

Well-conceived satire

Tired theme weakens Citizens of Calais

By CARLO SGUASSERO

Canadian comedy writer Eric Nicol has created a realistic impression of the ambiguous Canadian character in the Citizens of Calais, shown in Burton last week.

The play is about an English-Canadian director, Ted English (Gord Masten) and his wife (played alternately by Irene Matyas and Lois Pody) who land in Rideauville, a small mixed community in Quebec. He is faced with the job of directing an historical play about the British siege of Calais in the eighteenth century.

An audition is held for actors from the local community, but the response is poor, barely getting the number of people needed to fill all the roles. Less than amateur actors, the country folk don't seem to take the play as a serious community endeavour, and personal conflicts arise which ultimately destroy the play.

The very real national problems of Quebec separatism and the American influence in Canada are implicit as characters begin to clash. Louis Ferguson (Ralph Small) a Rideauville banker who protests that everything must be done in English, irritates his French-Canadian neighbours whose liberal attitudes and independent feeling separate them from the rest of the crowd. This conflict, however, is only to be replaced by a more pronounced confrontation between Ferguson and Marvin (Michael Hollingsworth) a long-haired, pot-smoking, American draft dodger who proudly whistles his country's national anthem.

The inter-relation between the characters in the play, Anglophones, Francophones, an American and an Italian, are very loose, making any type of co-operation unlikely. The only real relationship exists between Ted English and his wife Donna, and even that at times does not seem

very well buttressed as they try to fight the collapse of their marriage.

The script is packed with humour, mixing puns with situation comedy and a sprinkling of romance, but there are a few odd moments. The flashbacks into history created to familiarize the characters and the audience with background information contribute nothing to the play with the exception of a few laughs.

The play was performed by a third year performance group of the theatre department under the direction of Malcolm Black, who has directed several other of Eric Nicol's plays on a professional level.

The Citizens of Calais is a well written and well conceived satire which could stand some improvement. It is written by a Canadian for Canadians who understand the problems of trying to realize the Canadian identity, but this is a tired theme which just might make The Citizens of Calais a tired play.



Agnes Kruchio photos

"Two generations of playwrights" — Michael Hollingsworth (Clear Light, Strawberry Fields) and Eric Nicol, (Citizens of Calais), share the spotlight at the production of Nicol's play with the performance class of the theatre department, below.



Sprouts held over at Glendon

By BOB McBRYDE

The Glendon Dramatic Arts production of Brussels Sprouts, popular enough to be held over this week in the Pipe Room of Glendon Hall, provides a curious and worthy evening's entertainment. A Canadian play by Larry Kardish, it is directed by York alumnus Charles Northcote.

A somewhat popular misconception about the drama is that it resembles a Bacchanalian romp — what with total nudity and all. Actually Brussels Sprouts has a consistent undertext of pathos and muted anxiety.

Two young male travellers (from up in a Brussels Hotel. Within this claustrophobic context we learn of their close interdependence, mainly through verbal parries and thrusts.

After two evening visits by a

spectre-like Lolita, they assume an overt physical love relationship, catalyzed, it seems, by this contact with a woman.

All three characters, Ernie (Gordon McIvor), Moby (John Frankie) and Charlotte (Dorren Hess) become well-developed entities. Role reversals and ambiguous stories abound and the actors are required to combine concentration with versatility. Each performer differentiates his or her character through the use of

idiosyncratic verbal or physical mannerisms.

The Pipe Room set creates the physical environment of a sleazy European hotel to near-perfection. Indeed, the entire production staff deserves mention for their lighting and designing competence. Also the original music composed and performed by Phil Booth provides an apt background and lends a whimsical atmosphere to the play as a whole.

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