

to a publication that would cover the impressive variety and cultural scope of scenography in Canada—a book that is long overdue.

GILBERT DAVID, ed.

Écrits sur le théâtre canadien-français. Études suivies d'une anthologie (1900-1950). Montréal : Paragraphes, 2011. 518 pp.

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Fruit of a long-term research project undertaken by Gilbert David and a team of research assistants and collaborators, this substantial volume offers fascinating insight into a vast primary corpus, systematically extracted from contemporary newspapers, periodicals, magazines, and other writings, and available online as a bibliography of nearly seven thousand items, through the Centre de recherche interuniversitaire sur la littérature et la culture québécoises (CRILCQ) at the University of Montreal. Helpfully juxtaposing original texts and analytical comment, it imaginatively provides an introductory overview of the project by David, a three-hundred page anthology of some one hundred items, and studies by the other team members of contemporary publishing environments.

The anthology is organised chronologically into five parts, decade by decade, the number and length of texts varying quite considerably between sections. The 1920s and 1930s feature respectively only eight texts by six authors and twelve texts by eight authors, numbers reflecting, according to David, the low state of contemporary Montreal theatre. In contrast, the 1940s section, with thirty-one texts, some much lengthier than those of earlier periods, clearly demonstrates a new spirit of theatrical endeavour and the elaboration of a more consistently sophisticated reflection on the nature, aspirations, and techniques of theatre, not only by theatre journalists but also by engaged practitioners. Selection has, of course, brought definition to a diffuse and amorphous corpus, but David, as editor, still contrives to suggest the complexity of divergent agendas as first experienced by the research team, thus enabling the reader to share the satisfying sense of discovery as key themes and arguments gradually emerge. These include the Catholic Church's hostility to theatre, viewed as a dangerous competitor for the public voice; the rejection of sensationalist melodrama and the promotion of serious

theatre as an engine for national cultural affirmation; the importance of theatre for the preservation of the French language; the need for a national repertory, contradictorily defined as based primarily on the classics of (French) theatre, or rooted in French-Canadian experience. More specific practical concerns include the need for a dedicated building for national theatre; provision of professional training and improved pay and conditions of work for actors; improved financial arrangements for theatres and theatre companies (reduction of exorbitant taxes, provision of subsidies); and strengthening of copyright laws to aid the emergence of French-Canadian dramaturgical talent.

The six companion studies provide indispensable contextualizing analysis of the publications in which the theatre articles appeared and of the economic and social conditions within which publishers had to operate. The first two essays focus on the commercial considerations driving owners and editors. As Yves Jubinville highlights for the broadsheet dailies (1900-1950) and Hervé Guay similarly comments for the weeklies (1898-1916), publishers, in the early years, were primarily interested in the revenue from theatre announcements and self-supplied theatre publicity. They avoided confrontation with the religious authorities, and 'reviews' were essentially plot summaries and bland one-line comments on the actors. Progress towards more reflective theatre reporting was occasionally more evident in the weeklies' discussions of links between theatre, language and national culture, but professional theatre journalism did not fully emerge until the 1920s (for example Jean Béraud's articles in *La Presse*). Maggie Dubé's essay switches to dedicated theatre publications. Though few and short-lived at first, these nevertheless provide clear evidence of an interest for all aspects of theatre, which ultimately led to the informed journalism of theatrical practitioner Henri Letondal (1920s) before finally blossoming into the extended reflection of Émile Legault in *Les Cahiers des Compagnons*.

Sylvano Santini turns next to the varying roles and readerships for theatre reporting in two women's and family magazines. *La Revue populaire*, addressing a less affluent, less educated audience, concentrated on basic explanation of the workings of theatre, also advising how to behave when attending performances. *La Revue moderne*, geared to a wealthier elite, stressed the more abstract notion of theatre as a motor for building cultural capacity and national identity. By the 1940s, however, the interest of both readerships, under the influence of cinema and radio,

began to shift towards the private lives of performers. From once marginalized outsider, the actor was now fêted as 'one of us,' a move prefiguring the celebrity culture of our own period. The interplay of radio and theatre journalism in the 1940s occupies Lucie Courchesne's study of *Radiomonde*. In contrast to the anxious downplaying of radio evident in some of the anthology articles, she notes the welcome extension of actor employment across the two media and the magazine's highlighting of their two-fold achievements. She also emphasizes the magazine's crucial contribution to development of French-language theatre in Canada by its persistent calls for a dedicated "centre municipal" for theatre and a school of dramatic art. Finally Sylvain Schryburt reflects on the small number of active theatre practitioners in early theatre reporting. Pre-1940 the pressure of one-week stands precluded self-reflection. Theatre writing by theatre professionals was the work of retired practitioners, commenting, from past experience, on the difficulties of building a theatre public with no theatre milieu, or a national repertoire with no framework of theatre publishing. The priesthood alone provided a time-rich environment conducive to combined practitioner experiment and reflection, until developing possibilities of employment gave lay exponents the breathing space to formulate a dramaturgical vision co-extensive with their practical experience.

David amply fulfils his ambition of opening up a neglected field of Quebec's theatre history, providing invaluable tools for a better understanding of the gradual emergence of an autonomous theatre and theatre milieu in Quebec and a better appreciation of the important formative role of theatre in the development of Quebec's cultural and national psyche. His introductory essay signals further stimulating directions for research: the evolution of notions of 'realism' and 'modernity'; study of acting and staging techniques; analysis of the work of individual theatre journalists; and exploration of the dis/connections of English-language and French-language theatre in Montreal. The volume concludes with a bibliography and two indexes of the anthology texts. Ideally it might also have included an additional bibliography for items referenced only in footnotes in the individual studies. These footnotes might also have conveniently indicated whether referenced items figure in the anthology.