

The Professionalization of a Stage Naturalist, the Making of a Mythmaker: The Theatre Criticism of Urjo Kareda at the University of Toronto's *Varsity* Newspaper

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The theatre criticism of Urjo Kareda in the *Toronto Star* offers favoured primary source material for theatre historians evaluating the so-called "alternative theatre" movement in Toronto in the early 1970s. Indeed, it has been argued that theatre activity during these years constitutes a "movement" largely because of Kareda's engaging writing at the time, which popularly labeled it as "movement" even as it emerged. However, Kareda's equally engaging writing in the campus weekly newspaper the *Varsity* in the mid-1960s, while he was a student at the University of Toronto, has been left unexplored. This essay argues that Kareda's themes, styles, and opinions in that student publication reveal much about the development of his early views on theatre practices and aesthetics in the years prior to the emergence of the alternative theatres, most notably his unwavering preference for neo-Aristotelian stage naturalism and psychological realism, and a dynamic emphasis on Toronto's theatre ecology. In doing so, it offers connections between undergraduate cultural production and career-minded journalistic theatre writing. And it challenges scholars to rethink the professional researcher's undervaluation of extra-professional theatre criticism.

Les critiques que signait Urjo Kareda dans le *Toronto Star* sont une importante source première pour les chercheurs en histoire du théâtre qui étudient le mouvement du théâtre dit « alternatif » à Toronto au début des années 1970. On a qualifié cette activité théâtrale de « mouvement » en grande partie à cause des écrits engagés de Kareda qui, à l'époque, lui attribuait déjà ce qualificatif. Or, les textes tout aussi engagés que publiait Kareda au milieu des années 1960 dans *Varsity*, le journal étudiant de l'Université de Toronto où il faisait ses études à l'époque, restent largement méconnus. Dans cet article, Whittaker démontre que les thèmes, les styles et les opinions de Kareda dans ce journal étudiant font voir l'évolution de sa perception des pratiques et de l'esthétique théâtrales avant l'émergence des compagnies de théâtre alternatif, notamment en ce qui concerne son inébranlable préférence pour le naturalisme néo-aristotélicien et le réalisme psychologique, de même que l'importance qu'il accordait à l'écologie du théâtre de Toronto. Whittaker souligne ainsi le lien entre la production culturelle dans le cadre d'études de premier cycle et celle, davantage axée sur la carrière, de la critique théâtrale produite dans un contexte journalistique. Ce faisant, il remet en cause la tendance qu'ont les chercheurs professionnels à sous-évaluer la critique théâtrale produite dans un contexte non professionnel.



The fourteenth of February 1972 proves to be a telling date in the life of Estonian-born Canadian Urjo Kareda. At the age of twenty-eight and serving in the first year of his position as lead theatre critic at the *Toronto Star*, he is lecturing in English and Drama at the University of Toronto's Erindale campus. He is also in the thick of rehearsals at the University Alumnae Dramatic Club's (UADC's) Coach House Theatre on Toronto's Maplewood Avenue directing a double-bill of Harold Pinter's short plays *Landscape* and *Silence*. His stage manager is Mallory Gilbert, who had joined Tarragon Theatre before the start of the season (she would become Tarragon's General Manager in 1975). It is UADC's last "Coach House" production before moving into its current Berkeley Street Firehall home.

It is also on this date—between classes and rehearsals—that Kareda sets out his preferred style of drama in a *Star* review of the Poor Alex's production of Bill Fruet's Canadian prairie play *Wedding in White*:¹

Why has naturalism become such a taboo in Canadian theatre? Why are there so few attempts at a naturalistic depiction of the quality of our life?

Why do some younger writers regard the form with a spectrum of indifference ranging from bemused apathy to aggressive contempt? [. . .]

Naturalism, with its 19th-century origins in a desire to mirror life on the stage, still holds astonishing power to spellbind. [. . .]

Because theatrical naturalism inevitably holds an incomplete mirror up to life, because it presents a heightened and juggled reality, its final effect is acutely poetic and impressionistic. The naturalistic details acquire depth, beauty and resonance. ("Almost")

Kareda links his concept of naturalism's "heightened and juggled reality" with Pinter, whom he believes "plays [. . .] with a naturalistic presentation of life" ("Drama"). His direction of *Landscape* and *Silence* at the Coach House Theatre is an extension-in-practice of his favoured form of drama, and his column in the *Star* is the medium for this message. By the end of that year, in his Introduction to the publication of David French's Tarragon Theatre hit *Leaving Home*, he proclaims the 1971-72 Toronto theatre season to be one "during which, creatively, all hell had broken loose" (v), and one in which "the wane of neo-Pinterism is not yet due. It was as if, compressed into one season, we were witnessing a ritualized recreation of the history of modern drama" (vii). Kareda would be the chronicler of this recreation.

But how might we ground Kareda's preference for naturalism—which he judged so vigorously to be the best form for the new Canadian theatre—prior to his time at the *Star*? This study analyzes Kareda's early theatre and film reviews while he was a student writing for the University of Toronto's *Varsity* newspaper in the mid-1960s. It traces the predominant themes, styles, and opinions that he developed during these years, and offers insights into how it prefigures his construction of Toronto's so-called alternative theatres in the *Star* in the early 1970s. It also argues that Kareda's writing in the *Varsity* prepared him to take the lead in translating these practices into narratives that would influence artists', audiences', and scholars' perception of the alternative theatres as the next, and thereafter maybe even last, "movement" to dominate theatre practices not only in Toronto, but across the country.

