

Until the advent of professional theatre in French Canada, it was difficult to create a distinctive dramatic literature that reflected French-Canadian society. Since the professional theatres (with few exceptions) have made it a practice to present each season at least one play by a Quebec writer, French-Canadian drama has built up an interesting repertoire. Mainly devoted to exploring psychological and social themes, the work of these dramatists is generally well received by the Quebec public and in recent years their plays have attracted the largest audiences.

The "Englang" (English language) theatre in Quebec reflects the vitality of its French-speaking counterpart. As is the case with the French theatre, English theatre activity in Quebec is situated almost exclusively in Montreal. The "Englang" repertoire provides a window on world culture, is sophisticated and lively in its views and makes an important contribution to Montreal theatre. Established in 1969, the Centaur Theatre group is the leading English company in the province. Although it can be classed as an "establishment" theatre, it is not afraid to challenge itself and its audience to new approaches. It also seeks out native playwrights and undertakes the responsibility of presenting new works.

The giant of the theatre world in English-speaking Canada is the Stratford Festival. Opened in 1953 to give summer seasons of Shakespearean plays, Stratford was a success from the beginning and has maintained its reputation throughout its existence. The Festival is now one of the most important theatre events in the world and the company is one of the best in North America. The advent of good theatre in the relaxed atmosphere of summertime has added a new dimension to the cultural evolution of Canada. Situated on the banks of the Avon River, the physical facilities of the Festival are impressive and have had no less impact than the artistic aspects. The Festival opened in the largest tent in existence, containing, rather than the traditional proscenium stage, a "thrust" stage, which projected into the audience. In 1957, the tent was replaced by a permanent theatre with the same type of stage.

The Festival has extended the length of its season and has expanded to include contemporary drama and other attractions such as opera, concerts and art exhibits. It has also created an opera and drama workshop where actors can learn something of music and singers can be coached in drama. Other celebrated festivals include the Charlottetown Summer Festival and the Shaw Festival at Niagara-on-the-Lake. The latter was founded in 1964 to perpetuate the work of Shaw. Emulating the Stratford Festival, it has expanded to include the work of other playwrights and a music festival has been added.

#### Rise of the "Separate" Stage

While French-speaking artists have for some time been developing a truly French-Canadian tradition in the arts, English-speaking artists have continued to be borrowers and imitators of British and American theatre. In particular, the Canadian playwright in English-speaking Canada has not attained the acceptance and professional standard achieved by writers in the other literary arts.