

1960s, dozens of accomplished Inuit sculptors and printmakers have become recognized; the native Haida culture on the Pacific Coast has been successfully revived; and native Indian painters have become prominent in the art galleries.

Even within French literature there is no uniform cultural tone. Canada's most internationally celebrated novelist writing in French is probably Antonine Maillet, who won the Prix Goncourt in Paris in 1979. She's lived much of her life in Montreal, Quebec, but she was born in Bouctouche, New Brunswick, and she writes of the tragic history of her people, the Acadians (who are distinct from the Québécois and live mainly in the Atlantic provinces).

Maillet's accomplishment was an early sign of a trend that accelerated in the 1980s and seems likely to grow more important in the 1990s: the acceptance of Canadian culture in distant places where, 15 or so years in the past, it was mainly unknown. Today we can find Canadian novels (such as those of Robertson Davies) in the bookstores of Vienna, Canadian TV drama

(such as the two films made from Montgomery's "Anne" material) on Japanese and Australian networks, Canadian art (such as Jeff Wall's photos) in the galleries of New York or Milan, and at least a few Canadian movies — notably *Le Déclin de l'empire américain* (*The Decline of the American Empire*), by Denys Arcand — heatedly discussed in the film magazines of Europe and the United States. Far more astonishing is the fact, recently uncovered, that no less than 80 Canadian books have been translated during the last five years into Finnish. And increasingly, Quebec theatre companies are showing up at festivals around the globe.

Powerful Stage Language

At its best, Quebec theatre is wildly imaginative, groundbreaking; unlike its equivalent in English-speaking Canada, it depends far more on visual imagery than on dialogue. Little translation is needed to communicate the powerful stage language of Quebec

actor-director Robert Lepage, for instance. His most famous work, *La Trilogie des dragons* (*The Dragon Trilogy*) played to great acclaim in Europe, Northern America and Australia in the 1980s. The *Times* of London called it a "masterpiece." The set designed by the highly gifted Michael Levine of Toronto for Lepage's more recent *Tectonic Plates* consisted of a waist-high swimming pool, a fallen tree, and a blue grand piano floating in mid-air. Its elements combined to create a shape-changing theatre, a theatre that cannot be boxed or pinned down. Years ago, Lepage dreamed of a theatre that could shift (like tectonic plates) and constantly reinvent itself. With the aid of Levine, he's made this improbable dream come spectacularly true.

Spectacle of a different sort characterizes one of the great hits of Canadian popular culture, the Cirque du Soleil, also of Montreal. The travelling circus has never been considered a traditional Canadian art form, but for the past five years audiences around the world have been wildly applauding the fresh charm of the acrobats, clowns, and contortionists in the Cirque.

Almost everybody seems to agree that this is the best thing that's happened to the circus business in a generation, anywhere.

Using contemporary music, exquisite lighting and brilliant choreography, the troupe has gathered ecstatic reviews in Canada, the United States and Europe. Its secret seems to lie in remaining close to its Montreal street performance roots, always innovating, testing the limits, taking nothing for granted. It may be the only circus on earth that always astonishes its audience.

Back home, artists have played, during the last 30 years, an increasingly prominent role in public life. Quebec, in this sense, was ahead of the rest of Canada. In the 1960s, Quebec poets, songwriters and filmmakers were prominent among those who advocated a more independent status for their province. In creating a new mood in Quebec society, they were at least as important as politicians and journalists.

Cirque du Soleil: one of the great hits of Canadian pop culture.