Positivist Discourse and the Pre-Professionalized Critic

To review the undergraduate writings of an eminent cultural figure like Urjo Kareda is, arguably, a radical choice for professional theatre scholars. Doing so challenges us to reconsider the notion, however explicit or unintended, that pre-professional critical writings, like other extra-professional cultural products such as “amateur” theatre, should remain outside the purview of professional research, as if such phenomena predate, or are otherwise external to, the origin of knowledges, practices, and genealogies. Michel Foucault observes that scholars “communicate by the form of positivity of their discourse” and that this positivity “defines a field” and “plays the role of what might be called a *historical a priori*” (143). This, he explains, is an *a priori* that is “a condition of reality for statements,” a “history that is given, since it is that of things actually said.” Beyond the abstracted boundaries of inherited fields of knowledge like “theatre studies,” “journalism,” or “juvenilia,” utterances as disparate—and yet not so disparate—as a review published in an undergraduate newspaper, a theatre season preview published in a metropolitan daily, or a chapter in a scholarly collection of essays need not be organized into distant hierarchies of knowledge that rank from “professional” down to “hobby,” or “adult” down to “young adult.” In this sense, the historical *a priori* of each of these utterances and others “like” them can be productively reconfigured to introduce new approaches to research and to reassess the relationship between professional cultural output and its pre- and extra-professional counterparts. This is largely a measure of difference wherein the discipline of theatre studies, itself a profession, weighs, ranks, selects, and omits various journalistic utterances on the basis of their place in the profession of journalism, in advance of qualitative study or thoughtful consideration.

In the case of Kareda’s journalistic writings these weights, measures, differences, selections, and exclusions may be quantified by his age (barely five years between student and professional journalist statuses), experience (writing, travel, theatre viewing, personal life), or income (volunteer, freelance, regular salary); but they may also be qualified by the relationship of the ideas and perspectives that run through his published theatre criticism. To see them otherwise would be to argue that they “elude historicity” and to deny their *a priori* relationship as a constitutive “transformable group” (Foucault 144). It is this malleability that allows these statements and documents to be approached and re-approached and which, along with the “objects” that they review, preview, and critique, constitute and re-constitute the “archive” that orders and re-orders them (145). It is from the totality of this systematizing archive that the researcher weighs, measures, differentiates, selects, and even excludes on grounds that may—or may not—be structured by a field’s fashioned (and fashionable), malleated (and malleable) profession. It is from a totality of “differences” between utterances, not a mythical “origin” (147) bordered by the contracts of professional status, that we extract frames for analysis. Though Kareda’s undergraduate writing emerges in hindsight as a collection of professionalizing, pre-career utterances regarding Canadian nationalism and stage naturalism, at the time of their emergence—before that professional career—these utterances belonged to the intake and outtake of fields of knowledge. These fields were as disparate—and yet not so disparate—as constitutional politics, modern theatre, and the sundry “genres” and “movements” out of which Kareda’s objects of criticism, those plays and films, surfaced.

The significance of journalistic theatre criticism as an activity generating essential cultural documents that bear witness to, and provide insight into, contemporary events and practices, can hardly be overstated. As Anton Wagner explains, in the colonies that later formed Canada:

The first theatrical notice in English appeared in newspapers in Halifax in 1773. Since then, theatre critics have left us several hundred thousand reviews published in newspapers and magazines across Canada over two centuries. These reviews often are the only descriptive record left to cultural historians of theatre production in Canada. (14)

Thereafter, the purposes of journalistic theatre writing moved from advertising and puffery to polemical aesthetics and cultural nationalism. This trajectory, traced formidably in Wagner's influential edited collection *Establishing Our Boundaries*, moves from the turn of the twentieth-century criticism of Hector Charlesworth and B. K. Sandwell through to the mid-twentieth-century criticism of Nathan Cohen and Herbert Whittaker. In particular, Cohen at the *Star* and Whittaker at the *Globe and Mail* praised Toronto productions of well-produced, new modern and theatre of the absurd plays from Europe and America; they championed productions of old classics presented well (and damned those presented poorly); they kept watch over any new, homegrown plays that emerged, particularly at the annual Dominion Drama Festival and its Central Ontario Drama League feeder competition; and crucially, they enumerated for their readers the significance of each of these plays for the benefit of inexpert audiences. From Charlesworth to Whittaker, theatre criticism increasingly tied together the nationalist intentions of Canadian playwrights with the cultural intentions of "our" nation. When Kareda replaced Cohen as lead theatre critic at the *Star* in 1971, he was poised to witness these intentions writ large across several Toronto stages.

As audiences witnessed these nationalist impulses on stage, a handful of theatre critics across the country—including Jamie Portman in his later years at the *Calgary Herald*, Christopher Dafoe at the *Vancouver Sun*, and Kareda at the *Star*—provided a sort of cultural gloss for theatre-goers by translating the ideological distance between new theatre practices emerging in repurposed parking garages, warehouses, auto shops, and churches; and the Trudeau-era cultural nationalism of the post-Centennial years. These critics, operating as cultural advocates, promoted Canadian theatre by training readers and audiences to understand how emergent artistic practices could speak to emergent cultural aspirations.

Kareda's Toronto

Kareda's extraordinary influence on playwriting and new play production in Toronto as the *Star's* theatre critic has received significant scholarly attention. From the fall of 1971 to the spring of 1975, he reviewed and championed a renaissance in playwriting and new play production in Toronto. Deemed to be among Canada's "most influential daily reviewers [who] were instrumental in recognizing and advocating Canadian playwriting, new directions in the theatre, and encouraging audience development" (Filewod 142), he is lauded for articulating "the most important call to arms that the alternative theatre ever inspired" (Johnston, *Up* 183). His "literate, passionate reviews [had] an enormous impact on theatre in Toronto"

(26) and his “enthusiasm and influence had a great deal to do with bestowing mainstream status on these theatres” (253). In one interview, Kareda recalls that his “opportunity came with the challenge to make this new constituency available to readers. I became both a critic and a champion” (qtd. in Rudakoff 5). Unlike Cohen and Whittaker, who had reviewed theatre in Toronto for decades (Whittaker remained at the *Globe and Mail* until 1975, the same year Kareda left the *Star*), Kareda’s comparatively short full-time professional journalism career was wholly contemporary with theatre work that has been characterized as a temporally and geographically cohesive “movement.” He was in the right place at the right time and he knew it. By the time his days at the *Star* were over, John Fraser could write in the *Globe and Mail* that:

Because of his enthusiasm (pro and con) and highly visible support of the new kind of drama emerging from Toronto’s alternate theatres, Kareda became inextricably identified with it and, as often happens when good critics leave their posts, some people now believe he was largely responsible for it. [He was] the unofficial pope of the underground Canadian theatre.

