othello. She is a chameleon: she is a scorned lover who berates her lost partner, a mother informing her son of his misguided perspective on the world and a sister who has shared in a lifetime of growing up. In each of these roles, Billie is trying to assert her control over the situation, though she is not ultimately successful. Othello, too, embodies different roles at different points in time in reaction to Billie's emotional vicissitudes. But his role as a child is the most notable, as it is brought on by the mere vocal presence of his new lover, Mona. In this role, Billie realizes how lost her lover is; Mona has much more control over Othello than she has. I would argue that Othello's assumption of this particular role is a turning point in Billie's character, which causes her to then enact her role as child for the rest of the play. Like a child, she sees the only solution to her problem with Othello as revenge. This particular role choice eventually overtakes her life, and Billie is placed in a hospital to be cared for by the parental figures of doctors and nurses. Perhaps Canada's claim, "Oh, I don't think I'm going anywhere just yet – least if I can help it. Way too much leaving gone on for more than one lifetime already," presents for Billie a viable option: she can finally live out her lost childhood (369). No longer an abandoned child, Billie is now free to continue to occupy this role for as long as she may need. John Thieme suggests, in an article on *Harlem Duet*, "there is a strong sense that Billie has the resources to climb back to health [...] because she has a community and an alternative body of discourse on which she can draw" (Thieme 88). In Canada's presence, Billie will be able to exhume those misplaced feelings from her childhood, which will finally enable her to move beyond such a reliance on her role as a child. With the help of this family, Billie will hopefully move past her nervous breakdown and emerge as a newly revitalized woman.

The family of *Harlem Duet* has certainly taken advantage of their flexible boundaries. Without judgement, these characters seem able to alternate between child and parent for one another in order to help their fellow members attain personal fulfillment. As in the other plays discussed, the alternative structure of the family immediately gives licence to individuals who may need to enact other roles to achieve what they want or need. I believe that the acceptance of such flexibility in individual roles stems from the absence of the traditional nuclear family structure. For example, in the absence of a biological mother, as we have seen in *Amigo's Blue Guitar* and *Harlem Duet*, other characters must assume the

role, whether it be for moments, months or years. Clearly, it would seem that Callie often enacts this role for Sander, while Amah generally plays mother to Billie. The absence of such figures or addition of new ones invites other characters to explore themselves further and shift between different personas. Thus, the alternative family structure enables or encourages the flexibility of familial roles.

In considering the allegorical argument, I must also address the fact that Sears' play takes place in the United States. However, as previously indicated, Billie's upbringing occurred mainly in Canada, where she lived with her father, brother and grandmother. This early introduction to an alternative family structure enables the characters of *Harlem Duet* to take advantage of such an education. The flexible ideal prevails throughout the play: Billie's desire for a traditional nuclear family has been dashed. The only family that works for her, historically and currently, is a flexible alternative one. In this, we see the imaginary reinforced, as Billie releases her dream of a nuclear family in order to begin seeking out a new one. In showing the potential success of this imagined community, we see hope for the nation as an imagined community; with its boundaries intact but able to shift, its citizens are able to change as well.

In *The Adventures of Ali and Ali and the Axes of Evil*, the imagined community exists in yet another way. It is certainly interesting to note that in the fifteen years between *Amigo's Blue Guitar* and *Ali and Ali*, the ideal is now one that can be satirized. I believe that the satire in this play belies some truth about cultural stereotyping, as suggested in the previous chapter, but the flexible alternative ideal does seem to have become fully entrenched in the realm of the banal in a different way. No longer is this an issue of such contention. That is, the ideal has been so ingrained in our everyday lives that it is now something at which we may laugh. We have tried so hard to indoctrinate the citizens of Canada with a message of tolerance, flexibility and acceptance that it can be satirized.

The Adventures of Ali and Ali and the Axes of Evil presents several different family structures. In their interaction with one another, the protagonists generally act as congenial siblings. We see this relationship quite clearly from the beginning of the show as Ali Ababwa cajoles Ali Hakim into telling a funny joke about a leprechaun, suggesting that only Ali Hakim can tell it properly. In this, the two inhabit brotherly roles, with Ali Ababwa acting like a younger brother who is slightly in awe of his elder sibling. The familial roles shift,

however, as Ali Hakim assumes a fatherly role toward Ali Ababwa. Like a child to his parent, Ali Ababwa requests that Ali Hakim take a look at his sore bum. Ali Hakim does so and then replies as an authoritative father: "You fool of a Copt, I have told you: do like the Sammis. Use hand and water technique. But you rub and rub and scrape your delicate pink asshole with harsh papers. It is small wonder"(Chai et al 20). The two men are so intimate that one can perform parental duties for the other. Then they will shift from this parent-child kind of interaction back to sibling roles, arguing with much frequency, and they comfortably tell one another to shut up without causing substantial rifts in the relationship. After being confronted by Duncan, the theatre manager, about the inappropriateness of their Oval Office puppet show, Ali and Ali begin to fight more pointedly. The two engage in a series of alternating blame assignments after neither of them will confront the theatre manager about their pay:

Ali Hakim: Why didn't you say something?

Ali Ababwa: Why didn't you? Why must it always be me who does the saying?

Ali Hakim: You? (in Agrabanian) I always have to get the money.

Ali Ababwa: No, Ali Hakim. I tell you. Here I am speaking the English.

Ali Hakim: Pah! I am always attaining the money. Who made warlord certify cheque in Congo?

Ali Ababwa: Who pawned watch to bury Friday Kim Chee?

Ali Hakim: Who bribed the guards in camp in Axerbijan? And who bought passports to get out of Jerkiistan?

Ali Ababwa: (remembering audience) Ali Hakim...little camels have big ears...

Ali Hakim: Them – pah! They don't know what's going on. They think this is part of show.

Ali Ababwa: Arguing this way will not help us obtain money we are owed from manager. (77-8).

In this scene, Ali and Ali argue like siblings: they blame one another while trying to assert their own personal worth. They seem to be engaging in a power struggle, which is common amongst siblings. Although the men are quite brazen with each other, there seem to be no lasting feelings of anger and they are able to move on to more important things without grudges interfering. Forgiving and forgetting are more important than winning the argument, when there are more vital things at stake, like money. Furthermore, their sibling unity is apparently more valuable than their petty arguments. This is seen most clearly at the end of the play, when Ali Hakim has fallen asleep. Ali Ababwa says gently to the audience, "When

you decide to go, please leave quietly as Ali Hakim is sleeping" (123). Ali Ababwa feels a responsibility to his partner, his brother, and wants to ensure that his sleep is not disrupted. Their final and most significant union is apparent in the fact that the men share a mutual dream of a beautiful and peaceful future, in which they will live with the rest of their families.

