

and Dominique Maingueneau). The heterolingual nature of Franco-Ontarian plays extends beyond the text, coming back to Nolette's idea that this form of translation is also metatheatrical. In discussing Leroux's *Rêve totalitaire de dieu l'amibe*, she explains that, "Cette expérience théâtrale n'est plus hermétique au plateau, mais traverse la salle d'une manière ludique dans ses allusions aux styles de théâtre" (143). The playfulness in these plays is similar to Wagner and Kandinsky's *total theatre*, in that they use music, rhythm, language, visual elements, and the mixing of styles and forms of theatre, to provoke the audience to see a unique Franco-Ontarian identity. Chapter 4 provides an analysis of Acadian theatre, including *La Sagouine* by Antonine Maillet and *Empreintes* by Paul Bossé, demonstrating that translation of Acadian works reinscribes the style of the individual author rather than reaffirming a national or regional cultural identity. The plays employ almost Brechtian-style alienation effects to displace the audience and the English language rather than the Acadian culture, which has historically been itself displaced. Nolette explains that, "Dans tous ses cas, l'anglais est relégué à l'espace virtuel proche ou lointain: il n'a pas de place dans l'espace actuel de la scène, ses formes les plus intenses étant exclues performativement vers les coulisses du théâtre monctonien ... ou, comme pour Michael de *Pierre, Hélène et Michael*, vers Toronto"(191). Here, *traduction ludique* engages the untranslatability of Acadian culture and language by creating a new language within the play that utilizes syntax, grammar, vocabulary, and rhythms from both French and English to elicit various forms of laughter—humorous, uncomfortable, recognition, self-effacing—in the audience.

Nolette's book provides a detailed and insightful overview of translation theory as it relates to *traduction ludique* and the inherent playfulness of translation for the theatre. From a literary or a translation studies perspective, the methodology and analysis have a lot to offer. The manuscript, however, could be somewhat problematic for theatre or performance studies scholars as there is a lack of depth to the historical context of French Canadian theatre and minimal discussion of the differences in codes and conventions between French- and English-Canadian theatre creation and production. In the field of dramaturgy in particular, there has been a great deal of research done on theatricality and performativity, the relationship between theatrical text and performance (and the embodied translational element of moving from one to the other), as well as the cultural context of performance. These limitations, however, do not negate the value of this book for those studying translation theory as it offers a new framework of understanding the nuanced and layered nature of theatrical translation.

**JESSICA RILEY, ed.**

***A Man of Letters: The Selected Dramaturgical Correspondence of Urjo Kareda.***

Playwrights Canada Press, 2017. 568 pp.

ROBIN C. WHITTAKER

I've already taken the opportunity to read [your play] because of a manic desire to start 2001 with a clean slate. Which meant that I finished last year with no scripts *un-read*. (531)

Dear *TRIC/RTAC* Reader,

Among the memories a scholar accumulates are the acts of attending book launches at conferences. I can report without reservation that I have never felt so compelled to vault from my leg-weary spot at the Gladstone at CATR 2017 and lay my cash on Playwrights Canada Press's table than I did when Jessica Riley had finished reading from her collection of Urjo Kareda's letters to playwrights. Their public collection by Riley in *A Man of Letters: The Selected Dramaturgical Correspondence of Urjo Kareda* was hotly anticipated by more scholars than me for their central importance to the development of Canadian plays and playwrights and for their difficult place within conversations about identity and exclusion on the Canadian stage. But could this 568-page epistolary tome live up to both its launch and its subject's mythology?

Just a few years into his tenure as artistic director of Toronto's Tarragon Theatre (1982-2001), Kareda's written replies to established and would-be dramatists alike had ascended into legend. The emerging consensus was that he left all punches unpulled and all adorations unbound in his passionate prose. His aim was rarely spite for time wasted, but rather a ceaseless focus on constructing a Canadian theatre of plays and playwrights, one that he had so famously championed as lead critic for the *Toronto Star* during the emergence of Toronto's alternative theatre movement in the early 1970s. One assumes that had Riley been denied access to Kareda's restricted fonds at the National Archives, she might have settled for the tear-soaked copies (tears of sorrow or joy or fury or admiration) mailed out to—and left preserved, framed, or half-crumpled by—the playwrights' own hands.