Scholarship that reflects upon Kareda’s critical writing during his tenure at the *Star* is almost unanimous in its conclusion that “To a great extent the story of these theatres is the story as he wrote it day by day” (Johnston, “Archetypal” 292). Kareda was an articulate and enthusiastic reviewer whose writings have effectively shaped the discourse about that period’s theatre activity.

“How was it possible for someone so young,” mused Kareda’s friend and colleague Martin Knelman thirty years later, “to know so much about so many things?” (9). One answer is that Kareda had, in fact, covered Toronto theatre for several years before becoming the *Star*’s lead drama critic. This includes writing, with remarkable insight and authority, film, opera, and theatre reviews for the University of Toronto’s undergraduate student newspaper, the *Varsity*.

After immigrating to Toronto from Tallinn, Estonia in 1949 with his family at the age of five, Kareda studied English literature at the University of Toronto. During his undergraduate years he acted with Clare Coulter in Pirandello’s *Six Characters in Search of an Author* and began writing film and then theatre reviews for the *Varsity* newspaper. He became its lead theatre reviewer in the fall of 1966. When *Globe and Mail* entertainment editor John Macfarlane came across Kareda’s reviews, he asked him to write for him. Upon completing his MA in 1967, Kareda accepted a Canada Council fellowship for doctoral studies to read modern drama at King’s College at Cambridge University, focusing on Chekhov and the Theatre of the Absurd (Johnston, *Up* 25). During his three years in England he wrote a regular “London Letter” for the *Star* and, while home for the holidays in Toronto, reviewed theatre (Johnston, “Archetypal” 292). Without finishing his doctorate, he returned to Toronto in 1970, becoming the *Star*’s film critic and, after Nathan Cohen’s sudden death a year later, the *Star*’s lead theatre critic while lecturing at the University of Toronto’s Erindale campus. “By the time he was thirty,” writes Johnston, “he had become perhaps the country’s most important cultural commentator” (“Our” 19). In 1975 he left the *Star* to become literary manager for the Stratford Festival under Robin Phillips, but following a stormy few months in 1980 as co-artistic director at the Festival (with Martha Henry, Pam Brighton, and Peter Moss),

he returned to Toronto as director of script development of CBC Radio Drama before taking over as artistic director of the Tarragon Theatre, a position he held until his death from cancer on 26 December 2001 at the age of 57. His post-*Star* journalistic writing included regular pieces on opera for the *Globe and Mail*, *Opera News*, and *Opera Canada*.²

The Toronto theatre scene of the 1960s, in which Kareda immersed himself as a student, stands in stark contrast to that of the 1970s. While he studied English at the University of Toronto, the city offered mainly classics and new modern works. These were produced by touring or local professionals, or by local semi- or nonprofessional companies. Foreign touring shows, including Broadway hits, appeared at the O’Keefe Centre or the Royal Alexandra Theatre; classics and a few new plays were produced by the professional Crest Theatre or Canadian Players (which sputtered into a two-year joint venture in 1966); classical, modern, (about a dozen) new Canadian works were produced at the nonprofessionalizing University Alumnae Dramatic Club’s (UADC’s) Coach House Theatre, including James Reaney’s *The Killdeer* (1960) and *The Easter Egg* (1962), and Wilfred Watson’s *The Trial of Corporal Adam* (1963); and new experimental theatre was collectively created at George Luscombe’s Toronto Workshop Productions, including *Hey Rube!* (1961). An assortment of smaller, semi-professional companies emerged for a time, some of which rented the Central Library Theatre. And a number of influential, nonprofessionalizing groups at the University of Toronto were thriving during this time: The *Poculi Ludique Societas* (PLS) produced then, as it does now, medieval and morality plays; Hart House Theatre—which was placed under the control of the Centre for Study of Drama while Kareda was finishing his studies at the University—produced classical and modern plays; and a collection of college-specific groups produced theatre during the school year.

At the *Varsity* there was no shortage of opinion regarding the state of theatre in Toronto. In March 1966, while Kareda wrote film reviews for the *Varsity*, his theatre-reviewing predecessor Marc Czarnecki commented on Toronto’s theatre ecology:

Midst all the verbiage written in glorious praise of the Canadian Players, a lonely voice in the crowd cries “help!” That same voice pleads that the new Graduate Drama Centre will not divorce the undergraduate from its activities, but its owner doesn’t see much hope. There is a dangerous trend in the Toronto theatre scene, and this reporter doesn’t like it. [. . .]

The voice, as you may have guessed, is the pulling cry of experimental theatre, not just of the original and avant-garde.[...] Only groups like the Coach House, who are not primarily concerned with making money, can afford to present discriminating plays to a discriminating public. Obviously, the Toronto theatre goer, on the whole, is not discriminating; but given half a chance, he might be. [. . .]

The point is not that Toronto is not getting any good theatre. It is. But it is dangerous to become complacent, and think that because the Canadian Players do a good *Murder in the Cathedral*, Toronto has arrived. It hasn’t. To make theatre in Toronto grow, we must have more Luscombes [. . .]. And the people who can take the lead are the very ones who are now presenting the kind of theatre which will eventually lead to stagnation.