Within *Ali and Ali*, there are other family constellations explored as well. Of great significance is the family portrayed in the plays-within-the-play – the ethnic family dramas. In all three versions of the play, Chinese, Russian and Native Canadian, a family is parodied. These dramas poke fun at the Canadian prevalence of family dramas, like the Mercer plays of David French. Furthermore, they serve as satirical examples of the perpetual reinforcement of multiculturalism. These notions of flexible alternative families have been so firmly entrenched in the realm of the banal that they have become something laughable. In each of the ethnic family dramas, the son is struggling to assert his independence from his father and his father's culture. The son attempts to challenge his father's perception by venting his frustration and angst, disclaiming his first culture and assigning blame to his father. In doing this, the son is trying to switch roles with his father and inhabit the parental position of authority. Initially, the father reacts violently, calling upon his own story of struggle and despair endured in order to get to Canada. Eventually, however, the father recognizes the son's words as truth, and he gives in to his son's desire. Here is a unique example of the familial role switching: the characters concurrently seem to embody both parent and child roles. Only in sharing this common view can the men reconcile their differences. Moreover, in this moment of shared identity the men find the most satisfaction, undergoing both a purgation and fulfillment of emotions simultaneously. Their individual insecurities are subverted by their moment of true unity. Unfortunately, this is an impossible role to continually inhabit because of its dialectic nature, and in each of the ethnic family dramas the father's accidental killing of the son shatters this ephemeral moment. The son cannot usurp the father's position, nor can the father bear the anguish and guilt inflicted by the death of his son. In the end, both characters must die as they are unable to return to their initial identities. Only in death are they able to maintain their shared perspective.

Ali and Ali enact their various familial roles as a means of filling the holes left by their own missing families. Ali Hakim, though married with children, is separated from them. He has also lost touch with his sister due to the ongoing violence in his hometown of Agraba

City. And religious police murdered Ali Ababwa's love, Souad. As a result, the men have to look to one another for everything that a family would provide. They inhabit different roles at times in order to meet their emotional and physical needs. Moreover, in the ethnic family dramas, another level of familial role-playing occurs. Ali Ababwa and Ali Hakim each take turns playing the son to Tim's father, until the final play in which Ali Ababwa plays the father and Ali Hakim plays the son. They have each briefly occupied the role of the son, and Ali Ababwa, who does not have children or enact a fatherly role with Ali Hakim, takes on the character of the father. In these shifts, Ali and Ali are able to explore different facets of their own identities; they seek an eventual arrival at a comfortable concept of self. Until they are reunited with their families, Ali and Ali must act as the primary social unit for one another, embodying all the necessary familial roles.

The concept of alternative families seems quite pronounced in each of these plays. Acting as the key social group for the characters, the family constellation shifts and changes regularly in accordance with its members' individual needs. As they seek personal fulfillment, the characters choose to embody different roles within the family unit. Whether composed of a theatre company, grandparents, parents, children, refugees, neighbours or friends, there is an alternative family structure that works for these characters. In these malleable social groups, characters are able to enact different familial roles to fulfill their personal needs. Such flexibility would not likely be available in a more typical nuclear family; thus, in these less traditional family groupings, characters are better able to challenge their insecurities and negotiate their identities.

Returning to the argument for allegorical representations of Canada, I would certainly suggest that we may in fact see these plays as banal reinforcements of the national ideal. If Canada is to fulfill its proclaimed destiny as a peaceful multicultural nation, it will surely have to observe the type of attitudes that we see occurring in these five plays. Furthermore, I find it intriguing to see that, chronologically, the plays indicate an increasing level of tolerance and acceptance of the flexible ideal. Whether or not these families really do represent an allegorical portrait of Canada is most definitely debatable; however, the prevalence of such alternative structures and the increase of their presence in the realm of the banal does suggest that these open-minded attitudes represent an ideal that Canadians will continue to strive to fulfill. Ali and Ali show us that we are not quite there yet -- there is still some work

to be done in moving from philosophical to practical acceptance, but the continued reinforcement of such ideals certainly breeds hope for their actualization (102-103).

Chapter 3:

Home is Where the Boundaries Can Shift

Thus far, the characters of *Jitters*, *Bordertown Café*, *Amigo's Blue Guitar*, *Harlem Duet* and *Ali and Ali and the Axes of Evil* have shown themselves to be people of change. An underlying sense of insecurity leads them to display various behaviours to allay feelings of insecurity; they also enact different roles within their family groups. We have seen various examples of the characters maintaining flexible notions of themselves and those around them in an attempt to fulfill their personal needs. The ubiquity of the flexible ideal throughout the texts suggests that it is a model of Billig's banal nationalism. The omnipresence of this idea works to reinforce for Canadians, those in the plays and in the audiences, their affiliation with the imagined community. Furthermore, this idea truly does seem entrenched in the theatrical world. In accordance with Filewod's book, the dramatic texts present "the nation [indeed being] enacted in the imaginary theatre" (Filewod). It would seem that Canadian nationalism and theatre are mutually mimetic: each community maintains ideas of national identity, and both work to support the continuation of such an idea in the other domain.

Of course, in a population that consists of over 30,000,000 people, 1/5 of whom consider themselves immigrants, flexibility is to be expected in order to maintain peace in the nation.⁵ One must be willing to accept new cultures and the changing face of the nation. But promoting the maintenance of those cultural differences is not necessarily the ideal to all nations. Simply by comparing the (admittedly clichéd) metaphors of the Canadian mosaic and the American melting pot, we find a clear disconnect. Without assigning judgement to either, I would assert that these divergent metaphors offer much insight into the national identities of these two countries. After all, "[c]ommunities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined" (Anderson 6). That is, whether or not the ideas are truly practiced in either nation is less important than the fact that they are foundational ideas in the realm of the national banal. The existence of such metaphors, mosaic or melting pot, in the language of the everyday suggests that they are an important means by which a nation distinguishes itself from others. And the continual reiteration of ideas like flexibility in the theatre, offers a fine example of banal nationalism at work, being disseminated and reinforced. So, if the imagined community of Canada

contains the mosaic metaphor and this idea requires flexibility, then the regular reiteration of this idea in the theatre suggests that flexibility does indeed seem to be ingrained in the realm of the banal.