Writers whose plays received detailed rejections from Kareda are legion: Bruce Barton, Marty Chan, Sally Clark, Alan Filewod, Norm Foster, Brad Fraser, David French, Stephen Johnson, John Lazarus, John Mighton, Jason Sherman, and Carol Shields, to name a few. There are multiple letters to Judith Thompson chronicling Kareda's infatuation with the development of her writing from *White Biting Dog* through *Perfect Pie*, yet culminating in what he called an "insult" resulting from an interview Thompson did when *Habitat* premiered at the Canadian Stage Company (and not Tarragon). The emotion with which he writes to Thompson represents a career's worth of raw artistic passion and mutual collaboration soured.

It is estimated that Kareda read and responded to an unimaginable average of one-and-a-half scripts per calendar day starting six months before he took up his position until his sudden passing on Boxing Day 2001. From icon Gordon Pinsent (16 Dec 1981) to Daniel Brooks (25 Nov 2001), the range of artists submitting work to Kareda shows just how much Canadian playwrights craved quality feedback and/or production from him. It is clear from comparing these letters to his early reviews in the *Star* that both are part of a *de facto* nationalizing and professionalizing project begun by Herbert Whittaker in the *Globe and Mail* and Nathan Cohen in the *Star* aimed at midwifing Canadian playwriting. Kareda's letters are a clear extension of this tough love mission. As readers we can join the chorus of playwrights who lament in their published reactions to Riley that no one then, or since, responds to that volume of scripts. This may be because Kareda, unlike other Artistic Directors, only twice occupied himself with directing a play at the Tarragon. In this sense, he was a literary manager who also controlled the theatre's season programming and operations.

Collected here are letters in which his rejections are at their most uplifting. To James

Reaney he writes that *The House by the Churchyard* “is very complex, and I couldn’t even begin to say how much of it I had been able to grasp. But I was held by the evocative quality of the language and its cadences, and by the glimmerings of images which began to suggest themselves even through the stage-directions” (217). Conversely, there are only a few letters in which he intentionally silences a writer as when, having read three plays in one year from the same playwright, he says that “without finding in them anything that I could see myself working on [ ... ] I have to say ‘No more, please’” (70). Kareda sought a Canada in which playwrights were ubiquitous, even if play production could not be.

True, *A Man of Letters* is mainly a collection of rejection letters. But it is also a collection of unparalleled insights into the elements that create a stage play. Kareda writes to Rachel Wyatt:

I’m afraid that *The Unsafe City* is still not, to me, satisfactory as a play. I don’t feel the characters, I don’t sense the urgency of their situations, I don’t recognize them as observable people in our world in this year of our Lord, and I don’t find any way of entering into their narrative. This may be because they have too few dimensions, too few moments of unpredictability or eccentricity or madness—their passions (if one can find them) burn at too low a level to ignite a stage piece. And that may be why their dialogue has such a banked, genteel, formal, etiquette feel, [...] something indistinctly recalled from the past, and not a testament from the present. (46)

In few other places have the elements of drama been dealt with in more detail and purpose. This is evident in the collection’s remarkable index (itself worth reading alphabetically!) which sorts Kareda’s comments from “character” (subindexed as “in-depth,” “stereotypes,” “sympathy for,” “underdeveloped,” and most common: written “from the inside”); to “dialogue”; “dramatic structure”; “overwritten”; “emotion”; “focus”; “playwright’s intention”; “motor within”; “practical concerns” (subindexed as “cost,” “expenses,” “length,” “marketing,” “props,” “sets/locales,” and “technical”); to “concentration”; “immediacy”; “intensity”; “intimacy”; “tension”; “theme”; and “titles.” Expertly employing the dramaturge’s great asset, the probing question, we see he asks in nineteen instances, “why are you telling me this?” and in ten instances the more withering, “why would I do this to an audience?” Riley’s collection offers a periscopic look at an iceberg of unproduced Canadian writing.

Key to the success of this volume is Riley’s cunning choice to solicit responses from playwrights, asking them to re-confront their letters. “[H]e was so damned smart it was scary!” writes Steven Bush (52). For Denis Foon, “Urjo’s dramaturgy was old-school in the sense that he trusted his intelligence and taste—and was willing to share his felt response with candour and grace” (99). Says Conni Massing, “He struck me as someone who wanted to know what was going on across the country—who considered it part of his job to know” (304). For Robyn Butts, Kareda’s responses evince “a golden era for playwrights when theatres actually seemed to *like* writers (and not just their own)” (56).

