

Day, Moira

Women and the Western Canadian theatre 1918-1960

Sborník prací Filozofické fakulty brněnské univerzity. Q, Řada teatrologická. 2005, vol. 54, iss. Q8, pp. [185]-195

ISBN 80-210-3785-7

ISSN 1214-0406

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/114642>

Access Date: 19. 02. 2024

Version: 20220831

Terms of use: Digital Library of the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University provides access to digitized documents strictly for personal use, unless otherwise specified.

PROSTOR PRO HOSTA

MOIRA DAY

WOMEN AND THE WESTERN CANADIAN THEATRE 1918–1960

“‘What a piece of work is man,’ cried Hamlet, and for centuries the world echoed his admiration,” notes Elsie Park Gowan in a 1930s lecture entitled “Woman in the Twentieth Century”. “‘Frailty, thy name is woman,’ exclaimed the same Prince, and for years they have been making us believe it.” “Small wonder,” she continues, “that our great aunts, fighting their way out of the Doll’s House, claimed equality and felt that to be free and self-respecting they must be like men.” (307–08)

With these few terse, wry observations, Gowan sketches out a larger, more complex dynamic between the development of feminism and theatre in Canada between the closing years of the nineteenth century and the opening decades of the twentieth. Gowan’s implicit criticism of a classical humanist tradition of theatre that continued to perpetuate even into modern times a vision of Woman as “a negative, passive condition of unmanliness” with “all the opprobrious qualities of weakness, timidity, deceit and vacillation” (307) was further reinforced by the impact of the same tradition on Canada’s vision of itself – and by extension, its own theatre – well into the twentieth century.

As late as 1932 the Toronto *Mail and Empire* confidently affirmed:

We make no apology for espousing the Shakespearean drama and the British stage in general. Our best traditions – much that we hold most dear – have their origin in British traditions, in English literature and English ideals. This is not to say that we should not develop our own drama, but for a long time to come our playwrights and players will have to draw upon British culture. (*Mail and Empire*, 16 April 1932, 6)

It is undeniable that “Shakespearean drama and the British stage in general” cast a long shadow over the developing theatre of most of the British Empire’s former colonies, including America. However, in Canada the shadow was deepened considerably by the domination of an expanding entertainment empire that similarly viewed Canada as simply an extension of its territory. Composed largely of both British and American commercial interests, the touring syndicates controlled not just their own scripts, but the actual conditions of profes-

sional performance and production surrounding the selection and presentation of *any* dramatic script before a live audience. In short, if a continuing reverence for Shakespeare and a conservative suspicion of “the moderns”, including Ibsen, was one factor discouraging Canadians from writing their own *Doll Houses*, an even more serious one was the lack of indigenous professional companies or theatres dedicated to producing Canadian work.

This two-fold cultural and commercial domination did not prevent an increasing number of Canadian actresses from “fighting their way out of the *Doll’s House*” both on and off stage – and making good their “claim [to] equality” with their male peers in that larger theatrical empire. After the mid-nineteenth century there was a rapid acceleration in the number of Canadian-born women who worked as writers, actresses, and even actor-managers in the British and US touring circuits which dominated the Canadian theatrical scene until 1914. (Sperdakos *Daughters* 136–37) However, to be professional was almost by definition to be expatriate since the training and employment opportunities were almost exclusively outside the country.

More than that, the highly transient, public and commercial nature of these professionals’ lives was foreign to the experience of most nineteenth-century Canadian women who tended to confine their own artistic attainments to the protected world of school, church, and parlor. In general, women were regarded not just as the protectors of the hearth and home but as the guardians of the gentler, more human realms of beauty, spirituality, and artistic sensibility which again had increasingly little real value in a pragmatic, materialistic society. Paradoxically, not even the professional actress could wholly escape the burden of “the womanly woman”. While there were exceptions, most women who succeeded professionally in the “aggressive capitalist system” of the nineteenth century British and American theatre had to rely much less on their portrayals of “Nora” or “Mrs. Elving” to make a living, than on a constant stream of Shakespeare’s perennially-popular women characters and the sentimental “types” of the feminine ideal pervasive in contemporary melodramas and comedies.