The members of a generation concerned with forward thinking new theatre that they could guide with public dialogue were now of university age.³ Czarnecki’s critique of the university’s

theatre practices reflects a long-held tension that had existed since Hart House Theatre, the Graduate Drama Centre's newly-bestowed home, opened after the First World War: Which affiliated colleges would be granted use of the space? Which students? And would they be male and female? If a graduate centre now took over, which undergraduates (if any) would still have access to producing theatre there? And would the theatre productions be the sort of canonical works one might expect to study at a graduate drama centre in the 1960s, or would there be room for "experimental theatre" too? If not, only the nonprofessionalizing Coach House theatre would be left to produce new work, and this might mean that the baby-boom undergraduates would have relatively limited opportunities to produce experimental theatre. Kareda's voice would soon take up these iconoclastic issues to lead them through the alternative theatre's fresh fare, even as the O'Keefe Centre, the Royal Alexandra Theatre, and soon the St. Lawrence Centre frequently disappointed them. Yet while Kareda wrote theatre reviews for the *Varsity*, he did not review any original Canadian plays – save for one revue whose material he judged to be original "in name only" ("Bell").

The Critic Critiqued: An Analysis of Kareda's *Varsity* Criticism

It is at the *Varsity* that Kareda develops his critical voice, at once flowing, almost poetic, and always precise and informed. Carefully considered judgment laced with timely humour defines his writing. The general structure of his reviews forms early: A short opening paragraph that presents his overall judgment of the production in a sentence or two (missing only in his first review) and introduces the title and production company; a plot synopsis and history of the work; his evaluation of the script, the direction, and the performances (within a year Kareda also includes evaluations of design elements and his impressions of the company's recent work); and finally, a concluding evaluative paragraph.

These reviews range from resounding positivity, to the delineation of very good and very bad elements in a performance, to comprehensive, scathing negativity and dismissal. For example, in what would be his final piece for the *Varsity* in February 1967, he proclaims David Gardner's Graduate Drama Centre production of August Strindberg's *The Father* at Hart House Theatre to be "nothing short of magnificent" and the direction deserving of "literally endless praise" ("*Father*"). The touring APA Rep Company's production of *The Wild Duck* is "beyond reproach" and "superlative" (two phrases he would use often in subsequent years), featuring a Clayton Corzette performance that is "uncompromising" ("APA's"). Conversely, he unequivocally condemns the "chaotic presentation" of Algirdas Landsbergis's *Five Posts in a Market Place*, presented by the New Canadian Theatre, in which "Not once is there any sign of a directorial imagination breathing upon the play to bring it to life" ("New Canadian"). With even more thorough damnation he writes that the Theatre in the Dell's "'new' revue" *For Whom the Dell Tolls* "is an evening of staggering mediocrity and seemingly limitless ineptitude" ("Bell").

This range carries through to his *Star* reviewing style in which, five years later, he declares Tarragon's premiere of David Freeman's *Creeps* to be "beyond praise" ("New theatre's") and Theatre Passe Muraille's *The Farm Show* offers "a lot of pleasure for a lot of reasons" ("*Farm*"). Conversely, Factory Theatre Lab's thirteen short plays over two nights in December 1972 presents "numbing abominations," including "half-inspired productions" that are often

“ruinous and rubbishy” and resemble “anecdotic undergraduate skit[s]” (“Short”)—the title of the review itself exudes sarcasm: “‘Short’ play festival a killing marathon.” From his writing in the *Varsity* to his writing in the *Star*, Kareda is consistently as damning in the face of disappointment as he is enthusiastic in the face of approval.

In each of his *Varsity* reviews, Kareda deftly separates out certain elements in a production that he deems to be successfully rendered from elements that he deems less successful. With ambivalence he judges the Upstairs Theatre Foundation’s production of *The Flies* at the Central Library Theatre to be “agonizingly inconsistent” with “a dichotomy throughout the entire evening between the perceptive and the banal,” where each actor “had his strong individual contribution to make; but concurrently, each also demonstrated disappointing weaknesses [. . .] frequently coupled with the maudlin” (“*Flies*”). Elsewhere, he considers Howard Bay’s sets, lighting, and costumes for *Man of La Mancha* at the O’Keefe Centre to be “irreproachable, easily the most consistent source of satisfaction,” while José Ferrer, in the lead role, appears to Kareda as a musical theatre caricature akin to the character he plays: “Ferrer, to put it simply, is just terrible. I suppose that he is ideally cast as this Don Quixote: a pseudo-actor in a pseudo-play. [T]here is nothing underneath the rabid theatricality but fakery and sham” (“Grab-bag”). Always sure to give the macro impression as well, Kareda describes the production as “a calculated, ambitious and disappointing enterprise.”⁴

His authoritative and engaging reviews gained prominence at the *Varsity* such that by the time he was named theatre reviewer, the Review section—or “Back Page”—masthead was cunningly referring to him as Urjo “Kohen” (“Back” 1967), both a nod to the *Star*’s lead theatre critic at the time, Nathan Cohen, and the Hebrew word for “priest.” This is a remarkable opening bookend to Fraser’s later descriptor for Kareda as “pope,” cited above. Here we see acknowledgement of his heavy pronouncements on the productions he reviewed, and signs of a longstanding, devoted readership.

Incubated in the environment of the student newspaper editorial room, Kareda’s early writing pops with humour that ranges widely from the erudite to the college dorm variety. Thus, in her performance of Violetta in the Met’s touring production of *La Traviata* at the O’Keefe Centre, Clarice Carson presents her character’s emotional collapse at the end of the third act “as if she had dropped an earring” (“Why”). Arnold Rubenstein, playing Lancaster in *Edward II*, “employed two accents which sat none-too-happily on either side of the Atlantic” (“*Edward*”). The event of Canada’s Centennial is a source of humour for Kareda: The year 1967, he says, “is significant (aside from minor national celebrations)” (“Theatre”); and in a brief plea to his readership in his Back Page theatre notes, Kareda cries sarcastically, “Support the St. Lawrence Centre! Put the cent back in Centennial!” (“Back” 1967).

