

REVIEWS

Literary History and Criticism edited by Hope Christiansen

BOVET, JEANNE, éd. *Les Langues de la dramaturgie québécoise contemporaine. Etudes françaises* 43:1. Montréal: PU de Montréal, 2007. ISBN 978-2-7606-2057-5. Pp. 168. \$33,00 Can (annual subscription).

This noteworthy special issue of the distinguished journal *Etudes françaises* seeks to reevaluate the problematics of theatrical language in Québec. The socio-historical context for such an analysis is provided by Karim Larose's careful examination of the debates concerning theatrical language *before* it was revolutionized by Michel Tremblay's *Les Belles-Sœurs* in 1968. He is able to show how the issue was a topic of considerable discussion from the early 30s, beginning with questions concerning accents (Canadian or continental?) and oral delivery (oratorical with precise diction or closer to actual spoken language?). From these debates emerged the notion of "naturalness" on stage, which prepared the advent of Marcel Dubé's theater in the 1950s.

The remaining essays concentrate on the period that began with Tremblay's transformational drama. Among these is Jeanne Bovet's, which focuses on the plurilinguism of contemporary Québec theater, primarily, though not exclusively, in Larry Tremblay's *The Dragonfly of Chicoutimi* where the protagonist (and only character) speaks in English, but with a French syntax, and Robert Lepage's *La Trilogie des dragons*, in which six different languages are used. Her thesis, cogently argued, is that the *effets de sens* engendered by the presence of multiple languages reconfigure the relational values inherent to intimacy.

In her contribution, Mathilde Dargnat demonstrates how Michel Tremblay succeeds in making his *readers* believe that his language represents popular speech, by taking a close look at his use of graphical procedures to textualize the speech of his characters. In the process, she provides a useful repertoire of the techniques used to render the oral readable. Dargnat continually refers to Tremblay's transcriptions as *néographies*, implying perhaps a greater originality of transcription than is due (earlier writers such as Ringuet and Gabriel Roy also used a number of these same transcriptions), a neglect that does not, however, detract from the value of the essay. For her part, Louise Ladouceur reflects upon the translation and performance of Québec theater of the sixties in Anglophone Canada. As her insightful commentary on the negotiating of Québécois difference points out, there is no Canadian English equivalent to *joual*, in the sense of a mobilizing identitary reference. Translations of Michel Tremblay into colloquial Canadian English (a register virtually identical to that of the United States), while at the same time leaving some words and phrases untranslated and retaining Gallicisms, cannot capture language's emblematic importance as a sign of identity in Québec and has the effect of evacuating the play's Québécois specificity. The link between Tremblay's theater and its immediate socio-political context is thereby minimized while his work is by the same token universalized.

Yves Jubinville's article uses a genetic approach to analyze *le travail d'écriture* in

Michel Tremblay's *Les Belles-Sœurs*, Larry Tremblay's *Le Ventriloque*, and François Godin's *Louisiane Nord*. Through an analysis of the pre-performance/pre-publication versions of these plays, he is able to show how Michel Tremblay's language successively grows and becomes increasingly digressive; how Larry Tremblay devalorizes language in favor of other theatrical elements such as sound, light, and music; and how Godin moves away from a *joual* register. Gilbert David's essay focuses on Daniel Danis, whose linguistic strategy shows him to be seeking an original orality as part of a theatrical texture that puts into play a speaking body. Danis is seen as creating a dramatic language that maintains a tension between the oral and the literary, which affects the speaking mode of the character who thus becomes an image of *la parole*.

Two unrelated articles flesh out the volume: Mahigan Lepage's study of Pierre Michon and Pierre Bergounioux's appropriation of Faulkner, and Marie-Christine Pioffet's essay demonstrating how La Popelinière and Marc Lescarbot attempted to promote colonization by extolling the virtues of mobility.

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SUKYS, JULIJA. *Silence is Death: The Life and Work of Tahar Djaout*. Lincoln & London: U of Nebraska P, 2007. ISBN 978-0-8032-4320-0. Pp. 197. \$26.95.

More than fifteen years have passed since the assassination of the Algerian writer, Tahar Djaout. Journalist, novelist, and poet, Djaout was an ardent supporter of secularism and a harsh critic of Islamic fundamentalism. He was gunned down in Algiers on 26 May 1993, an attack attributed to Islamist extremists. The writer's death was one in a series of violent acts against liberal voices in Algeria in the 1990s, an era in which Islamist extremists fought Algeria's military regime in an undeclared civil war.

Julija Sukys attempts an original interpretation of Djaout's life, death, and writings, by fusing history, biography, personal memoir, and fiction in her text. The seminal idea is an interesting one particularly since Djaout has become a symbol of martyrdom to the cause of freedom of thought and freedom of speech. Providing readers with Djaout's biography and Algerian history of the late 1980s and 1990s (chapter 2), she then examines his poetry and prose, focusing on *Les Chercheurs d'os* (1984), a work that foregrounds Algeria's obsession with the memory of the independence struggle and *L'Invention du désert* (1987), a novel that warns against the dangers of reviving Medieval puritanism (chapter 3). She concludes with analyses of *Les Vigiles* (1991), a text that portrays an inventor struggling against the Algerian bureaucracy, and the posthumous work, *Le Dernier Été de la raison* (1999). The latter depicts a bookstore owner's efforts to escape the wrath of Islamists by keeping a low profile in Algiers (chapter 4).

Unfortunately, the first and concluding chapters of the book attenuate the rest. In chapter 1, Sukys visits Elkader, Iowa, a Midwestern farming community founded in 1844, named for Algerian resistance leader Emir Abdelkader who was celebrated in America at the time for resisting French colonialism. The link between Elkader, Iowa, and Tahar Djaout remains a mystery to me and probably to most readers. More enigmatic is Sukys's letter to the departed Djaout; it reflects upon bones, corpses, exhumations, and recounts the critic's pilgrimage to a Catholic shrine in Ohio to view saints' relics. Most problematic is the fictional research trip to Algeria she undertakes disguised as a boy. Sukys is "inventing