Mini Musings

Miniature Thoughts on Theatre and Poetry

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Keith Garebian

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for Don Mills
and his championship of my writing
and
for Rose and David Scollard
who have striven for the noblest promotion
of Canadian poets, especially of new voices

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Preface

In 2014, American playwright Sarah Ruhl brought out a collection entitled *100 Essays I Don't Have Time to Write,* in which (as its back cover boasted) "chimpanzees, Chekhov, and child care are equally at home." In examining the possibilities of the theatre, Ruhl engaged with subjects ranging from the most personal to the most encompassing issues of art and culture—all these becoming a map of her artistic sensibility and an existential guide, perhaps, for anyone who chooses the life of the artist. Umbrellas, sword fights, parades, dogs, fire alarms, children, chimpanzees, Chekhov, Calvino, Miller, Williams, Kushner, male orgasm, lice, Greek masks, Bell's palsy, motherhood, and so on were all part of her mix. Some of the pieces were a few lines long. One essay was exactly a single word. Most ran to a page. The longest ones spanned three pages.

One of Ruhl's epigraphs for the collection was drawn from poet Louise Glück: "I wanted to make something. I wanted to finish my own sentences." In my own case, I sometimes want others to finish some of my sentences, taking my opening gambits as launch-pads or provocations or motives for reflection. I strongly believe in a role for a literary audience—something not simply as a passive recipient of information but as an active respondent to questions, suggestions, and lines of argument—enticements (to use a more seductive word).

To give my own miniature essays their boundaries and focus, I offer pieces coalescing around two of the art forms that have dominated most of my life: Theatre and Poetry. Theatre first came to me through my mother, who entertained her three children (I was the eldest) with sock puppet plays and readings from children's stories. Theatre remained in my life all through high school and university, as I produced, directed, sometimes designed, and acted in one-act plays, scenes from plays, and full-length productions.

I did a M.A. thesis on *Hamlet*, although in this case the emphasis was on academic explication rather than theatre. Shakespeare was my literary and theatre idol, and he has remained so. As a teacher, I ran a drama club, and produced, directed, and/or acted in scenes from Shakespeare and plays by Edward Albee, T.S. Eliot, Eugene Ionesco, and Henri Ghéon.

When I began my freelance career as theatre reviewer and scholar in 1976, my exploration of theatre deepened and widened. It was not long before I began to write books on theatre—production histories, collections of theatre writing, and biography. I am a collector of great performances, besides being a collector of theatre books, and my enthusiasm in this regard is undiminished.

The little essays in the Theatre section of this book speak to some of my curiosities and obsessions: acting technique and acting issues (such as the private self and the role; the stage as a public forum; community theatre; pioneers and geniuses; the role of imagination; the role of feet; theatre as a responsibility; *et cetera*). This section invokes famous acting icons, such as Laurence Olivier, William Hutt, Heath Lamberts, and Vanessa Redgrave; it makes gestures

of homage to the likes of Tennessee Williams, Ibsen, and Chekhov; it also invokes great acting teachers and actor-writers, such as Sanford Meisner, Stella Adler, Tadashi Suzuki, Simon Callow, and Oliver Ford Davies. I mix vignettes and anecdotes; impressionistic perspectives on Vivien Leigh and Cherry Jones, for instance; historical subjects (Boy Players, memorable first nights); tributes; and slices of autobiography. Some of my miniature essays are clearly meant to be provocative—never for the sake of mere provocation, however. All are meant to be lures for meditation or further contemplation, and I make no apology for their cosmopolitanism.

The Poetry section is also saturated with personal interests and obsessions. It, too, is sometimes anecdotal, without cancelling meditation. A reader can get a sense of some of the challenges of poetry readings (for both the poet and audience), questions of form, and some of the craft that creates poetry, as well as some of the mundane challenges to poets. The miniature essays are sometimes satirical, sometimes didactic—but never in an academic manner. This section makes reference to poetry from Armenia, Japan, Iran, England, Canada, and the U.S. The breadth of its cosmopolitanism is not intended to be merely exotic but to take a small measure of poetry's internationalism. It doesn't avoid some of the darkness or bleakness of contemporary poetry, and it provides insights into my personal sensibility.