It is here that we begin to get a sense of Kareda’s emerging distaste for ostentatious or officious theatre, whether imported from abroad—like the New York productions of *Man of La Mancha* and *La Traviata*—or officially sanctioned in the context of national celebration. But to qualify, his humour is also unforgiving in the face of local failure: The entire evening of *For Whom the Bell Tolls* “is simply impossible to sit through [. . .] unless one is half-bombed” (“Bell”). Four years later in the *Star* editorial room, Kareda would take Canadian nationalism far more seriously than in his undergraduate days, using it to ground his mythologization of the city’s alternative theatres. Where Kareda dismissed official Nationalism, he sought after and celebrated local, grassroots voices when they hit their mark.

An examination of Kareda's *Varsity* writing reveals four aspects of script and production to which he repeatedly gives attention: the dual execution of intelligence and emotion; the degree to which there is what he calls a realistic or truthful performance—that is, an adhesion to “naturalism”; the relevance of a play's production history; and the production's greater significance to Toronto's theatre ecology, often phrased in the form of “advice.”

For Kareda, intelligence and emotion are entities that must be present in a theatrical production if it is to be successful. He draws from the Aristotelian tradition of separating the two by defining emotion as arising out of thought. Thus, with *Five Posts in a Market Place*, Landsbergis “lack[s] the ability to devise dramatic material with sufficient intellectual or emotional interest to sustain an evening” (“New”). But Sartre's writing in *The Flies* is “intelligent [. . .] generating considerable emotional tension and impact” (“*Flies*”), Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II* at the Centre for Study of Drama at Hart House “is full of emotional and intellectual vitality” (“*Edward*”), and Peter Weiss's *The Investigation* presents history that is “immediately felt emotionally but almost impossible to grasp intellectually” (“Harrowing”). For Kareda, intelligence and emotion are integral for the playwright, his subject matter, and his script, as well as the director and the overall production. That he believed an audience must apprehend both if the production is to be an irreproachable success would be clear five years later when he celebrates French's *Leaving Home* as both “intelligent and compassionate” (“Tarragon's”).

Already prefiguring his later (unfinished) dissertation work on Chekhov, Kareda's defining bias, from his first review at the *Varsity* to his last at the *Star*, is his preference for realistic and truthful presentation as embedded in the genre of naturalism. In film and theatre reviews alike he grapples with this when he describes the film *Taxi for Tobruk*'s “uneasy blend of war-is-fun joviality and war-is-hell realism” (“Stereotyped”), and then a year later in the Western film *The Appaloosa* in which Marlon Brando “seizes a few opportunities to express a truthful intensity” (“*Appaloosa*”). Elsewhere, some stage designs do not quite achieve realism for Kareda, as with Bruce Gray's “quasi-realistic settings” for *Tchin-Tchin*, an Aries' Theatre production at the Central Library Theatre (“Fragile”). And some actors do not achieve truth, as when, in *The Investigation*, Bronwyn Drainie “seemed to have difficulty in delivering her lines naturally” and Ralph McPherson “distorted many of his moments by neo-realistic mannerisms—sighs and hesitations which had no relation to truth” (“Harrowing”). For Kareda early on, realism is a powerful presentational style not to be underestimated or arbitrarily employed, but to be sought for in all elements of production. By the end of his time at the *Varsity*, he begins to express more extended thoughts on the value of stage realism. Even when judging the revue structure of *For Whom the Dell Tolls* he argues that:

the essence of revue is truth. As zany and witty as the happenings may become, there must be a perceptible anchor to reality. Attacking overly-familiar targets is a poor way to make any kind of statement. The behaviour onstage should be explicable in terms of human psychology; only in this way can anything meaningful or funny be communicated. The performers must be less interested in projected ill-conceived “star” personalities than in exploring the material naturally. (“Bell”)

Going on to name several contemporary performers whom he considers exemplary in the revue style—including Alan Arkin and “the greatest of all, Elaine May”—Kareda argues that,

“the finest revue performers are invariably good actors, because they treat their material, not as a series of jokes, but as a miniature playlet” (the comma splices pace his lecturing tone). The revue’s unconvincing acting leads Kareda to conclude that, “Almost the only thing it succeeds in parodying is the genre itself.” Clearly, Kareda’s writing at the *Varsity* was beginning to approach dramaturgical critique in its extension and authority.

Later, at the *Star*, Kareda’s eye for realistic presentation would hold fast. When Toronto Free Theatre presents its “first official performance,” Kareda determines that in *How Are Things with the Walking Wounded*, “there isn’t any truth in the performances because there isn’t any truth in the writing” (“*Walking*”); conversely, Theatre Passe Muraille’s *The Farm Show* presents “realism of a magic intensity” (“*Farm*”). But his naturalism manifesto of 1972, quoted earlier, sets the tone for his professional theatre criticism to come. Ten days later, he begins his review of Factory Theatre Lab’s *Brussels Sprouts* with the proclamation, “A little naturalism does the trick again” (“*Brussels*”). Stephen Katz’s production is “wonderfully natural and detailed, the comic and lyrical arcs always kept within a realistic framework,” and Don LeGros’s acting achieves “realistic effects.” With this production, the Factory Theatre Lab “at last comes into its own” because the play is “built on top of a naturalistic base,” and is therefore among “the finest new Canadian work seen this season.”

Kareda’s ceaseless preoccupation with naturalism while at the *Star* is perhaps most evident in May of 1972 when he is moved, apparently like never before, by a play that has come to represent the touchstone of Canadian theatrical naturalism: David French’s *Leaving Home*. In his review, Kareda connects the relation of intelligence and emotion to stage naturalism:

Leaving Home springs from a traditional form, and one could quickly enumerate any number of models for it. But a genre play cannot be dismissed when the writing is as mature, intelligent and compassionate as here. [. . .]

About the Mercers, David French never lies. [. . .]

[Bill Glassco] subtly evokes a low-key, realistic symbolism out of the most ordinary facets of everyday life, and enriches the play with amazing detail. [. . .]

Mel Tuck’s Billy—a definitive version of mid-’50s youth—is wrenchingly accurate. [. . .]