The flexible mosaic does seem to prevail in the plays. First of all, some of the playwrights were born outside of Canada but have come to make Canada their home. Secondly, all of the plays feature characters from different countries with various ethnic backgrounds; these characters are also trying to make Canada their home. People come to Canada for a myriad of reasons, including political asylum and a high quality of life. But newcomers to Canada sometimes attest to the country's dullness, and the characters in these plays are often plagued by similar feelings - there is much more glamour to be found south of the 49th parallel.⁶ Fortunately, Canada's physical beauty, liberal policies and democratic government system outweigh its tendency to be boring, and the characters recognize this, choosing to opt for safety and comfort instead of risking the dangers inherent in leaving. Furthermore, in each drama, we observe characters in pursuit of home. The home that they desire is capable of accommodating many different people, both related and not, who then find ways to make theatres, houses and cafes become their homes. Through their negotiation of individual and familial identities, the characters test the spaces they inhabit, requiring them to operate as places of home and work, rest and play. All of the plays are set in spaces which exist on or near borders, both physical and psychological. These border places, where it seems "reality is something neither innate nor absolute," allow the characters to discern their own realities, shifting their perceptions and ultimately finding a home in Canada (Wasserman 4).

The setting in each of the plays is a home of some kind. Whether the characters are visiting, staging or living in these spaces, they all somehow represent home. The idea is inherent in both the dramatic text and in the staging: it is a vital notion both thematically and visually, as all of the characters work to negotiate their individual identities in pursuit of a place they may call home. This is the fundamental quest of each of the characters: to create or find a home. That home will surely be comprised of a physical space to inhabit, a house perhaps, but it will also involve the national location of that house. Furthermore, home will involve the psychology that prevails in that immediate space, the values of the family, and its vaster placement, the values of the nation. But home is more than just a geographical or philosophical location: ideally, it is a place in which one feels at ease, a

place of family, of rest, of food, of communication, of safety. Home is both a specific physical space in which one may comfortably rest, eat and feel safe, and a portion of the larger world, in which one subscribes to the majority of political and social values upheld by a specific nation. Finding this place will provide fulfillment; it is an omnipresent goal for all of the characters in each of the plays.

Perhaps part of the reason that 'home' is difficult for the characters to locate is due to the seeming liminality of the spaces which they inhabit: the notion of being in-between presents potential complications. The historically fractured identity of Canada may have initiated the national identity crisis, but the physical proximity to the U.S. and the constant influx of American popular culture has surely compounded the dilemma. This idea is apparent in all of the plays. Each of the plays occurs in a liminal space because of their proximity to the Canadian-American border. Furthermore, each of the plays is set specifically in another liminal space: *Jitters* takes place in a theatre/home, *Bordertown Café* in a café/home, *Amigo's Blue Guitar* in a refuge/home, *Harlem Duet* in a lab/home and *Ali and Ali* in a theatre/home. But the space along the border does not have to be one of tortured dichotomy. Instead, as Homi Bhabha writes, "[t]hese 'in-between spaces provide terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood" (Bhabha 1). This seems to be what happens in these plays: the liminal space provides the ideal conditions for space to be transformed: if nothing is fixed, then it can surely be changed.

As mentioned, the plays are set in cafes, theatres, apartments and houses, within specific towns and cities; these physical spaces may be geographically real or fictitious, or even a combination of both, but their *national* location is not so fluid: they take place in either the United States or Canada. References to location are explicit and numerous in all of the plays. Surely this is in part because, as stated in a footnote of *The Adventures of Ali and Ali and the Axes of Evil*, site-specific references are important: "People love that shtick" (Chai et al 23). By 'shtick,' I believe that the playwrights mean that people love to hear the names of their cities, provinces and country in the world of the play. This creates a sense of unity among all those present – like at a rock concert, the audience is welcomed specifically, inviting a feeling of camaraderie amongst the members of the audience and the performers. For example, in the opening of *Ali and Ali*, the characters greet the "People in Real Life Canada" (21). Furthermore, setting the plays in specific places helps to orient the audience. Moreover, geographically precise places locate the characters in the vaster world. A bond is

formed between the world on stage and that of the audience, which now extends out to the vaster world beyond the theatre.

The bond is strengthened through the use of a domestic domain which is easily recognizable. The plays are all located in a specific town or city. This space operates, to some extent, as both a place of home and work in all of the plays. For a theatre company, the theatre space becomes a kind of home, as during rehearsals and the run of a production, people embody other lives which only exist while at the theatre. *Jitters* is set in a small theatre in Canada's biggest city, Toronto. All of the actors and crew seem to feel quite comfortable in the space - they nap, drink coffee and eat sandwiches in the green room, which acts as a sort of makeshift living room. A second domestic domain exists on stage, in the play-within-the-play, where the set is the interior of a home. This feeling of homey surroundings encourages the familial behaviour discussed previously: characters feel comfortable in these spaces, which makes it possible for them to shift their roles in the family as needed. The theatre space is serving dual purposes for these characters, as the company partly lives in this space and also conducts business there. This overlap of business and home allows for an interesting dynamic, as it enables the characters to be perhaps more comfortable at work but less able to relax at home. Kelly Rebar's play also subscribes to such a malleability of space. Set in southern Alberta in a fictional place called Bordertown, the action occurs in a café, with its backroom living area visible during the first act, while the café portion acts as the setting for the second act. The café encourages fellowship, as a domestic space for cooking and eating for its customers and the family that occupies it. The family in *Amigo's Blue Guitar* lives in a more traditional home than a partly converted café, though its location on one of the Gulf Islands, "a short ferry ride from Vancouver" (MacLeod 229), also makes it a bit different than the average mainland Canadian home. Most of the action occurs inside the family house, in either Elias' room or the living/dining room, with a few scenes set outside on the beach in front of the house. The interior setting is again a domestic space, in which cooking, eating and fellowship occur. These spaces do not technically act as work spaces in the same way as that of the theatre or the café, but the characters do study for school, and Owen's boat, which is his livelihood, is docked right outside the house, so the area does have more than one function. The settings in *Harlem Duet* have an even greater overlap, as three distinct spaces (a front stoop, a tiny dressing room and an apartment), each from different time periods, exist simultaneously; all three spaces involve ideas of both work and home. The central focus of

the play (and the space to which I will give the most attention), however, is Billie's small apartment in Harlem, New York. Billie, like a secretive Dr. Frankenstein, uses her kitchen as a lab in which to concoct mysterious herbal potions, meant to poison her ex-lover. In this again, we witness a character using a domestic space to function dually as a place of home and work. Finally, rest, play and work also occur in the theatrical 'home' of *The Adventures of Ali and Ali and the Axes of Evil*. It becomes, at different points in time, a kitchen, the Oval Office, an auto-racing track and a makeshift campsite. As in each of the other plays, the characters use the space as both a means of employment and as a home. The theatre is indeed a theatre in *Ali and Ali* – the characters ensure that the audience knows this - but the evocation of other spaces, like the brief scenes in the parodied kitchen and the camp-out scene at the play's end, creates the necessary home environment. The domestic space, both of the nation and the home, is somehow unsatisfactory, but it is safe and has the potential to be fulfilling because of its flexibility.