Still for nineteenth-century Canadians struggling slowly and less surely to sovereignty and power in the shadow of aggressive US neighbors, and similarly trying “to stabilize and advertise in their work the values that cast their recessive position in the most favorable light” (Douglas 75), this valorization of the “maternal principle” took on a distinctively Canadian twist in their own popular art and literature. While Victorian Canada also sometimes portrayed itself as England’s “loyal son”, a female image of itself as a kind of wiser, stronger “Eve” resisting the temptation to join the seductive US “snake” in his Fallen World was a more frequent image in the popular culture of the time. Still, there was a significant clash between the confidence that the image exuded and the difficult struggle its promulgators faced in trying to establish and maintain Canadian visibility amidst an ever-rising tide of art, literature, and live entertainment flooding in from the more aggressive European, British, and US markets. In truth, nineteenth-century Canada exercised as much real power and influence over her own cultural affairs as the sensible Victorian woman who represented her.

However, the status of both women and theatre in Canada – and indeed, of Canadian nationhood itself – were to change significantly in the early decades of the twentieth century, bringing the destinies of these emerging forces into unusually close conjunction. This was in no small part because the same set of social, aesthetic and economic circumstances that defined and circumscribed one also tended to define and circumscribe the others.

II

The 19th century was the century of the United States. I think we can claim that it is Canada that shall fill the 20th century.

Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier.

Speech to the Canadian Club of Ottawa, 18 January 1904

Laurier's memorable 1904 assertion that the twentieth century belonged to Canada signaled the determination of the new Dominion to actively shape and order the times as a mature autonomous entity with dreams, ambitions and needs of its own rather than to passively "belong" to them. If Canada marched to war in 1914 as one of the "England's loyal sons", it emerged in 1918 as a turbulent contemporary nation trying to define itself in a world void of the old certainties – a prospect at once enormously liberating and terrifying.

Many of "England's loyal daughters" also passed through the same crucible. By 1918, many white middle-class Canadian women, aided by their higher public profile during the war years, successful battles for suffrage, and access to higher learning, had started to re-emerge from the domestic ghetto. The rising generation may have retained a belief that women's new spheres of influence should be extensions of their traditional roles of mother, wife, and muse. Yet many women genuinely perceived this as a liberating rather than limiting concept, provided these roles were imbued with legitimate public power and were used to advance the ends of social, cultural and political reform. (Prentice et al. 240–241).

For the emerging New Woman, the post World War I Canadian theatre was one increasingly attractive sphere of influence. Weakened by the disruption of the war, escalating costs, and the competition of the movies, the old touring circuits were on the verge of collapse and the three indigenous Canadian theatrical movements rising rapidly to replace them were generally more sympathetic to these "feminine" values and pursuits.

For women drawn to the vocation of the "muse", the Little Theatre movement, which aimed at creating a new, aesthetically innovative national theatre based on Canadian talent and experiences, represented wonderful new opportunities. In demanding an amateur theatre with professional standards, the male promulgators of the Canadian movement may have been consciously revolting against the kind of slick, mass-produced foreign glitz which was culturally suppressing and excluding all Canadians. At the same time, they were also perhaps less consciously reclaiming the indigenous theatre from a competitive commercial world that had largely excluded Canadian women except as consumers or expatriate professionals on

tour. Often unable to work professionally once married, but effectively subsidized by their husbands' incomes to perform important cultural or humanitarian work, such women soon became prominent as directors, actors, founders, board members, and even playwrights in local theatre associations.

Women more concerned with their roles as "wife" and "mother" – as the spiritual and physical nurturers of children, the moral guardians of family and by extension, local community life – were drawn in equal numbers to the new drama education movement springing up at the same time as the Little Theatre. One branch of drama education led into child and youth work – using drama specifically to educate and develop the young into the enlightened citizens of an enlightened society. The other, more closely allied with the purposes of the Little Theatre, led to extension or adult education work – the use of drama to promote a greater sense of cultural enrichment, social cohesiveness, and cooperation in smaller or more isolated communities.