Taken together, the pieces give a sampling of why I am drawn to Theatre and Poetry. Much of both genres can be disappointing at times. Theatre is built on illusion, of course, and Poetry comes out of dreaming by way of imagining, reflecting, and re-making. They are not useful the way car mechanics or accounting can be, but they are indispensable

to me because both are important parts of my life. And my writing on them is also an important part of my life. But these pieces are not the last words on anything. Take them as opening gambits, pieces of larger bits to be hammered out of life and art, or simply opening sentences rather than finishing ones.

As I look back on the two themes of Theatre and Poetry, I realize how they have sometimes overlapped in my life. I think of poetry as performance and not simply as words on a page. Just as the best Theatre does not simply tell a story or amuse or appeal to our feelings, but compels us to reflect, and to understand the darker and deeper significances of characters and events, so Poetry also has ground in common with Theatre. In fact, many poets (such as the late Earle Birney, Ted Hughes, Anne Carson, and Margaret Atwood) have written plays, and many poets have been very theatrical in spoken performance. Both genres recognize potentiality and actuality. Consequently, both have an existential value. The vignettes and reflections are meant to attract the reader's interest to certain people in certain places and in certain times. While some of the matter is deliberately light, some more profound, the essays are essentially a breezy conversation with myself and interested readers.

PART ONE

ON ACTING

Keith Garebian as 2nd Tempter in The Genesian Players production of *Murder in the Cathedral* by T.S. Eliot, directed by Rudy Stoeckel, St. Patrick's Church, Montreal, February 1978.

Completing the Sentence, Completing the Thought

William Hutt explained to me that, in his acting, he always preferred to leave a thought unfinished. He said it was like singing "Come to me, my melancholy ..." and not uttering the final word "baby," allowing the audience to complete the sentence. I have thought about the implications ever since.

When we're part of an audience at a play, we're obviously willing to forego solitude, interrupt or suspend private reverie and internal monologue, and to submit, instead, to a communal, sometimes crowded experience. We're not allowed to finish our own mental sentences because the playwright's text is a complete thing, and actors prefer to utter the sentences as decreed—unless there is great acting on stage, where the actor uses a subtle, expert technique that coaxes, entices, incites, or provokes a spectator to complete his thought process while completing or, perhaps, half completing an action.

Only the very great actors or actresses—Laurence Olivier, Michael and Vanessa Redgrave, Maggie Smith, Judi Dench, Albert Finney, Cherry Jones, Daniel Day Lewis, Marlon Brando, Christopher Plummer, or William Hutt, for example—could show theatre intruding on life, stealing bits from it, transforming these pieces, yet delivering a tantalizing invitation to the most alert, most sensitive in the

audience to fill in some of the gaps created by the mystery of character and thought.

But if we say that great acting leaves a little unsaid and that gap can be filled by a spectator, does this mean that there is something predictable even in great acting, for how would the spectator know what to fill in unless it could be eloquently anticipated? On the other hand, by filling in what is left unsaid, the spectator is not a mere voyeur but an active mental or spiritual participant by being complicit in the very process of creation.

No great acting is ever definable, and no great acting can ever have completeness. But can great acting exist without a great audience that is creatively complicit in the mimesis?

The Private Self and the Role

William Hutt was adamant in his claim that an actor could never *become* another person on stage. He argued that acting was always a process of using one's own identity in disguise as another without losing the essence of that personal identity. In other words, a Hutt Lear was always the Lear in Hutt, just as an Olivier Hamlet could be only the Hamlet in Olivier. This idea has been reformulated by other acting eminences, one of whom is Simon Callow, who has written of the overlapping between character and actor: "Another person is coursing through your veins, is breathing through your lungs. But of course, it's not. It's only you—another arrangement of you." To which Oliver Ford Davies adds that an actor can only play aspects of oneself, not some construct of another person.

A penetrating wisdom because no matter how skilful the makeup and costuming, how accurate the accent, how practised the performance, the seasoned spectator always finds the actor in the role—even on film where disguise has been taken to extraordinary heights. It might take five minutes or thirty, but eventually one sees Alec Guinness behind the hooked nose and oily locks of his Fagin or Marlon Brando behind the puffy cheeks, sunken eyes, and tired stoop of his Don Corleone or Meryl Streep in any of her versatile imitations.

The private self, buried by disguise, comes to light because of its authenticity. And no amount of acquired mannerism or rehearsed style could ever mask that private self. The question is just how much or how deep or what texture that private self has.