The plays are set in a home, though it is not the ideal home that the characters would like it to be. For the characters in *Jitters*, their theatre acts as a home. This is because none of the characters seems to have a true home elsewhere: Patrick is divorced and lives alone in an apartment, Jessica makes reference to grown children, but no husband or partner, Phil lives with his mother and Tommy is a young adult who attends his father's second marriage during the course of the play. Yes, these characters live in homes outside the theatre, but they are all somehow incomplete or lacking in what might traditionally be termed ideal: a house, with a partner and children. Thus, the theatre is a home away from home.

Though it may provide some comfort, this small Canadian theatre will never provide the riches and fame that could be available to them if they were acting in the States. It is a place where they cannot afford a prompter, and even if they could, "the theatre's too small. A prompter would be heard in the last row" (French 33). Furthermore, their home is in Canada, a place where, as Patrick sarcastically claims, you can "be a top-notch actor and still die broke and anonymous" (31). Clearly the fact that their home theatre is physically and economically limited, and located in Canada, indicates to the characters that it may never be like their dreams of Broadway. There is, however, a flip side to this. Although New York could be infinitely more glamorous, the stakes are a great deal higher – success could be greater, but so could failure. In Canada, one does not have to face such devastating

disappointment and as Patrick explains: "I make a damn good living here. I have my pick of roles. I might not be star, but who is in this country? Not everyone feels the compulsion to outshine" (62). When the successful American producer does not appear to see *The Care and Treatment of Roses*, the company accepts its less than thrilling fate, but they are ready and willing to forge ahead together in the production in their small Canadian home.

Although the characters have talked about the arrival of Bernard Feldman through the entire script, in the last few moments of the play they suddenly decide to accept their Canadian fates. Toronto will have to suffice, though New York may continue to beckon quietly from the wings.

It is also important to consider the idea of the space that the cast of *Jitters* inhabits. The theatre is ultimately a place of creative imagination; thus it is logical that the characters in this play are able to perform different identities. In the same way, they are able to re-imagine their domain. The theatrical space, by its nature, maintains a high degree of flexibility. So the characters can shift their perspectives, if necessary, and make the space what they want or need it to be. The Canadian theatre may not be perfect, but it is home.

The small Canadian 'home,' in *Jitters*, when placed in comparison with the potential glamour and sheer size of the United States, does seem rather lacklustre. This is also true for the characters of *Bordertown Café*, who live out an existence that seems composed entirely of work in a small prairie town. Although Rebar's Bordertown is fictional, it bears a strong resemblance to the small towns located around her hometown of Lethbridge, Alberta. Having spent four years in Lethbridge and two summers working in the small town of Fort Macleod, just west of Lethbridge, I saw a strong resemblance between the café of Bordertown and the Greyhound Station café of Fort Macleod, where the same waitresses worked every day, and most of the customers were tourists or travellers just passing through town. I believe that the play is set in a fictional place so that Rebar can highlight what is a reality for most Canadians: close proximity to the United States. When Canada seems boring, the glitter and glamour of the United States is nearby, taunting people to cross over that undefended border and embrace a new life – one that promotes "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," as opposed to "peace, order and good government." Like in *Jitters*, the characters are unsatisfied with the current state of their home, with respect to both its physical makeup and its dull surroundings. Marlene's teenaged son, Jimmy, is looking

forward to the possibility of leaving with his American truck-driving father. Jimmy expounds on his excitement to Marlene:

A guy would have to be a *fool* not to wanna go on those hauls - those hauls are the highlight of my life! ...how many of my friends get to ride in a truck higher'n any old building we got around here? ...the life of a trucker, and I mean, I bin there and I know, it's better than anything you can learn in school... Gives me a chance to get outta here, see for myself there's somethin' besides *nothin'* out some people's windows. Nothin' that's what I got to look at. We live smack-dab in the middle of nowhere - correction, the Canadian side of nowhere...we're sittin' in this café like we're stuck in the muck. (Rebar 33-4).

Obviously Jimmy is dissatisfied with his home - the physical space in which he showers, eats and sleeps, as well as the vaster national surroundings. He is not alone in this sentiment, as Marlene expresses her own displeasure at several points throughout the play; she feels unhappy about her working situation and the home that she inhabits in the back of the cafe, which does not even have a proper bathtub. These characters continually complain about the inadequacy of their home, often making comparisons to the better life that surely exists just on the other side of the border. Eventually, however, Marlene is reconciled to her feeling that her home is inadequate. As she says, "I didn't wanna buy the Mathison house. I wanted to stay *here*" (62). Although it may have problems, the café is her home.

Several heated debates ensue during the play about the dullness of Canada as compared with the magic of the States, spearheaded by Jimmy's American grandmother and her talk of "fairs bigger'n anything you'd ever find up here [in Canada]" (38). But in the end, Grandad's arguments trump Grandma's: he paints a picture of a more exciting Canada. When Grandad was younger, in Halifax during Prohibition, they could not get any liquor, so "we rioted...until they threw me in the clinker" (64). Suddenly, Canada does not seem quite as boring to Jimmy anymore. Furthermore, Grandad's speech about chasing after something only if it is truly worthwhile forces Jimmy to examine his relationship with his father a little more closely (63). He decides to assert himself with his father, telling him that he "can't sit around here waitin' for you to show up" (64). Between this and Grandad's generous compliment, "You... do a good day's work, Jimmy. I - well, I want you to know I'm proud of you," Jimmy realizes that his home is in Bordertown, where he can play hockey, work the land and take pride in both his family and in Canada (63). The Canadian home is

again portrayed as flexible: it operates as a dichotomous place of work, rest and play, of comfort and discomfort. The characters provide for one another a shift in perspective: they are reassured that home may not be glamorous, but it can fulfill every need in its malleable form. The liminal spaces of both the café and the town provide ideal conditions in which to re-imagine surroundings: this café/home located along the border is capable of transforming in the minds of its inhabitant. Thus, home is fulfilling because of its ability to remain flexible which, in turn, allows the characters to remain flexible as well.

