

The Drama of Our Past: Major Plays from Nineteenth-Century Quebec



Although the General Evolution of French-Canadian theatre in the nineteenth century has been described previously in some detail, the plays themselves remain largely inaccessible, in French and, especially, in English. The Drama of Our Past fills this significant void by presenting, in English for the first time, five full-length plays and five playlets which together cover the major genres and themes treated by local dramatists throughout the century. These plays include: *Anglomania* (1803), the first play with an explicit Canadian theme and setting to appear since the seventeenth century; the best-known political plays -- the five *Status Quo* comedies (1834); *The Donation* (1842), the first play by a Quebec-born writer to be produced and published in Canada, plus another by the same author dealing with French-English relations; *Felix Poutre* (1862), the most popular play in public performance; and the best-known and most frequently staged of college plays, *Archibald Cameron of Locheill* (1868/1894). Much more than a mere anthology, *The Drama of Our Past* provides a lengthy introductory essay for each play, situating it in the social, historical, and political context in which it was composed and performed. When read in the chronological order in which they are presented, the essays and plays offer a connected history of Canadian drama in French for this period. The plays are presented in their full and most authoritative versions, in translations which convey both the sense of the original French and its flavour or spirit, ranging from stilted literary convention to amusing imitation of local dialect, from solemn political harangue to earthy humour. What emerges is an indigenous dramaturgy demonstrably more original, impassioned, sophisticated, and entertaining than has hitherto been credited.

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