For many reasons, drama extension work was more the domain of women in the Western Canadian provinces than it was in Eastern Canada. In Ontario, extension work tended to be much more closely tied to formal university training where the women were less numerous. By contrast, Western universities and provincial Departments were frequently far more innovative at reaching and accommodating the existing needs and interests of their small community and rural constituents. Thus women and their cultural work often became logical allies in the same fight for advancing community well-being and improvement.

During the inter-war era, this was particularly true in Manitoba and Alberta. While the mainstream of extension work in Manitoba, as driven by the provincial government, focused on agriculture, the arts increasingly became the domain of the Women's Extension Service. Esther Thompson, Director of the WES between 1926 and 1940, found herself unexpectedly developing into an ad hoc provincial drama consultant when the provincial W.I. (Women's Institute) organizations, with whom she worked closely, started broadening the focus of their activities from domestic science and pacifism to include the establishment of rural arts festivals including drama and music competitions. Between 1929 and 1932, Thompson, in partnership with the W.I. and the Winnipeg Little Theatre, oversaw the expansion of the rural arts festival from one to eight centers, the province-wide broadcasting of a series of lessons and lectures on play production during W.I. radio time, the distribution of letters and radio transcripts to over ninety groups requesting help, and finally, the organization of the Manitoba Drama League. (Stuart 114–225)

In Alberta, the stronger cultural focus of the University Extension Service prevented a similar alliance from developing between women's societies and the provincial women's services. Yet, when the University Department of Extension developed its own fine arts division in 1932, it looked to another strong woman, Elizabeth Sterling Haynes, to fill the position of Canada's first traveling provincial drama consultant. Better funded, trained, and mandated for the work than Thompson, Haynes traveled literally thousands of miles by car, train, horse and buggy, and sleigh to give lectures, short courses, and personal aid to local community, Little Theatre and school groups. Those whom she could not reach per-

sonally on her trips, she reached through the summer schools of the drama she helped found at Banff and Edmonton, as well as through letters, hand-outs, drama lessons over the radio, and the numerous books and plays she ordered for the Extension library. (Day and Potts 8–35)

If Haynes' work set the model for analogous positions so, it would appear, did her gender. While men like Major Bulwar-Lytton of British Columbia and Sydney Risk of Alberta also did excellent drama extension work, such appointments were more frequently to be held by women: Edith Sinclair in Manitoba, Florence James and Mary Ellen Burgess in Saskatchewan; Gwen Pharis Ringwood, Helen Stuart, and Esther Nelson in Alberta and Dorothy Somerset in British Columbia.

In short, the inter-war Canadian theatre between 1918 and 1939 in all of its aspects – as a spiritually enlightened non-commercial art, as an educator of children, and as an enricher of community life – wore in spirit, and often in fact, a woman's face.

III

By 1945, Canada, having survived both a Depression and another World War, seemed poised to seize the second half of the 20th century as its own. It might have been expected that women, having proved themselves once more in the war effort at home and abroad, would experience the same expansion of social, economic, political and theatrical vistas that they had after World War I.

Indeed, superficially, the future never looked brighter for theatre artists of both sexes. As the Canadian theatre, propelled by the optimism and prosperity of the post-war decades, began to move from amateurism to full professional status, new careers, especially in acting, began to open for such talented young women as Barbara Chilcott, Kate Reid, and Frances Hyland. At the same time, many women who had been influential before the war, like Toronto's Dora Mavor Moore, Calgary's Betty Mitchell, Vancouver's Dorothy Somerset, and Saskatchewan's Mary Ellen Burgess and Florence James, were just entering their most productive years. Yet in actuality, outside of traditional areas of female "expertise" like costuming, acting, and child/educational drama, women as a whole were slowly beginning to vanish from the post-war theatrical horizon.