The home in MacLeod's play is flexible, as well, though its possibilities are not realized within the scope of the text. Set on an island off the southwest coast of British Columbia, the house in *Amigo's Blue Guitar* is also a place for re-imagining. Like Bordertown, the small island is somewhat segregated from city life. I would suggest that the characters of *Amigo's Blue Guitar* occupy a literally liminal space: it is surrounded by the ocean and on the coast 'in-between' Vancouver, Canada and the United States. But unlike the characters in *Jitters* and *Bordertown Café* who manage to find some degree of satisfaction with their homes, the outcome for the family in British Columbia is not so optimistic.

The house belongs to Owen, an American draft dodger who lives with his two grown children. For Owen, Canada was initially a place to escape the draft in his home country of the United States. Thus, it was a place for him to re-imagine himself and create a safe new life. The house itself is apparently rather rustic, featuring a woodstove, because, as Martha says, "Owen wouldn't be modern" (MacLeod 230). The simplicity is surely a symptom of Owen's tendency to romanticize his life, as can be seen in his description of his flight from the States to Canada. Sander claims that his father is "always making it sound like the Berlin Wall or something," indicating that the experience was not as traumatic as Owen likes to suggest (236). The simple surroundings in which the family lives can be seen as the quintessential backdrop for Owen's romanticized life. But, living in a house with a woodstove also suggests that he needs the space to be transformable -- to straddle the world between the past and the present. Furthermore, Owen's livelihood, his fishing boat, is stored at the house, where he can work on it. Again, we see a character finding dual uses for his house. This reaffirms the notion of flexibility as an imagined ideal, which Owen is attempting to practice and absorb into his habitus. His home is a refuge and a space that can be transformed to serve multiple purposes as needed.

Sander also sees their family home as a refuge and a flexible space. Having absorbed information from his father “who’s always going on about how hard it was being booted out of [his] own country,” Sander has sponsored a refugee from El Salvador – a refugee, as Sander tells his father, who is going to live “with us. Isn’t that great?” (233). Sander claims that he is “concerned with saving other people’s lives” (232). Clearly, he is hoping to find validation in helping Elias, and believes that his liberal Canadian home is the perfect place to which Elias can escape. Sander perceives his family’s home as a place of refuge and his country as a place of flexibility - a place where refugees are safe and welcomed; after all, his father was allowed to remain in Canada. Sander assigns blame for the problems of the world to the United States, telling his grandmother that “[i]t’s the Americans who are responsible for [Elias]’ going to jail, his being tortured, his having to run away” (246). Canada is a place where refugees can live peacefully.

But Canada, with its employment assistance and English classes for immigrants, is not a perfect place. And for those who have not been properly indoctrinated with the philosophies of the imagined nation, Canada is simply one of many countries that will accept refugees (248). Elias came to Canada because he had to -- “I am afraid of my house,” he says, “Please let me come” (231). With its liberal policies and mosaic metaphors, the real world of Canada still struggles to move beyond an ideological haven to a real home for new immigrants. Sander wants to be a hero: he knows “how good you feel when you’re filling out the goddamn forms” (254) to sponsor refugees. Unfortunately, Elias is not as grateful as Sander wants him to be; Sander seems incapable of understanding that Elias is in Canada not because he wants to be, but because he truly has “no other place to go” (248). Canada may be a physical place of safety, but Elias still dreams of the terrible torture he endured in El Salvador: “I am try very hard to not let the bad dream go outside me” (255), he tells Sander. For Elias, “Canada is alright,” but it is not the haven that Sander believes it is. This is most interesting as it suggests that Sander, a Canadian, has had the notion of flexibility reinforced with such regularity that he truly believes this ideal is a reality and has a hard time understanding why Elias cannot find home in Canada (250). It seems that the community of Canada may imagine itself to be a mosaic, but the imaginary has not yet been fully realized. The reinforcement of this flexible ideal in the realm of the banal is extremely important: regardless of whether it has yet been achieved, the presence of such a notion in the imaginary suggests that it is a goal of the citizens. Repeating the idea will hopefully move it

beyond a philosophy to eventually exist in practice, so that maybe someday Elias will be able to call Canada home.

Canada was home to Billie for a portion of her childhood and its impact seems to be indelible. In *Harlem Duet*, three separate locales and eras exist simultaneously, and in each of these, the characters are working to determine whether their home is suitable. In *Harlem Duet* time is a fundamental aspect of the setting, continually reminding us of the powerful impact of history upon the present. The historical settings feature characters on the stairs outside a blacksmith's forge in 1860 and a tiny dressing room in 1928, while in the contemporary world, Billie's story unfolds in her small apartment in Harlem. As the majority of the play occurs in Billie's world in the present, I will focus this discussion on that setting. In the contemporary portion of the story, we see a character who seeks home, as the space she inhabits can no longer change enough to meet her needs.

Like *Bordertown Café* and *Amigo's Blue Guitar*, *Harlem Duet* is also set in a space which is quite literally liminal. Billie lives in "a renovated brownstone, at the corner of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X Boulevards" -- her home is situated in a place of ubiquitous dichotomy, somewhere between peaceful integration and violent black pride (Sears 337). And these divergent ideologies haunt the apartment, as we see in the heated arguments between Billie and her ex-husband Othello. After Othello left her for another woman, Billie stayed in their apartment, but she can no longer endure the pain of being reminded of him. "I'm moving on," Billie says, "I don't want anything that's -- that was ours" (352). For her, the apartment has become a constant reminder of all that she has lost and cannot reclaim. Its liminality is no longer useful to her: without Othello, these arguments become soliloquies, incapable of finding even momentary resolutions.

As with the characters in all of the other plays, Billie also uses this space for both home and work. It is home in the sense that she will eat, sleep, bathe and feel safe in this space, and it is a place for work when she does research for her Master's degree or conducts experiments and concocts mixtures in her kitchen. Like the characters in Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia, Billie requires her space to serve various purposes depending on her immediate needs. That is, it must remain a flexible space in which she may carry out whatever business she wishes.