[The production elements have] the difficult, urgent complexity of truth. (“Tarragon’s”)

Indeed, in his Introduction to the text of *Leaving Home* published in the same year, Kareda begins by surveying a variety of new plays that he deems to adhere to the genres of expressionism, documentary drama, historical epic, Broadway farce, happenings, and Theatre of the Absurd, before proclaiming, with a rare lack of evidence, that “those playwrights who began at the beginning—with naturalism—were the winners.” “Is it a coincidence,” he asks rhetorically:

that the most fully satisfying, the most finished new plays of the season were all naturalistic in technique [. . .]? The strength of that revolutionary 1971-1972 season lay with old-fashioned, naturalistic drama, unaccountably considered archaic and unworkable.” (viii-ix)

As if seeking to replicate the genealogy of twentieth-century European theatre in Toronto, Kareda intends to begin with naturalism, once itself a revolutionary style. It is this naturalism

that drew Kareda to the Tarragon's work, and it is naturalism that Kareda considered to be the most viable foundation on which to build the city's theatrical reputation.⁵

We might pause here to consider whether it is the illusion of completion that Kareda most admires in a play, and whether naturalism is the genre most able to convey completion and therefore the sense of truth he seeks. The other forms listed by Kareda do not necessarily organize themselves around edicts of narrative, character, or crisis-climax-denouement structures in the way that naturalism does. They therefore do not appeal to his critical sensibilities because only naturalism, and its psychological corollary realism, rests on the dual execution of intelligence and emotion. Kareda's growing influence in his newspaper reviewing, as acknowledged in part by the fact that he wrote the prefatory material for the first publication of *Leaving Home*—privilege naturalism on the early 1970s Toronto stage, several years after he introduces his affection for it in the *Varsity*.

Though naturalism remained a primary preoccupation for Kareda while employed at the *Star*, at the *Varsity* in 1966 and 1967 he was already becoming attuned to the production history of the plays he reviewed. His critical voice is one that speaks from a point of knowledge of dramatic literature and theatre history. With reference to the University of Toronto Italian Club's production of *Enrico IV*, Kareda is experienced enough to state that *Enrico IV* is "Pirandello's most perfect play. [. . .] It is always a pleasure to see *Enrico IV*, particularly in its original language" ("Theatre"). In his *Varsity* review of *Tchin-Tchin*, he reveals that he has already seen a superior version of the play in New York ("Fragile"). These are early glimpses of an intellect that future colleagues and scholars recognized in his subsequent work as critic at the *Star*, literary manager at the Stratford Festival, and artistic director of the Tarragon Theatre.

Kareda is particularly at ease making pronouncements on, and giving advice to, theatre companies, framing this advice within Toronto's broader theatre ecology. He clearly feels that it is his prerogative as a reviewer to do so. The University of Toronto's Centre for Medieval Studies is the first group that Kareda comments on at length, saying in one Back Page *Varsity* listing that, "previous productions by this group have been exemplary" ("Back" 1966). In the following month Kareda says, "The presentations of the PLS have a vitality and intelligence which are as rare in the theatre as they are valuable. [. . .] The directing is consistently imaginative and lucid" ("Theatre"). Conversely, Kareda counsels the New Canadian Theatre that it should have chosen a different play: "For a dramatically and intellectually more valid presentation of similar themes, I would advise that the company investigate Ugo Betti's *The Burnt Flower Garden*; it too has been neglected in Toronto" ("New"). He also questions the future of their work, concluding his review by saying, "If the New Canadian theatre wishes to make a lasting contribution to Toronto's theatrical history, it is surely time now to re-assess the conception and execution of its aspirations" ("New").

But in his final *Varsity* review it is upon the Centre for Study of Drama that Kareda bestows his greatest admiration, stating that their "productions at Hart House have been the most consistently rewarding aspect of Toronto theatre this season" ("*Father*"). It is here, in his evaluations of the New Canadian Theatre and the Drama Centre, that we find early hints at Kareda's valuation of a theatre company's worth. A company must be discerning in its production choices and consistent in its execution so that it might contribute, in a lasting way, to Toronto and its audiences. If it is neither discerning nor consistent it must re-assess

or fold so as not to saturate the field with subpar theatre. He would later apply these same “tough-love” programming principles to the theatres he would review while at the *Star*.

Well before his manifesto-style writing at the *Star*, in the *Varsity* Kareda begins offering judgments about Toronto theatre generally, avenues that it might go down (and avoid), and the forces that prevent it from going there. His first such commentary appears in a December 1966 review of a UADC evening of one-acts. Here, Kareda pens a review-cum-commentary innocently titled, “A look at amateur theatre.” It is remarkable for its harsh, extended pronouncements on what was clearly for him an excruciating evening of one-act plays at the Coach House Theatre:

It would be an undeserved kindness to dismiss these plays quickly. But the nagging fact remains that this evening was only one of a depressingly lengthy list of similarly wasted evenings. Because the weaknesses which negated the merits of the drama at the Coach House are symptomatic of the failings of almost all recent amateur and semi-professional (and a degrading amount of so-called professional) theatrics, it should be of some importance to explore these questions at some length. (“Look”)

And so he does, on the grounds of value-for-money and, most damningly, a threat to the practice of theatre generally. “What is missing most,” Kareda continues:

is honesty and imagination. So much of amateur theatre operates on a level of fraudulence which would astound the attorney-general’s office. People are being asked to donate \$3 to suffer through a half-hearted, under-rehearsed and banal presentation. [. . .]

There follows a casual attention to detail, resulting in an embarrassment of tiny errors which are amalgamated into a negative impression. [. . .]

[T]hese people have no right to inflict their inadequacies onto a paying public. If theatre is destroyed, it will not be by (as some claim) critics outside the theatre, but by incompetents within it. [. . .]

Toronto’s amateur theatre needs new and vital imagination.

Kareda’s diction opens out, away from his immediate object of criticism to universalize his bad evening of amateur theatre—part-and-parcel, apparently, of a string of disappointments—to condemn all of amateur theatre. He uses the evening as a springboard to theorize an amateur theatre aesthetic, replete with scheming, lazy “incompetents” out to steal ticket money. The tone is a familiar one in which, by way of synecdoche, a critic ascribes one amateur production as bearing the burden of signification for all amateur theatre practices.