This was true even in the female stronghold of extension work. Both the women's societies and the drama extension workers found their traditional rural spheres of power and influence eroding beneath the growing post-war wave of urbanization, industrialization, and centralized government services. In Manitoba, Edith Sinclair served only two years in the new University of Manitoba extension position before resigning because of personal and philosophical differences with the Director. The position and the division did not long survive her, being phased out in 1946. The drama extension positions in Alberta and Saskatchewan disappeared during the early sixties as government agencies and departments increasingly assumed responsibility for labor the extension workers had done. Such agencies doubtless provided better funding and operational structures for work grown too big for one person to handle. However, such

structures were frequently dominated by men, contributing to the reduction of women's contribution to prairie theatre development.

For most women the problem was a basic one. While the Canadian theatre was beginning to evolve beyond its early amateur and educational roots, women, influenced by a post-war revival of the idea of a "feminine mystique", were not. As a consequence, the theatre began to advance into the traditionally male domain of professional, commercial activity without them. Their former positions as directors, producers, founders, and playwrights were increasingly "professionalized" and filled by ambitious young men eager to remake the new theatre in *their* own image. To be sure, women continued to be very active in the community, children's and educational theatre but these were no longer the mainstream of Canadian theatrical development. Even as late as 1982, women still comprised only 10% of the playwrights, 13% of the directors, and 11% of the artistic directors in the Canadian professional theatre (Wallace 9).

Within this context, even the continued success of the early "great ladies" of the theatre had its hollow aspects. According to Esther Nelson, the final director of Extension drama in Alberta, the amateur theatre was an institution frequently powered more by strong personal influence than formal structures. As such, women like Elizabeth Haynes and Betty Mitchell, who tended to dominate it, relied as strongly on their considerable personal charisma and powers to inspire and teach young people, as on their considerable dramatic talent (Nelson).

Building on their earlier accomplishments, such women continued to function as adored, larger-than-life figures. Yet, this adulation, seldom dispensed to quite the same degree to the women's male colleagues, had a disturbingly elegiac tone. They were eulogized as gigantic mother/muses who transcended rather than contributed to the new "masculine" professional structures. The fact that so many contemporary Canadian awards for theatrical excellence bear the names of the "great ladies" may be an acknowledgement that these founding "mothers, wives, and muses" remain powerful icons in our consciousness yet. But it is also a truism that only the dead can be canonized.

IV

Historian Ann Douglas suggests that this was a battle these women were ultimately doomed to lose from the start, as the same forces of urbanization and industrialization caught up with the Canadian West in the mid-20th Century:

Many nineteenth-century Americans in the Northeast acted everyday as if they believed that economic expansion, urbanization and industrialization represented the greatest good. It is to their credit that they indirectly acknowledged that the pursuit of these masculine goals meant damaging, perhaps losing, another good: one they increasingly included under the "feminine" ideal. Yet the fact remains that their regret was calculated not to interfere with their actions. ...The minister and the lady were appointed as the champions of sensibility...in a fixed fight... [they were] to lose. (Douglas 13)

However, most of the women who were deeply engaged in the battle during the interwar period would certainly not have agreed that they were in a "fixed fight". Many of them had staked their lives and careers on a revolution they believed would eventually succeed. Frequently, they fiercely resisted the dwindling of the world and self that went with the process of their being "eulogized". At the very least, they retained an ironic sense of the growing discrepancy between a still-strongly felt inner reality and vision, and a proliferation of fragmenting external perceptions and realities at odds with it.

In many ways, Elsie Park Gowan, one of the pre-eminent Western Canadian playwrights of the interwar period, expressed the essential dilemma of the women of the time. Despite the triumph of "our great aunts [in] fighting their way out of the Doll's House", Gowan wondered, even in the mid-30s, whether it had not in some ways proved to be a pyrrhic victory:

It has been said that when Nora Helmer slammed the door of her doll's house, the bang re-echoed around the world. It announced a new age for women – an age in which she ceased to be a chattel or plaything; an age in which she escaped from bondage, achieved a position of freedom and equality. That was many years ago, but if the girl of today thinks the battle is over, let her think again and think hard. The doors are still banging it is true. But they bang in our expectant faces quite as often as behind our triumphant backs.