Unfortunately, this space is simply not flexible enough to allow Billie to live. In conversation with me, Jerry Wasserman has suggested that Billie is a child of Canada, literally and figuratively, so perhaps she has been driven insane by her life in the U.S. This seems quite plausible when we consider the opposing ideologies of the U.S. and Canada; Canada may not be a true haven for all cultures and ethnicities, but it did begin to abolish slavery a full seventy years before the U.S. ("Underground Railway"). As proposed in this research, Canada seems prone to banal reiterations of nationalism that are rife with the notion of Canada as a flexible, multicultural, liberal place. Thus, if Billie was raised in Canada, then she would have had a great deal of exposure to such ideas and would be subconsciously troubled by the dialectical nature of her Harlem home: she does not want to assimilate into the white world like the name of her street, Martin Luther King Jr. suggests, and with whom Othello agrees. Furthermore, having grown up with an alcoholic, somewhat absent father and without a mother, Billie likely struggled to find peace with the notion of family. But when she and Othello shared the apartment, shared a dream to have a family, Billie was able to abate those feelings of uncertainty about family. The couple also shared conversations about their different perspectives – and as long as Othello was there, they could engage in dialogue. Thus the apartment existed as a potential place of change. But Othello could not endure the pressure that he seemed to feel in their home. After a particularly heated debate between him and Billie, Othello angrily asserts:

I prefer White women [...] We'd make love and I'd fall asleep not having to beware being mistaken for someone's inattentive father [...] and not be confused with every lousy lover, or husband that has ever left them lying in a gutter of unresolved emotions. It's the truth. To a Black woman, I represent every Black man she has ever been with and with whom there is still so much to work out. (355).

In some ways, Othello's words hold some truth for Billie: she has unresolved issues with her father and she has surely ascribed some of her father's faults to her husband. When Othello leaves, the apartment is no longer a place for her to discuss and change; as opposed to this home being an in-between place of privilege, in which selfhood can be explored and shifted, it has become a place of singularity. Without Othello, there is again no family, and there is only one side to the arguments. Billie is no longer able to imagine alternative possibilities: the boundaries are no longer flexible.

"I'm thinking about heading back [...to Canada] myself," Billie tells her father (358). If home is, as previously discussed, a place of flexibility, security and comfort, then Billie has

ascribed those values to Canada because she can no longer find them in the U.S. Billie cannot find fulfillment in her domestic space, her city or her nation, and thus she must continue to dream. "Canada freedom come," she says to her sister in law, "I wanna be free;" from this, I would suggest that once Billie is well enough, she may possibly return to Canada (369). Or perhaps Billie says these words as a kind of invocation: she remembers the imagined community of Canada, with its ideal of flexibility, and she hopes that this ideology may someday come to occupy the imaginary United States – this will set her free. Either way, Billie's quest for home can be seen as incomplete. Her journey has been from one liminal space to another: her apartment has lost its liminality with the absence of her husband, so she has been moved to a new in-between world, the hospital. Here, Billie is not alone and people will help her to re-imagine her life – she may test the boundaries of this space in her quest to find fulfillment of the self. As the play ends, Billie and her father sit together and he takes her hand. The two sing "Spanish Harlem" together suggesting that something beautiful will indeed result from this difficult experience. Like a rose that can grow in Spanish Harlem, if Billie remains flexible she will find a place to feel beautiful. The play's ending is hopeful -- Billie will find a new home, one founded on the ideals of flexibility. She has not arrived yet, but she is on her way there.

Unlike Billie, Ali and Ali have definitely arrived and they are able to make home wherever necessary, as they, like the cast of *Jitters*, occupy the most flexible space of all: the theatre. *The Adventures of Ali and Ali and the Axes of Evil* deals with place in an entirely different way. This is a self-reflexive play, and place is most certainly important: physically and psychologically, the world of the play exists in a theatre space. The characters make reference to the space they inhabit, actually going so far as to change dialogue in order to accommodate the specific theatre and city in which the play is being performed. This acute spatial awareness is made clear to the audience immediately, as the play opens with a voice-over, rather like the opening of a rock concert:

fresh from their sold-out tour of East Monrovia and the jungle encampments of Congolese Bauxite smugglers...Are you ready, Mogadishu? Butt out your cigars and wipe the buckets of sweat from your really really black brows, put your stumps and prostheses together and give a GREAT BIG CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS WELCOME TO ALI AND ALI! (Chai et al 12).

Like a rock concert, this play does not try to suggest that it is anything other than a play. This abrupt immersion orients the audience and supplies a great deal of information about

the place of the play. Once on stage, Ali and Ali quickly recognize the inaccuracy of their introduction to the audience. Ali Ababwa claims, "We know you're not Somalia," followed by Ali Hakim's statement that "We know where we are" (13). Within the first fifteen minutes of the play, the characters make reference to their present location, saying, "Hello People in Real Life Canada...And thank you for coming to Vancouver East Church basement," at which point in the script we discover the footnote referred to earlier in this chapter (21). The playwrights state, "This was a site-specific reference for the Vancouver East Cultural Centre. In Toronto, at Theatre Passe Muraille, we said: 'Thank you for coming to Theatre Past Its Prime'. In Montreal and Edmonton, something else" (21). In doing this, the play establishes its self-reflexivity and forms an alliance with the audience, who feel included by this specific reference. There are no pretences exercised to indicate that Ali and Ali expect their audience to suspend their disbelief as to the location of the world on stage: it is simply the stage and is subject to change according to the scene.

Throughout the play, the characters make reference to Canadian politics, society, ideology and public figures. Clearly, these characters have either spent significant time studying Canada or they have been in the country for quite a while. Either way, the implications are intriguing. Citing the banal reinforcements of nationalism once again, I would suggest that if these characters have been exposed to enough Canadian culture to be able to make jokes and create entire parodied scenes about it, they have been exposed to the omnipresent Canadian ideal of flexibility. This can be seen in their behaviour towards the space they inhabit. As in *Jitters*, the theatre acts as the central setting and the characters treat the theatre as a place of home, in which they may conduct work. These traveling performers from the Middle East use the small Canadian theatre in which they are performing to entertain, make money, (attempt to) eat, rest and bask in a safety unknown in their home country. Although the characters are not entirely successful in their quest for each of these things, their efforts suggest that they are indeed using the theatre as a home of sorts, as they try to abate their dreams of returning to their dangerous home country of Agraba. This would suggest that Ali and Ali have already adopted the highly regarded Canadian attitude of flexibility. Their experience with Canadian culture may be somewhat limited, but it was deep enough to have become somewhat ingrained in their imaginations.