Olivier, the supreme actor of my time, had an unparalleled amount of characters (on stage, screen, and television) within his self. But he himself did not really know what that self was because it was like water that took on the shape of the vessel (the role) it filled. Joan Plowright (his third wife) confessed that she often did not know what role he would assume in daily life from day to day. Olivier himself admitted that even he did not know what his real self was, though there were roles on which he placed his enduring stamp (Archie Rice in *The Entertainer* and Edgar in *Dance of Death*) that he himself felt were pieces of the real Olivier.

The Art of Being Private in Public

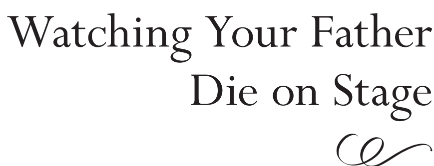
Acting is the art of being private in public—as William Hutt believed. Of course, he meant a stage privacy, a dramatization or comic expression or tragicomic exploration of that interiority.

His credo implicitly accepted the fact that the stage is a public forum, where the interior of a room (the set) allows the internal thoughts and feelings of a character to be externalized.

Naturally, it is through language or the word itself that the externalization proceeds. As Shakespeare well recognized in his use of soliloquies. And soliloquies should always be taken as truthful because the character alone on stage cannot be openly lying to himself when disclosing his innermost thoughts and feelings. He has no discernible reason to hide his private self—unless he were suffering from a pathology that the playwright fails to reveal.

As Oliver Ford Davies puts it: "When it's clear that the audience are being addressed, then it's a form of public, even political, act." But Shakespeare was careful not to overuse the soliloquy.

Watching Your Father Die on Stage



Many years ago, when I was still active in community theatre in Montreal, my son Michael (who was only about five or six at the time) was brought by his mother to a performance of Albee's *The Zoo Story*, in which I was playing Jerry, the greatly disturbed, alienated being with a long cry of discontent. I had been taking him to live theatre ever since he was four, and he was a very alert spectator, deeply drawn to a story and its characters. I used to read to him every night, and he loved listening, especially to stories from the Bible—the ones that were filled with dramatic incident, such as the tale of King David and his rebellious son Absalom who led a revolt against his father and was killed during the battle in a wood. The upshot of the tale was the circumstance of his death: Absalom's long hair became entangled in the branches of an oak tree as the mule he was riding ran beneath it. One of his inveterate enemies, Joab, the King's commander, slew him with three arrows to the heart. When King David heard the news, he was overcome with agonizing grief and let out a howl: "O my son, Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would God had I died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

Born with theatre in my blood, I would do the howl with as much genuine emotion as I could muster, and my son was visibly moved and disturbed. Whether he felt sad

for Absalom or sadder for heartbroken David I am not sure, but he certainly identified with my outcry, and begged: "O, Daddy, stop!"

Yet, as much as this tale shook him to the core, he would beg me to re-read it to him often.

Not long after, he would listen to me learning lines from *The Zoo Story*. In fact, when my fellow-actor, the one playing Peter (Jerry's foil, a complacent, publishing executive, married with two daughters, cats, and parakeets) rehearsed with me in my suburban living-room, my son was all eyes and ears. Soon after my fellow-actor had left, Michael was able to repeat huge chunks of the dialogue—not just mine, but Peter's as well. So incredulous was I that a tyke could listen so attentively and memorize very adult dialogue so quickly that I pulled out a tape-recorder and recorded his mimicry. He had the words down pat, along with the intonations. And while it was highly amusing to hear him enacting both roles, it was highly precocious, not to mention slightly weird, as well:

> JERRY: But you wanted boys.
> PETER: Well … naturally, every man wants a son, but …
> JERRY: (Lightly mocking) But that's the way the cookie crumbles?

And then my son came to the show. He was seeing me on stage for the very first time and, while he was silent during Peter's frightened and frightful animal rages, I heard him sniffle during the "fight" scene on the bench when Jerry goads Peter into battling for ownership or space on that bench, culminating in a violent stabbing when Jerry deliberately

engineers his own death. Then, at the sight of his father with a switchblade and stage blood on his hands, and in the throes of death, my son could not stop himself. His sniffle became a sob, and the sobbing continued unabated. Though my stage concentration was strong, I could not but hear those little boy's sobs.