This is a decade of reaction. The ideals which seemed so near achievement after [World War I] are now farther away than ever.... As a result, the position of women in this century is completely illogical. (Gowan 293)

Gowan was writing specifically about the conflict between the dominant liberal feminist philosophy of the age which encouraged raising and educating a young woman "on the assumption that her life will be the same as her brothers'" and the reality of women's lives which forced them to choose between marrying and raising a family in the private realm or pursuing the profession they had trained for in the public realm. If she tried to combine both, as many of her brothers did, the "smiling" century which encouraged her to think like a man and work like a man says very firmly: "No my dear, this will never do. After all, you are a woman, and a woman's place is in the home." (Gowan 294)

However, her complaint had wider reverberations as well. It was more than just the liberal humanist underpinnings of first wave feminism that had inspired a heady faith in the ability of modern woman to pursue a wholeness of being and doing denied earlier generations of her sisters. It was a whole complex of other optimistic late-nineteenth, early-twentieth-century creeds, myths and philosophies that often intersected with and reinforced the faith of early feminism in the world and the self to be constantly evolving towards higher, fuller and better states of being. Those of a more political bent had been similarly inspired by the rising tide of Marxism and socialism, which again saw infinite possibilities of social, economic and political transformation for all human beings in radical re-orderings of the existing order. Still others subscribing to the view that a radical transformation of the existing of social, economic and political order relied first

on a profound spiritual awakening, found a key to personal and social action in religious reform movements, like Methodism, that adhered to an implicit faith in the possibility of human perfectability in this life and the ability of the enlightened to realize “the Kingdom of God” in all its wholeness and justice on earth.

Those who traveled to Canada from other lands were also frequently caught up with the added Utopianism of immigrating to the frontier where all sorts of possibilities of living and becoming again – both individually and as a society – could be dreamed and embodied in a way they were not in the Old Country. It was a sense even more pronounced in those who moved west and had faith, as one of Gowan’s characters puts it, that in a country that is “so big ... All new and different ... we can be new people too no matter what we were anywhere else”. (Gowan *Breeches* 280) This too was part of the heady mix of “progressivism” – spiritual and material – that underlay many of the Canadian prairies’ most unique political, social and educational innovations and structures.

Those who committed themselves to further expressing those larger feminist, socio-political, spiritual and national/regional visions in the form of indigenous theatre writing, performance and production were again frequently inspired by humanist aesthetics that conceived of the arts as a force that humanized, expressed and fulfilled the best in both humans and societies and drove both beyond the little truths that divided to the great universal ones that united and elevated.

Yet, paradoxically, the reality of women’s lives as lived, regardless of the expanding, integrating visions they often embraced, remained ones of fragmentation, hierarchical categorizations, material restriction and a proliferating array of conflicting roles, demands and duties. Many of the philosophies of the day predisposed women towards embracing a Romantic conception of the self that was both integrated and expanding. Yet, in practice women who actually tried to realize that self-conception in life were frequently viewed with some suspicion as being *unwomanly* at a time when being regarded as a “lady”, in the old-fashioned sense of the word, still remained important to one’s personal advancement..

Thus, the “completely illogical” situation of which Gowan complains.

V

The lives and careers of the Western Canadian drama extension workers in many ways demonstrate the central dilemma that Gowan describes. They were the product of an age and place that promoted the ideal of wholeness, integration and ever-expanding possibilities of being and doing – for women as well as men – while making it virtually impossible for them to achieve it.

Born in the closing years of the 19th century or the opening ones of the 20th century they were all children of the last golden years of an older prosperity and innocence touched by the optimism that the dawning century would be an era of even greater human achievement and realization. Most of them were also immigrants who came to Western Canada, either alone or with their families, because the frontier represented opening windows of opportunity and experience missing in their Old Country. Only Edith Sinclair who was born in Portage Le Prairie, was a native

daughter of the province where she did most of her life's work. Elizabeth Haynes was born in England, Dorothy Somerset in Australia, Esther Nelson, Gwen Ringwood and Florence James in America, and Mary Ellen Burgess in Ontario.