Social and political satire are at the root of the on-stage world; the play makes great use of current events, all of which have their own specific association with place. For

example, the fictionalized country of Agraba, apparently located in the Middle East, bears strong resemblance to a real place such as Iraq. This makes it easier for the audience to become immersed in the world of the play. Calling upon prior knowledge of a similar place, the audience can immediately ascribe certain qualities to the place being described. Like Bordertown, Agraba is only a real place in the play, but similar places do exist in the real world – the majority of a Canadian audience will understand some things about a small town in the southern prairies, in the same way that they will have certain expectations about the current state of affairs in a country of the Middle East. Dealing with assumptions about place becomes a major issue throughout the play, as the characters challenge stereotypes through satire. Unlike in Rebar's play, in which stereotypes about place are actually reinforced (farmers from the prairies are morally good, hard-working people – the 'salt of the earth'), *The Adventures of Ali and Ali and the Axes of Evil* asks its audience to recognize these stereotypes and question them. This technique is utilised again in the plays-within-the-play, the 'ethnic family dramas', which clearly satirize the prevalence of plays which deal with cultural identity issues in Canada. It is significant that these plays-within-the-play are all set in kitchens and deal explicitly with issues of family, cultural identity and ethnicity. Moreover, the kitchen acts as space from which to re-tell and satirize the Canadian 'kitchen sink' dramas. The plays-within-the-play immediately evoke broader questions about Canada and Canadian theatre because they are located in such a space: what is Canadian theatre and how are things changing? The use of satire would imply that perhaps the kitchen sink drama is no longer an entirely relevant means of examining Canada, identity, or the place of Canadians in the context of the surrounding world.

If Canadians are no longer being relegated to the kitchen, this would suggest that maybe the issues facing Canadians are bigger than those that can be contained within such a space. The cultural implications of leaving one part of Canada to move to another, as in French's *Leaving Home*, are not the complex issues that they were in the past: now, we see characters leaving one country to come to another, where they may adopt a new language, maintain an old religion and eat foods from around the world. Furthermore, as we have seen in these five plays, the kitchen can only be a privileged liminal space in which change is fostered if it leads to another space - a stage, a prairie, a beach, a family room or a whole theatre. Only when the characters are able to test the boundaries of their spaces can they practice new identities and move toward personal fulfillment.

Moreover, as we see with *Ali and Ali*, the audience is being asked not only to reconsider their assumptions about specific places, but to go even further by re-imagining them. When *Ali and Ali* evoke a bombing, they are reminding audiences about their place in the world: "We repeat: this is not a real explosion" (121). A real bombing is not a consideration of most Canadians - such violence does not exist in Canada and therefore can only be an imaginary occurrence. But in imagining such a thing, *Ali and Ali* are asking us to consider the implications of place and think about how different life could be in another part of the world. We see this reinforced at the end of the play: "Ali Ababwa... you are really wishing to stay here [in Canada] with them?" to which Ababwa replies, "I don't know, Ali Hakim. (a pause) I don't know-" (123). Ali Hakim may recognize the potential that Canada has, but he is also uncertain as to whether Canada can be ultimately fulfilling. Their homeland beckons and the two men dream that "the whole world was Agraba" (124). Yet instead of returning to Agraba, perhaps they can stay in Canada, living in a nation that accepts, encourages and promotes multiculturalism and flexibility. They suggest that the dream was perhaps a dream of the future, but maybe it is actually Canada? After all, Canada is a nation that has moved into a world in which ethnic family dramas are being satirized; it is a place that has begun to re-imagine itself.

Home is certainly a relevant life-shaping force and its functions are vital to the understanding of each play, both for individual characters and groups. Whether or not the characters succeed in creating their ideal world is less important than the fact that they endeavour to find it. What is significant to glean from this survey is that all of the characters do try to challenge the borders within their own worlds. Instead of simply exiting immediately from a place that may not have met all their needs, they persevere in those spaces, in pursuit of what will work for them before they choose either to move on or remain in their current place. In this, we see Canadian characters testing the elasticity of their boundaries, attempting to discover new realms within old ones. They are reinventing spaces and finding ways for the spaces to accommodate their needs. Only in the play that uses the U.S. as its national location does the character need to leave in order to escape her fraught life. The Canadian characters all choose to stay in their present locales; they may need to adjust their perception of the place they inhabit, but they are willing to stay.

It is definitely interesting that each of the plays makes use of a specific domestic space of some kind, which clearly locates itself in a nation. Although I recognize that

locating a play specifically is certainly not a groundbreaking revelation, I think the way that characters see themselves in these places is noteworthy. As discussed in this chapter, home becomes a fundamental backdrop for the plot and the characters' lives, but it is also a prevalent theme which runs through all the plays. In examining their explorations of such spaces, we see them utilising these theatres, houses, cafes and apartments as places of work and home. In finding ways for a place to serve more than one purpose, the characters reinforce the banal ideal of malleability. The idea of home, both a specific space that one inhabits and the larger nation to which one belongs, is really a question at the heart of each play. In pursuit of this home, characters test the flexibility of the boundaries of their worlds, individually, socially, physically and psychologically. It comes to pass that the place that provides safety and comfort is home. In all of the plays, we see characters challenging the confines of their immediate surroundings and making use of the physically and demographically diverse landscape of Canada to find what they need. The external world is ever-present – it haunts, entices, aids and hinders characters in each of the plays, but the place of greatest significance is that which is immediate. The past and the future both loom, but the present dominates. Home is that present domain of family, comfort and safety, but it exists within a much bigger world. The nation has powerful implications: it is the bigger setting for each of these plays, and thus has an important and omnipresent role. It is the physical and social sphere that informs the smaller domestic spaces, all of which cumulatively represent home.

The prevalence of notions of place and home in each of the plays highlights the relevance of such ideas in the broader discussion of national identity. Each of the characters seeks a place to recognize as his or her home – that home must provide safety, comfort and an ability to accommodate change, either physically or psychologically. In this, the theme of flexibility again becomes apparent. Thus, I would assert that the omnipresence of such an ideal implies its existence within the Canadian imagination. That is, the imagined nation of Canada exists as a place of safety, accommodation and flexibility; the pervasiveness of this idea surely indicates its presence in the realm of the everyday, and therefore, as a fundamental aspect of the banal manifestations of Canadian nationalism.

Conclusion

Alan Filewod's discussion of theatrical activity in Canada illuminates the idea that "Canadian theatre can as a whole be considered as a meta-performance that literally enacts crises of (postcolonial) nationhood" (xvii). The analysis of the plays in this research seems to provide concurrent evidence. Moreover, I believe that in examining *Jitters*, *Bordertown Café*, *Amigo's Blue Guitar*, *Harlem Duet* and *The Adventures of Ali and Ali and the Axes of Evil* we have seen a wide variety of illustrations to indicate the presence of an imagined community which upholds flexibility as its fundamental creed. Using Billig's theory we have seen how the frequent occurrence of this ideal may suggest that more people than just those who occupy the stage may feel the impact of this important message. The characters employ a vast array of mechanisms for coping with their insecurities as each of them ultimately seeks the same thing: a place to call home. The home they look for is in Canada, where the mosaic prevails and flexibility is championed. This ideal is reinforced on stage and then recycled back into the daily lives of Canadian citizens.

