



Staging a Century: The Development of English Language Theatre During Quebec's 20th Century

by Hannah R. Cheslock

WHAT MAKES A PLAY QUEBECOIS?
WHAT MAKES A PLAYWRIGHT QUEBECOIS?

ABSTRACT



Quebec, a province who's 20th century had a deeply complex relationship with its Anglophone residents, has a rich reserve of English-language plays and dramatic texts. These plays touch on large ranges of topics; historical dramas that reimagine stories and events throughout human history, familial dramas that explore the dynamics of a family within the walls of their home, plays detailing the intense cultural and political connection of the church and state; and plays that in countless ways simultaneously reflect what it means to be human and to be Quebecois. The tasks of this research project are twofold: to take each of these texts and conduct a thorough thematic and formal analysis, and to research and write biographies on selected playwrights of each decade, with the goal of answering the questions: what makes a play a piece of Quebec theatre? What makes a playwright Quebecois? How does the Quebec identity and society impact theatre being written throughout the century?

OBJECTIVES

- Find textual similarities and differences
- Trace and understand developments and trends of English language theatre
- Link socio-political and cultural phenomena of the time to the texts being written
- Research and write the biographies of prominent playwrights to understand their personal artistic influences

METHODOLOGY

- Primary & secondary source analysis
- Library and archival research
- Data entry into a larger database



Playwright Biographies



- These biographies detail the lives of prominent English-language playwrights in Quebec in the 20th century
- These specific playwrights are those whom have had one of their plays chosen to be performed at a festival of staged readings at McGill in Winter 2020
- Biographies allow for a playwright's personal history to be studied and perhaps reveal why they are attracted to certain themes, styles, etc.



Conclusions

The scale of this research project was large, and data analysis is still on going and incomplete.

Issues with categorization are frequent: when is a playwright considered Quebecois? When is there work no longer in the canon of Quebec theatre?

As the research and data accumulates, one thing's for certain: the Quebecois identity is layered and deeply complex, and this complexity is mirrored in the province's theatrical canon.

Data Analysis- Database

Genre Synopsis

Cast

Setting Time

Setting Place

Historical Context

Premises

Central Conflicts

Issues Social Religious Political Historical

Theme Crime and Punishment Relationships Politics/Government Illness/Aging Social Structures Family War/Violence Social Pressures/Collective Consequences Racism Social/Collective Values Gender/Sexuality Community/Collective Identity Death Personal Values Self/Identity Personal Vices/Consequences

Style Verse/Poetry Burlesque Lyrical/Rhythmic Children's Theatre Interactive Musical/Music Included Abstract Cabaret None (no specific style) Historical Agit-Prop Other... Physical/Visual Religious

Format

Main Characters Descriptions

These broader questions pertaining to themes, style, and format can be used both to understand trends in English language playwrighting as well as what makes these texts Quebecois compared to other English language plays written in Canada during the same era.



- For each play, data is collected and filled into this database
- These specifications allow for researchers to find plays with overlapping themes, formats, etc.
- Being able to observe where and when there are trends helps researchers know where to focus research efforts, and also indicates playwrighting trends of different time periods, demographics, and more.

Check off as many as apply!



Special thanks to Professor Erin Hurley and Alison Bowie for their guidance and support throughout this research experience.