Jump forward many years to the death of my sister Elma from cancer at the age of thirty-six, and the sight and sounds of my parents grieving at her casket before it was sealed for her burial. Michael watched as his grandparents, weighed down by grief, let out sounds that he had never heard before anywhere. My mother's were a low sobbing hum, a keening; my father's was louder—an awful sound of a parent's untimely, unnatural loss. The sound of age bemoaning an all-too-early death of a child who had been his undeclared but definite favourite of his three offspring. An animal sound that I had never heard before, not even when my father recounted the awful brutalities of his Armenian history and his people's genocide at the hands of the Turks. Not even the deep melancholy at memories of his mother's sudden death by heartbreak and hunger. That had been awful enough; this death was worse. She had been named after his beloved mother whom he had lost when he was but five.

And yet my son had not wept this time. He was shaken, all right, but he remained silent.

There are, after all, many ways of dying. Just as there are many ways of grieving.

Does dying as a stage actor in a role prepare one for real death?

Shakespeare probably believed so. It is not surprising that he's one of the most quoted poets at funerals and

memorial services. As Domenic Dromgoole puts it in his beautifully written, wise essays in *Will & Me*: "The theme of 'Fear no more …,' 'Full fathom five …' and 'Like as the waves …' is pretty unequivocal. You live and then you die. And though you may turn into something rich and strange, what is certain is that the scythe will mow, and you will turn to dust. What mention there is of heaven is pretty muted compared to the toughness of all the finality." (165) Shakespeare did not seek to beautify death, even in romantic tragedy (*Romeo and Juliet*). He does offer very human, very loving benedictions for loved ones in plays and sonnets, but the point of his stories is: "To accept the end of the story with the same excitement as the beginning and the same delirious pleasure as the middle was, if anything, what Shakespeare was trying to help us towards." And his stage actors and actresses incarnate his deepest beliefs about death and grief—all linked to his own life.

PART TWO

PLAYS AND PLAYWRIGHTS

Bad Poets, Good Playwrights?

Bad poets can make good playwrights—Harold Pinter, for example—but good playwrights need not be good poets, although it is thrilling to have a balance of poet and playwright (as in the cases of Shakespeare, John Millington Synge, and Tennessee Williams).

Shakespeare's case is particularly interesting. He belongs to an era where language was valued in itself. People went to *hear* a play—which implies that rhetorical theatre and poetic drama could have had magical or medical power for them.

Alas, too many contemporary playwrights and directors treat words as if they were the enemy of drama. The modern trend has been towards something called "physical theatre," where movement, choreography, videography, *et cetera* displace the importance of language. Robert Wilson, Robert Lepage, Maria Abramovic, and the like do create memorable stage imagery, but their sort of theatre pushes into realms of optical illusion or surrealism. Some of this imagery has an undeniable poetic beauty—but a beauty that can be replicated through a Xeroxing of production concept and special effects. In their cases, the audience seeks *visual* pleasure and poetry, and the auditory aspect of theatre, along with the mystery of the actor, is diminished.

Robert Lepage's Theatre of Technology

He has been called "a magician of images," with a special theatrical language, "a visual, sound-based, musical, and only incidentally text-based language." Suitcases, backpacks, duffle bags, shoes, glass balls, flasks, baskets, dolls, cigarettes, puppets, screens, mats, mirrors, computers, cameras, microphones, and video screens populate his productions, forcing actors to co-exist with these objects. And it is true that he creates fascinating, sometimes complex images, in which lighting becomes part of the emotion of a scene, where photography is a metaphor related to memory, and where video divides space into different facets of the same reality, creating a visual architecture, as it were.

But is this enrichment ... or a confusion of realms ... or both?

He believes that "Theatre is about writing." He believes people tend not to realize this. "Writing is an ongoing process. It's full of unfinished sentences, crossed-out words."

But isn't this merely demarcating a boundary between process and product? Isn't rehearsal an ongoing process? Isn't it full of unfinished business, rejected choices, repetitions with modifications? Isn't it possible to rehearse a play endlessly, without having to worry about opening a production? Many East European theatre companies subscribe to

this view of endless rehearsal. Some of them have been known to boast about rehearsing a play for almost a year.

We do not need to be narcotized by the morphine of academics to understand that Lepage makes a strong case for theatre as a contemporary visual language. He seems to be suggesting that we cannot practise theatre today as if there had been no photography, cinema, computers, the Internet, virtual environments, and the evolution of visual arts. He saturates the stage with heterogeneity. His champions assert that he "stages" technology, dramatizing it.

So, where does this leave the actor?

He is subordinated to technology, to the machinery that is present on stage. In other words, he is dehumanized.