This dominating idea of flexibility, in individual personalities, family relationships and inhabited places, suggests that elasticity is, indeed, an integral ideal for the imagined community of Canada. Both on stage and off, these imagined communities are endowed with notions of malleability. Although the dream may not yet be achieved, the continual reinforcement of such a notion in the realm of the banal arguably makes it a key aspect of Canadian nationalism. The promulgation of such an ideal suggests that it is truly a cornerstone of our national identity, which will eventually become more than just an imagined ideal – it will move into the real of habitus: the flexible ideal will prevail and become second nature. I would argue that, to a large extent, perhaps it already has.

So, what does all of this say about Canadian theatre? It seems to imply that no matter what form or style the play takes -- be it farcical comedy, realistic drama, metatheatre, or self-reflexive re-tellings of Shakespeare – that drama is endowed with a distinctly Canadian flavour that exists on all planes of the plays: flexibility is a necessity! In a nation that has continued to change since its inception, that continues to pride itself on its (albeit perhaps somewhat unrealistic) dream of embracing all cultures, this notion of flexibility certainly seems a logical manifesto for Canadian drama to uphold. Furthermore,

drama, like the nation, continues to change and evolve over time as well. These imagined domains share a desire to remain malleable.

There is another important thread to this research. Sociologist and demographer Michael Adams has recently published a book called *Fire and Ice: The United States, Canada and the Myth of Converging Values*, which provides an array of statistical evidence to show “that Canadians – immersed in the rhetoric of globalization, surrounded by dizzying economic and technological change [...] will still [have] a place in the world for their unique values and perspectives” (Adams 15). Adams sets out to show that although many people may believe that Canada is becoming more like the United States every day (due largely to the complex mutual dependence of the countries’ economic systems and infiltration of American media that continue to dominate Canadian popular culture), surveys of social values indicate that the two nations are becoming more divergent in their social attitudes than they have been in the past.⁷ That is, with respect to the Canadian habitus, social value systems are actually much different than those that dominate in the United States. The book is comprised of the results of over ten years of demographic research in Canada and the United States; it is a surprising accumulation of data that indicates with respect to social values, which reflect the motivations behind human behaviour, that Canadians are much more liberal and much more flexible than their American neighbours (146).

This is important because it provides a link between my argument, that the Canadian ideal is essentially flexibility and is reinforced through its marked prevalence in the plays, and that of Adams’ book, which offers a wide range of studies showing the idea of flexibility at the core of the Canadian social values system. He argues that Canada was founded on compromise and that this has manifested itself in a myriad of ways (124). He writes:

the culture of accommodation that has been [Canada’s] socio-historical tradition today expresses itself as social liberalism, multi-culturalism, multilingualism, multiple faiths and spiritual paths, and sometimes even as cultural fusion or hybridization. In its most postmodern form, it can exist as an openness to flexible, multiple expressions of individual personality, the leading edges of which are the flexibility of gender, age, and cultural identities. (125-6).

Michael Adams’ research is salient, and seems to argue just what these plays do: *flexibility is indeed the ideal*. Canadians have expectations of malleability and this ideal continues to

be promulgated, even with the overwhelming exposure to American social values on a very regular basis.

The Canadian identity is intact. Though citizens may feel insecurity brought on by living in a nation that embraces differences, these feelings are assuaged by the continual reinforcement of the flexible ideal. By imagining themselves as connected by their differences, Canadians work to promote a new kind of nation, one that takes pride in its multi-ness and embraces change. Instead of becoming static, laden with notions of old stoic thinking, the Canadian imagination is trying to stay creative and dynamic. Maintaining notions of equality and flexibility gives the imaginary the potential to be realized. The proliferation of these ideas in the realm of the banal continues to impact the theatre, which, in turn, works to reinforce these ideas for the entire imagined community of Canada. The theatre is a place for performance, for creating imaginary worlds; interestingly, these plays work to encourage the actualization of such imaginary worlds. The continual reinforcement of national ideals in the everyday world works unconsciously to wave the Canadian flag. Canadian society and Canadian theatre are inextricably linked. Together they will continue to serve as a means of constructing, reinforcing and even changing the flexible national identity. The mimetic cycle is complete but it continues to revolve and evolve.

¹ David French's *Jitters* was included in the first edition of *Modern Canadian Plays*, but was later replaced by French's *Leaving Home*. *The Adventures of Ali and Ali and the Axes of Evil* has only very recently been published in 2005.

² In a transcript of the programme, Martin refers to the collective "we" (of Canada) numerous times. For example, he says: "I think we should be, as a country..." A full transcript can be viewed at the CBC archived website: <http://www.cbc.ca/national/yourturn/paulmartin.html>

³ The use of the definite article asserts that there can only be one country to which we refer: Canada. Billig explores this phenomenon at length. See *Banal Nationalism*: 94.

⁴ A survey conducted by Environics in 2003 of some 2000 people in Canada "reveals that over 80% of Canadians agree that multiculturalism has contributed positively to the Canadian identity. This view is held somewhat more strongly by the younger segment of the Canadian population though consensus is fairly strong across the age spectrum." For more specific details on the polls taken, see "Diversity Popular Among Canadians" at: <http://www.acs-aec.ca/Polls/Poll45.pdf>

⁵ Statistics Canada indicates that as of 2001, approximately 18% of the 31,629,677 people living in Canada consider themselves immigrants. For an overview of the 2005 Statistics Canada's "Canada At A Glance" booklet, see <http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/12-581-XIE/12-581-XIE2004001.pdf>. Compared to the US immigration rate of 7.9% of the total population (as of 1990), as reported by the Department of Homeland Security, a clearer perspective of the whole picture is gleaned. See <http://www.census.gov/apspd/wepeople/we-7.pdf> for more information on US immigration status.

⁶ Having worked as an ESL teacher for three years, I have encountered this comment regularly from people of other national origins, including Korea, China, Japan, Brazil, Spain, Germany, Argentina and Mexico. This is based entirely on personal experience with people ranging from the age of eight to 45 in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, with no pretence as to the academic validity of these statements.

⁷ With respect to defining social values, the book "consider[s] values to be evidence of 'motivated cognition' [...] beliefs that both determine and reflect our responses to the world" (146). These include such notions as, "Civic Apathy," "Cultural Assimilation," "Flexible Families," "Gender Parity," and "Racial Fusion." For more information on Social Values, see the Introduction to *Fire and Ice*, 1-15.

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