But even more than this, Kareda articulates to his readership for the first time a sort of theatre *other* that he fears the most, the sort that many theatre followers construct as their shadowy strawman: a theatre that is financially viable yet aesthetically disengaged. Importantly, the barbs Kareda casts at all amateur theatre here are similar to those he casts at commercial theatre, as is apparent in his reviews of *Man of La Mancha* and *La Traviata*, where actors’ performances do not approach realism, where they amount to “fakery and sham.” In other words, for Kareda amateur theatre and mainstream commercial theatre can come to collectively symbolize a threat to the sort of theatre he wants to see on Toronto

stages, a threat that he will soon find the Toronto alternative companies to be striving against. He would return to this *othering* formulation in his later *Star* reviews condemning, for example, a Factory Theatre Lab one-act play as “a children’s play worthlessly, endlessly resuscitated for a couple of cheap laughs at amateurism (as if everything around it were so professional)!” (“Short”).

In order to understand more fully Kareda’s mid-December attack on UADC’s work, we might consider his review of their production of Chekhov’s *The Three Sisters* two months earlier. Having positively reviewed the Lincoln Centre’s revival of *Show Boat* at the beginning of October, Kareda’s next theatre review is a scathing critique of UADC’s “superficial” production of *The Three Sisters*. It includes keen insights into the work of a playwright on whom he would later base his (incomplete) doctoral research:

Chekhov’s dramas are exceedingly complex and delicate compositions, dominated by swift and subtle changes of pace and perspective. His characters are not great tragic figures, pouring out their souls into the Russian twilight, but rather, they are fallible, weak, passive and charming people. (“Sisters”)

He goes on to argue that, “The play’s technique alternates and blends humour with intensity of emotion. As in the Theatre of the Absurd, it is the constantly reiterated phrase and the apparent non sequitur which cumulatively express character and mood.” However, he blames director Marigold Charlesworth—who had presided over the dissolution of the Canadian Players (as its co-artistic director) in July of that year when it merged with the Crest Theatre—for a “series of misjudgments” that lead to his conclusion that “the play’s tempo is erratically grasped, and the fluidity of emotional expression is not always clear. Too many of the actors are miscast, by reason of age, physique or dramatic ability.” He further accuses Charlesworth of “misjudging her theatre” by encouraging broad gestures on UADC’s small Coach House Theatre stage (at the time, UADC was producing out of a repurposed synagogue two blocks south of the University of Toronto). His critique of *The Three Sisters* is thorough and convincing. But whereas other critics might have focused on the importance of a theatre, any theatre, offering a production of a challenging Chekhov play to Toronto audiences at the time, Kareda settles on the shortcomings of UADC’s production, expecting more from the company, yet concluding that the low quality of its production is a consequence of its nonprofessionalized practice.

Among reviewers of UADC’s *The Three Sisters*, Kareda is alone in dismissing the production. Though Nathan Cohen in the *Star* also notes the problems created by the tiny thrust stage, he deems Charlesworth’s direction to be “consistently sympathetic to the Chekhov spirit and to the evocation of the right atmosphere. It is never ostentatious, never “dramatic,” always aiming for naturalism. There is no imbalance in the concept, no misrepresentation of the playwright’s imaginative manner” (“*Three*”). Cohen also praises a couple of the performances, though regrets that the weaker ones came from those of the title roles. (His review, appearing two days before Kareda’s, begins by noting that he has seen nine productions of the play across the continent in ten years.) Ron Evans’s review in the *Telegram* has little positive to say about Chekhov’s writing, but concludes that Charlesworth “achieves really astounding success considering the resources at hand”

(“Why”). Herbert Whittaker joins Kareda and Cohen in lamenting Charlesworth’s failure “to scale the Chekhovian yearnings down to the size of a theatre in which a murmur can have impact and a shout becomes an avalanche” (“3 *Sisters*”). Like Cohen, he concludes that, “Charlesworth had obviously given [the actors] a good grounding in the characterization and their involvement, so that the drama grew in truth as it quietened.” In contrast to the comparatively tempered judgments of Cohen and Whittaker, Kareda is quick and thorough in damning the experienced Charlesworth’s direction, her cast of nonprofessionalized actors, and the company’s choice of play in consideration of their space. And, he does not give credit to Charlesworth, as Cohen does, for “always aiming for naturalism.”

Kareda’s manifesto-style writing in the *Varsity* resurfaces in the opening paragraph of his first article in the *Star* on 18 September 1971. It reads with as much authority as it does enthusiasm:

There is a kind of mass hysteria specially produced for the beginnings of new theatrical seasons. In this state of anticipation, superlatives come dangerously easily, and the coming season pretty well has to be the best, biggest, richest, finest for as long as anybody can recall.[...] What is really interesting is the degree to which the dynamics of theatre in Toronto have changed even over the past five years. (“Superlative”)

Kareda goes on to detail the state of Toronto theatre since he left the *Varsity* four years earlier, revealing his extensive knowledge of the Toronto scene—which by then included Theatre Passe Muraille, Factory Lab Theatre, and Tarragon Theatre—despite having lived abroad for most of that time. Then, as if to cement his value to the *Star* and to the narrative of Canadian theatre, Kareda announces a year later that Toronto’s 1971-72 theatre season had indeed been “revolutionary” (“Introduction” ix). And he famously proclaims in a 16 September 1972 manifesto-style season preview:

The alternative theatre rushes where the commercial theatre fears to tread. The alternative theatre continues a ceaseless flirtation with chaos and ruin. The alternative theatre carries hope for the future.[...] Perhaps the future, the essence of this alternative theatre is still a couple of manifestos away. (“Alternative”)

Here, when he writes that “Over the past two years, Toronto’s theatrical sensibilities have reformed themselves around what can best be called the alternative theatre,” he confirms that which he had prophesied at the outset of the season when he had written that “The opportunity to see new Canadian drama in Toronto, in fact, appears better than ever before. The wave has started” (“Superlative”). It is new Canadian drama that he unabashedly encourages, and plays created in Toronto are now the pride of his beat. Perhaps out of vocational necessity, Kareda actively stepped out of the critical shadow of his influential predecessor, Nathan Cohen, to engage in the very “superlatives” that he warned against. He contributed to a renaissance mythology for Canadian theatre, and in so doing firmly chronicled himself into the tale.