Lepage would possibly argue that, on the contrary, the actor is doubled or tripled by some of the stage technology because his very form is multiplied by visual effects, such as the split-screen technique. Just as an audience is when it gazes at the visual image, drawing itself into the image's centre.

And yet, it is also possible to argue that the actor and audience are so immersed in the image that they become its prisoner.

This is not to deny Lepage's huge successes—especially his Stratford *Coriolanus* (2018), the most richly filmic, passionate version that festival has ever seen. It narrated its story through projected *trompe l'oeil* imagery, live video, sliding diorama-like boxes and panels that expanded or contracted like equivalents of cinematic pans, tracking shots, close-ups, and letter-box effects. But it also had an excellent cast of charismatic actors and an actress (Lucy Peacock) of bravura force.

Lepage's form of meta-theatre is fascinating, but its evident limits are equally fascinating.

A great play can have an after-life because of its language, characters, and exploration of story-telling. Can a theatre built primarily on technological effects have such an after-life?

Telling the Story

We often hear directors and actors claim that their primary focus is on telling the story clearly. They point to Shakespeare's ability to transcend his subplots and various plot complications in the pursuit of a clear story with compelling characters. But Shakespeare was a rare genius who could engross, challenge, question, and control his audience. So, when directors instruct their casts on opening night to just go out and tell the story, they sound rather glib. Whatever the motive and inspirations for Shakespeare's stories, society and the theatre have changed radically since his day, so is it really possible to tell his stories simply and clearly? What is the contemporary importance of ideas such as the Great Chain of Being or the Divine Right of Kings or of Prospero's magic? Does the subject of witchcraft have the same impact on a modern Western audience as it did in Shakespeare's time? No story can ever tell itself. Isn't the story subject to the director's approach and the cast's interpretation? Every production inevitably highlights certain passages of text, and although theatre does not limit an audience's gaze the way an edited film does, it nevertheless can impose a director's context or concept, or hinge on famous actors' interpretations of the principal roles.

As audiences, we all bring our conscious or subconscious biases to a story in the theatre, and for a production to tell

the story clearly, it would mean that the production would have to communicate itself around those biases with as few meddling filters as possible. Moreover, telling a story means sharing a story, and the success of the telling depends on the openness of the sharing both in terms of what is offered by the production and how it is received by the audience.

Poetry

PART ONE

ON THE READING OF IT

Keith Garebian reading some of his poetry at St. Vartan's Armenian Church, adjoining St. Cuthbert's Anglican Church, Oakville, September 2015.

Public Readings

Poetry readings are usually excruciating experiences.

There is the mumbling poet—the sort who seems embarrassed by his own verse, and whose mumbling muffles the poetry.

There is the droning poet: the type who seems to suffer from a sleeping illness that infects the audience.

There is the dub poet: the sort whose accent and rhythm can turn verse into spoken arts exotica.

There is the academic poet: the professor whose pontifical introduction of a piece is fraught with promise that is rarely fulfilled.

There is the deconstructive or post-modernist poet: the one for whom craft is eccentricity, his aim "how not to hit the mark he seems to aim at," "how to avoid the obvious," and his technique "how to vary the avoidance." (Phrases borrowed from Robert Francis' "Pitcher"—where baseball and poetry are analogous for aberrations.)

There is the modern beat poet: the one caught in the wrong decade because he was born too late.

There is the tub-thumping poet: the one who belongs on a soap box in some park.

There is the declamatory poet: the one who ends his dramatic utterances by usually yelling out a famous literary or political name, as if the mere allusion were enough to

put a seal on an awful poem. I experienced many instances of this type in Armenia, where poets from Georgia, Turkey, Iraq, Iran, *et cetera* invoked the names of Komidas or Saroyan or Siamanto as a dramatic but unearned climax.

There is the ham poet: the one who performs with melodramatic flourishes. He is not to be confused with the spoken art poet—the one who wishes to share the chemistry of poetry, with its distillates of diction, imagery, and tone.

(A sad fact about most poetry readings in North America is that the number of poetry readers is about the same as the number of poets.)

On "Direct" Readings

There is a bias in some literary circles against heightened effects in live readings. The bias is in favour of what is commonly called un-melodramatic, direct, simple readings—as if intelligent phrasing, with colourful emphases on certain words or images, or a sensitive negotiation of rhythm, or skilful modulations of tone are unfair advantages to a poet who respects and honours his craft by a high definition oral performance. There is an inordinate number of poets who claim that skilled spoken art camouflages a mediocre literary specimen. Perhaps, but only for those whose minds are a blank.