But Kareda’s letters demonstrate what came to be known derogatorily as the “Tarragon style,” mined from his (and Bill Glassco’s before him) preference for stage naturalism. In 1982, he writes to one playwright: “You asked me on the phone about what kind of plays

the Tarragon was looking for. I have no pat answer to that. I myself like plays which create their own world, which use language with vigour and muscle, which give us interesting and complex characters, and which seem urgent in their telling” (78). Against accusations of narrow-mindedness, Kareda defends his taste to subsequent playwrights by saying that he and Tarragon champion playwriting as diverse as Judith Thompson’s, Guillermo Verdecchia’s, and Joan MacLeod’s. Indeed, many responses reveal a frustration with Kareda’s stylistic gatekeeper position. T. Berto notes that Kareda rejected “big” plays like his on financial grounds (500), thus contributing to a reductionism in thought and scope on Canadian stages.

But the ways in which Kareda invoked identity politics in some of his letters draw ire. When he writes to Carmen Aguirre, “I do not think that it would make sense to program a solo show about growing up in a Latin (sic) culture so soon after the success here of *Fronteras Americanas*. There is some danger in repeating genres” (446), she takes his response as an act of erasure: “I doubt that the Tarragon had (or has) any problem programming multiple plays by and about white people. I believe they don’t see that as “repeating genres” (one-person shows are not genres, I believe, nor are people’s races or heritages or ethnicities)” (446). Moreover, when Kareda writes to Michael Miller of his new script *To Be King!*, “a cycle of Brer Rabbit stories for adults,” that he “could not imagine, for instance, being a non-black company and putting that tarbaby onto a stage” (452), Miller responds, “given the history of non-production of Black writers at the Tarragon, you could argue that systemic racism was a part of their aesthetic. His comments were nice and the tone of the letters were kind, but I was not read as a playwright, but a Black playwright” (453). Miller continues:

So though he contributed a lot, it was not to Canadian theatre but to white Canadian theatre, and it would be ahistorical for that point not to be made clear. White is not neutral. It is a stance. It is a position that Urjo took. In the most multicultural city in the world. I wish I could have worked with someone as knowledgeable as Mr. Kareda. I’m sorry that he did not want to share his expertise with people like me. We both lost. (453)

Accusations of sexism emerge too as when Leanna Brodie responds to a letter from Kareda: “His comment on ‘women’s issues’ was maybe the most bewildering and damaging of all. [ ... ] Is Urjo saying that because I’m telling this story through the voices of women, everything it touches on automatically becomes a ‘women’s issue’? [ ... ] And if it does become a ‘women’s issue,’ does that mean nobody cares?” (457). Sky Gilbert points to homophobia in Kareda’s 1982 and 1983 letters, saying, “Urjo here joins a chorus of twentieth-century homophobic art critics. Then he goes on to say that Bobby and Ricky deals with a ‘tricky’ subject, his again very deft way of dismissing gay male sexuality (as the play was about two gay stripper/go-go dancers)” (86). A strength of Riley’s collection is that by asking the playwrights to respond, we see that mixed with gratitude for his feedback is an awareness of his gatekeeper position.

There are, however, a few shortcomings. While most of the letters are conveniently transcribed, some are fatiguing to read because they are photocopies reduced by half, creating something akin to a six-point darkish grey font on a darkish grey background. Kareda’s

letter to John Mighton is nearly illegible (215). Riley peppers the letters with helpful citational footnotes, but other footnotes guess at the gender or ethnicity of playwrights she could not track down, reading like profiling and leaving readers wondering why they should care that the playwright's last name sounds Jewish or first name sounds traditionally gendered female. Also, it would be nice to see more acceptance letters

*A Man of Letters* is every inch a page-turner and immediately required reading for any course on dramaturgy. Indeed, the collection is a model for any teacher tasked with commenting on student papers, or any editor responding to manuscripts of any genre. Whether responding with fire or ice, it is obvious Kareda had a crystal clear idea of what he thought it took to be a playwright—often, it might be argued, an idea far clearer than the playwrights themselves. The certainty with which he writes about the craft and, most famously, a sense of naturalism on stage, sharply contrasts with the timidity of even the most accomplished dramatist. Offensive to some, to others his letters meant someone was listening acutely enough to forge a reply and encourage a lifetime devoted to the craft. Kareda's words, like those of other exquisite wordsmiths, incite better diction and prose in those who read them, and they are contagious—even as they give the feeling of driving oneself toward Kareda's sudden passing. With his last letter, Kareda's words are extinguished: "I doubt that any of this will have been of much help. Sorry: I'm finding this next phase of my treatment much more fearful and anxious-making than I could have anticipated" (548).

Kareda's life, Riley's reader can report, was a life of unparalleled dramaturgy left incomplete and nearly beyond reproach.

Yours,  
Robin.