Conclusions: Criticism “Beyond Reproach”

Where Kareda quickly dismisses one company’s work as a consequence of its nonprofessionalized status, and then goes further to broadly admonish amateur theatre practices generally, here I have situated his own pre-professionalized work in line with his professionalized, later work. Taking Foucault’s historical *a priori* as its founding principle, this “turn” exemplifies the re-organization and re-collection of utterances in a given discourse—theatre research—in order to challenge the dismissal of extra-professional cultural activity in the hands of professional theatre historians. British researcher Claire Cochrane has noted the “virtual exclusion of amateur theatre” as a narrative in theatre scholarship, wherein the professional historian shuns amateur theatre as an “*ersatz*” theatre excluded from “real” theatre practice while “sitting as audience in her own favoured performance environment” (170). But the irony and missed opportunity of a double exclusion—Kareda’s *Varsity* writing dismisses nonprofessionalized theatre practices, then theatre research dismisses Kareda’s pre-professionalized critical practices—should not be lost on the professional researcher. Professionalized and nonprofessionalized practices need not be separated from one another by contagious and self-replicating professional restrictions—restrictions that are, by many degrees, untangled from the purposes of the professionalization of occupations (including the assurance of safe environments, encouragement of quality standards, and disciplining of practicing members). Instead, both professionalized and nonprofessionalized practices can be viewed productively as mutual contributors to theatre research.

For scholars and pedagogues, praising articulate and engaging writing by and for post-secondary students should hardly be a question. Such material can be studied on its own merits instead of reducing it to exercises for future income and practice in advance of legitimate work. As a critical voice, Kareda’s writing at the *Varsity* can be taken by readers of Toronto theatre criticism as sincerely as that of Nathan Cohen or Herbert Whittaker, or Kareda himself a few years later, even if the venue is a school newspaper and not a major daily. In the *Varsity*, we see the appearance of a major critic’s writing style and preferred theatre aesthetic. Kareda expresses insightful and practical comments, often phrased as advice to his readership and the theatres upon which he comments, in reviews and manifesto-style opinion pieces. His articles overtly advocate an intellectually and emotionally informed naturalistic performance and command readers’ respect for their honest judgment, even while abjuring many of the popular forms of *avant-garde* performance that do not fall under the banner of stage naturalism or psychological realism.

At the *Star*, Kareda continued to apply aspects of criticism that he had honed at the *Varsity*: Intelligence leading to emotion convincingly presented in the form of naturalism to be taken as a sign of discerning programming choice and good execution that best serves the producing company, and Toronto theatre generally. His suspicion of big-budget, foreign entertainment touring to Toronto seems to develop during his undergraduate days, a product of his belief that Torontonians must do more than they are doing to create meaningful, lasting theatre. Neither big-budget musicals, nor low-budget amateur productions deserve anything more or less than his honest, articulate, impassioned reaction. There may be something of the *enfant terrible* in a few overdone polemical pieces in the *Varsity*. But there is also a traceable, unflinching passion for his work and for the work of those he critiques—a passion that is contagious, if not beyond reproach.

Notes

- 1 The same year, Fruet's film version of *Wedding in White* won the Canadian Film Awards' "Best Picture."
- 2 Biographical information on Kareda can be found in a number of sources, including Johnston's *Up the Mainstream* and "The Archetypal Enthusiast," *The Canadian Press's* obituary notice "Theatre director," Fraser's *Globe and Mail* article "Kareda," Levine's entry on Kareda in *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Theatre*, Knelman's "Messages from Urjo," Johnston's "Our man at the *Star*," and Charlebois's entry on Kareda in the online *The Canadian Theatre Encyclopedia*.
- 3 Kareda's contemporaries at the *Varsity* included theatre reviewer Marc Czarnecki, later a prolific writer for publications such as *Maclean's* and *The Walrus*; occasional feature writer Henry Tärvaäinen, a Rochedale College resident who did theatre at Hart House and who would go on to found the New Director's Group, which would have a great influence on the alternative theatres (Johnston, *Up* 67); and fellow film reviewer Shelagh Hewitt, whom Kareda would marry.
- 4 Kareda's review of *Man of La Mancha* received a letter, printed two weeks later, from a fellow student who had determined that the O'Keefe Centre's musical "was one of the most entertaining theatrical presentations that I have seen heretofore." The writer instructed Mr. Kareda to "concentrate on writing serious, accurate accounts rather than trying to be a comedian" (Rosenberg). Given that Kareda had opened his review by admitting that the New York drama critics had loved this touring production, Marlene Rosenberg was not alone in her praise.
- 5 Johnston states that Tarragon and Kareda "fed off each other over the ensuing three years" (Johnston, *Up* 95). But this mutual influence had deeper roots. Tarragon's General Manager Mallory Gilbert stage-managed Kareda's direction of *Landscape* and *Silence* at UADC's Coach House Theatre in 1972. And from 1960 until he took a leave of absence for the 1967-68 academic year, Glassco had been teaching English at the University of Toronto, a period which partially overlapped Kareda's time as a University of Toronto student. Kareda may have known of Glassco and his then-growing theatre interests, founded—as were his own—in a literary education and an interest in the naturalist form. Kareda clearly saw in Tarragon's careful dramaturgy important nationalistic plays, styles and initiatives akin to his own. Most tellingly, it is Glassco who asks Kareda to take over as Tarragon's artistic director in 1982.

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