The antipathy towards effective oral readings betrays an inveterate insecurity or an insidious rivalry or jealousy. I never want to hear a poem recited as if it were a telephone directory. This is one reason I usually avoid poetry readings, where art or craft is murdered with almost obscene carelessness. Better to stay home and read the poet's book, if you think it deserves your attention. All poetry began with oral performance. Hence the *scop* or bard. There was a time when great poets were great readers. They had to be because most people could not afford to buy books, or because they lived in a predominantly oral culture where such things as voice, tone, and rhythm mattered greatly.

This is not meant to separate oral art from printed art.

The two should go together—as they always do in the greatest poems or the most memorable ones.

One more point: scrutinizing adjectives such as "unmelodramatic," "direct," and "simple" leads to the discovery that these are simply meaningless, useless buzz words. "Unmelodramatic" is a word that does not properly belong to poetry. And what does it mean to read directly or simply? Does it mean that a poet should play dumb and not have a personal point of view in his reading, that he should simply recite words as if they have no denotative or connotative or tonal significance? Does it mean that the poet should be insensitive to the intrinsic rhythm of a piece? Does it mean he should not show a way into his poem, or accent what he believes is the crux of his theme? Moreover, a good reading exposes the real tone of a poem, unhindered by inept enunciation or articulation.

The Reading Poet's Voice

In Pablo Larrain's clever film *Neruda*, the famous Chilean poet's second wife, Delia, disapproves of the way in which he reads a new poem. He sounds flatly direct, almost toneless, so she urges him to use his poet's voice—the one she obviously has heard many times during his public readings. And, so, he obliges, adopting a sort of grave lyricism that too many poets confuse with sincerity.

There is voice, and then there is VOICE.

"Authors are actors, books are theatres," said Wallace Stevens, suggesting that poems can have incandescent histrionic power. He could have had dramatic monologues specifically in mind, such as those where the speaker adopts the voice of a real or imaginary person.

This is not to subscribe to a fetish of "voice" or physical presence, but rather (as Maureen N. McLane asserts in her essays in *My Poets*) "to keep alive a sonic dimension through which critical intelligence might also sound forth." Such poems involve us in the very process of their unfolding, and such poems breathe with the presence of their creators. They depend very much on accuracy of the voice being used to reveal the tone.

And even excepting the dramatic monologue, tone is crucially important. Apparently, not everyone can sense true tone, and there is a lamentable tendency for poets to

recite dully, almost in a monotone, as if they were embarrassed to reveal that their words can have a life of their own.

In these cases, is it rude to tune out, or is there a way of administering morphine to one's self in case the pain of a woeful reading becomes intolerable?

About the Author

Keith Garebian has been writing professionally about theatre since 1976 for numerous magazines, journals, tabloids, and anthologies. Winner of a Canada Council Senior Grant (to complete an authoritative biography of William Hutt), numerous grants from the Ontario Arts Council, and four Mississauga Arts Council Awards for Established Writing, he has served on writing and theatre juries for the OAC. His production histories of classic Broadway musicals culminated in *The Making of 'Cabaret'* (rev. and expanded ed.) (Oxford University Press). His reputation as a theatre scholar is further extended by his massive biography, *William Hutt: Soldier Actor* (Guernica), and *Colours to the Chameleon: Canadian Actors on Shakespeare* (Guernica).

Although he turned to poetry relatively late in his career, Garebian has produced eight poetry collections in the last 16 years, including *Frida: Paint Me as a Volcano* (Buschek), *Blue: The Derek Jarman Poems* (Signature Editions), *Children of Ararat* (Frontenac), *Poetry is Blood* (Guernica), and the autobiographical *Against Forgetting* (Frontenac). Many of his poems have been translated into French, Armenian, Romanian, and Bulgarian. One of his Derek Jarman poems (alongside a poem each by Thomas Merton and Denise Levertov) was set to music for choir and instruments by celebrated

American composer Gregory Spears, debuting (under the umbrella title "The Tower and the Garden") in 2018 in Philadelphia and San Francisco, prior to a New York premiere in 2019.

In 2013 Keith Garebian was awarded the William Saroyan Medal by the Republic of Armenia for his writing and work on behalf of the Armenian Diaspora.