
contrivance when they see one. A decade later, when our Stratford Festival had established our theatrical competence, the company travelled first to New York and then to Britain. In both places the productions were admired. But I noticed that the American critics praised our actors for their 'style' (in which they felt American actors were then lacking), while the British critics praised them for their 'vitality' (a quality in which, it pleased them to think, British actors were then deficient). In other words, the compliment in either case did no damage to the *amour propre* of the giver.

A New Renaissance?

If our theatre is to be judged by its compatibility with forms approved by *Good Housekeeping*, then any attempt to be original runs the risk of being seen as a failed attempt to be *à la mode*. There is, after all, not *one* set of values and practices in art, but many. We should be not richer but infinitely poorer if the Peking Opera were to duplicate the repertoire of the Met. Homogenization is the death of creativity, and those who counsel it – not the believers in variety – are the real narrow-minded zealots. It may very well be that in time to come, the most valuable aspect of the Canadian theatre may turn out to be that it is *not* the same as the American theatre; that it may offer the world not only an alternative North American theatre but also a model for greater diversity in general. Certainly the world is, like Canada itself, a pluralistic society. Like Canada, to survive, the world must make capital out of its cultural differences.

In a recent speech to U.S. scientists, Canada's Northrop Frye said this:

The arts and sciences have a common origin in social concern. In proportion as they follow their own inner structures, they become specialized and pluralistic. This is simply a condition of civilized life: they have to do this, and

the degree to which an art is allowed to follow its own line of development is of immense importance in determining the level of a society's culture and, ultimately, the leveling of the life of its citizens.

What is that level in Canada now? Well, we are in the midst of our most recent renaissance. There is more theatre going on in Toronto, and in Montreal, than in any North American city except New York – yet it is still difficult to find common denominators; it is an exceedingly varied theatrical fare. From Newfoundland to Alberta – both provinces newly rich with the promise of oil, and bursting to be listened to – we are getting plays and productions that really do manage to present us to ourselves and in original ways. We can only hope they may be of interest to others.

On the other hand, we may once again perform the astonishing magic act we have perfected from long practice: pulling the rug out from under our own feet while standing on it.

(This essay may be freely reproduced.)

This paper was delivered in February, 1982, to the Center for Inter-American Relations in New York, with whose permission it is reprinted.