

down, the audience falls quiet, and the stage lights come up on another Pollock play” (380).

**ALEKSANDAR SAŠA DUNDJEROVIĆ**

*The Theatricality of Robert Lepage.*

Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2007, 252pp.

ERIN HURLEY

In September 2008, Montreal playwright, actor, and director Wajdi Mouawad staged his solo show, *Seuls*, at the Théâtre d’Aujourd’hui. The play centred around Harwan, a doctoral candidate at a mythical Montreal university writing his dissertation on Robert Lepage. In one scene, to remind Lepage’s agent of precisely which doctoral candidate writing on Robert Lepage he is, Harwan tells her he’s writing on “le cadre comme espace identitaire dans les solos de Robert Lepage.” This comic moment, recognized as such by the Espace Go audience, signals not only the widespread interest in Lepage, his work, and his creative process by doctoral candidates and other kinds of academics—an interest evidenced in, for instance, the recent amply illustrated *Ex Machina. Chantiers d’écriture scénique* from *L’Instant scène* (2007) and Ludovic Fouquet’s *Robert Lepage, l’horizon en images* (2006). It also points to the many different ways such a multi-generic, multimedia, multi-linguistic body of work might be approached. Already Lepage’s theatrical productions have been examined through the lenses of sociological and postcolonial critique, of semiotics, and of inter-medial performance in both French and English. Aleksandar Dundjerović, a director and senior lecturer at the University of Manchester, whose book is derived from his own doctoral dissertation, takes a hagiographic approach. He attempts to isolate what he calls the “theatricality” of Lepage’s work, a term which seems to mean “style” or “aesthetic” as tied to his creative process developed from the Repère cycles. Its key features are a “transformative *mise en scène*,” its inclusion of multiple media, and its open-ended creative process (25-6). He seems to attribute Lepage’s international success and cross-cultural communication to this open form (4). I say “seems” as Dundjerović describes the work and

makes observations, but does not offer sustained analysis of, nor make any original claims about, Lepage's work, except to say that it is important and good. This makes it a sometimes confusing and, to me anyway, unfulfilling read.

Like the French-language publications immediately preceding this one, Dundjerović illuminates Lepage's creative process and his artistic preoccupations. Most chapters use a particular production as anchor for Dundjerović's reflections on stages of Lepage's creative process; they admirably cover each of Lepage's live performance genres (solo, collective, text-based, opera) and reach from his first school tours in the late 1970s to *Zulu Time* in the early 2000s. Thus, *La trilogie des dragons* (1985-91) serves as an exemplary use of "resources," the first stage of the Repère cycles Lepage developed out of his study and work with Jacques Lessard in the early 1980s. Indicative of his hagiographic approach, Dundjerović's first chapter establishes "Personal and Cultural Contexts," where a reductive view of Quebec's cultural politics is established in order to position Lepage as exceptional to his environment. Subsequent chapters explore his style, solo performance, space and scores (another Repère term), performers, text, and finally multimedia and new technology.

However, *The Theatricality of Robert Lepage* suffers from a curious anti-intellectual streak that prevents serious engagement with Lepage's smart, intellectually compelling, visually stunning, wide-ranging oeuvre: in other words, a body of work that seems to cry out for substantive and informed discussion. Criticisms regarding his representation of ethnic and cultural others, for instance, by the likes of Jen Harvie and Karen Fricker, are first underplayed and then responded to by a turn to Lepage's "intentions" as the only counter-argument one might need. Dundjerović writes in summary of Lepage's "theatricality" that "[Lepage's] theatre directing is not about knowledge and an educated point of view; it is rather intuitive, spontaneous, and founded on the actors' playfulness and group improvisations" (208). This kind of romanticization of artistic genius, a tack that Lepage has been known to cultivate himself, does little to advance knowledge about Lepage, his process, or his work as it straightjackets the critic/scholar. Moreover, it perpetuates a facile and self-defeating theory/practice, scholar/artist divide.

Dundjerović's ideas are victim at once of over-generalization and of a lack of facility with an abstract or conceptual critical (and aesthetic) vocabulary. On the one hand, clear and detailed description of how Lepage takes a show from resources to scoring, for

instance, or even of the shows themselves (what they look like, sound like, or are about) is largely absent. (The chapter on “The Performers” which takes *The Seven Streams of the River Ota* [1994–7] as its test-case captures most vividly the show itself, to my mind.) This strikes me as odd in a book vaunting Lepage’s aesthetic and his original theatrical process. On the other hand, the conceptual vocabulary Dundjerović enlists functions as a placeholder for analysis. For example, he situates Lepage’s image-theatre in the realm of Baudrillardian simulation on page four but then abandons that concept entirely. “Theatricality,” his key term, is “similar to the idea of performativity” on page 25, but is also like Barthes’s concept of theatricality which, he says on page 35, means “theatre minus text.” Other heavyweights like Derrida and Žižek, as well as Lepage scholars like Harvie, Fricker, and Jane Koustas, are duly invoked but not engaged. The text itself suffers from repetitions, unclear connections between paragraphs and sections, factual errors, and typos—most egregiously the French-language title of *Tectonic Plates* (rendered *Les plaque* [sic] *tectoniques*) and names of main characters of *Seven Streams* (“Hanako” becomes “Honako”) and *La trilogie des dragons* (“Wong” is rendered “Wang”).

In the end, *The Theatricality of Robert Lepage* does not give us much information that we didn’t already have, even in English where the scholarly literature is somewhat less extensive than that in French. We do need a good book on Lepage in English. I regret to say that this is not it.

**LOUISE FORSYTH, ed.**

*Anthology of Quebec Women’s Plays in English Translation Volume I (1966–1986).*

Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2006. 570pp.

*Anthology of Quebec Women’s Plays in English Translation Volume II (1987–2003).*

Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2008. 380pp.

LOUISE LADOUCEUR

C’est un travail colossal qu’accomplit Louise Forsyth dans les deux volumes de l’ouvrage *Anthology of Quebec Women’s Plays in English Translation*. Publiée par Playwrights Canada Press, l’antho-