As young women, rising on the tide of the first wave of feminism as well as the expanding vistas of the New World, most prided themselves on being liberal thinkers with a strong social conscience. They were also either the first woman or among the first generation of their family to acquire a university education, with at least three of them also acquiring a master's degree.

They all rode the rising tide of educational and indigenous theatre development into careers that involved building up a new theatre for a new age within their native or adopted country. At the same time, they felt required to balance their need to create radical new imaginative worlds with an equally compelling need to remain socially respectable as "ladies" within the community. The Canadian-born practitioners received most of their initial training in theatre through working with local community, university or school groups, with some summer school or "refresher" training either at home or abroad. Only one, the American-born Florence James, who founded and ran the Seattle Repertory Theatre with her husband, Burton James, had an extensive career in the professional theatre before coming to extension work.

Regardless of background, they also shared a passionate, life-long belief in the power of theatre to transform people's lives. For some, theatre was most valuable as a theosophical experience in which the theatre functioned as a temple of the human spirit that one entered, whether as acolyte or practitioner, with a bowed head. For others it was an Arnoldian preserver and promoter of the best and most humane qualities in a given nation – and in some cases, a specifically Canadian nation coming to maturity in the 20th century. Others saw it as an educator and socializer of young people, and builder of communities in the face of fragmenting and alienating social circumstances and geography. For still others, it was a voice of social conscience, reform and change in a world that too often ignored it. But all were prepared to embrace and use whatever argument it took to sell their diverse audience on drama. They also shared a passionate dedication to building those visions on a sound foundation of technical training and expertise that encompassed all the arts of the theatre – but concentrated mostly on developing the human resource to its fullest especially in the areas of acting and directing.

They all wrestled with the difficulties of power and gender in the professional world. Gowan's complaint that any woman serious about making a professional career in teaching or any other profession had better dedicate herself to perpetual celibacy apparently had some merit. Of those whose careers lasted 15 years or longer in the field, one was a widow and two others never married. As mature women they also developed very distinctive and compelling "personas", not only to deal with their public, but male-dominated structures of power.

All were simultaneously sustained and thwarted by changing political and socio-economic conditions, and the politics of gender and geography. At some point, many of them left the country to explore even briefly or temporarily other worlds of possibility, training or experience. Most, however, made the decision

to return to Western Canada, though without some wistful backward looks to a life and self that might have been.

Still others who had been socially radicalized towards the left by the Depression were then traumatized by the Cold War. While Sinclair's position – though possibly not Sinclair herself – was a victim of Cold War politics in Manitoba, Nelson and James fled to Canada and actually started their careers in Extension work in wake of the McCarthyite witch-hunts which had destroyed their theatrical careers in the States.

Finally, in age, they acquired the ambivalent status of “grand old women of the theatre”. All but Sinclair and Haynes lived to see the rise of the professional theatre in the provinces in which they had worked, and played their own roles in helping set the foundation for its development in the post-World War II world. Yet paradoxically, it was a world and a theatre that soon transformed their own impressive triumphs into a curiously pyrrhic victory.

VI

These women's accomplishments were undeniable. Yet their careers often hint at a great potential going unfulfilled for reasons that reflect as much on the limitations of the time and the place as they do on the human being. Florence James's story of a brilliant career being destroyed in its prime by repressive forces is in some ways a narrative as powerful and chilling as Miller's *The Crucible*. Yet Nelson notes that people like she and Florence James at least had the satisfaction of having blazed a successful career elsewhere in the theatre before settling for the quieter hearth fires of Canada. Too many others patiently tended the hearth fires for years in anticipation of a blaze that came too late or passed them by.

More profoundly, many of them spent the bulk of their lives and careers stubbornly and persistently attempting to live out the ideology of a radically transformative wholeness and transcendence of the human spirit in the face of a world that paradoxically encouraged such a vision of the world and self even as it ultimately denied the actual means of realizing it – before finally repudiating even the vision itself. Their stories at once validate their accomplishments as individuals while reinforcing what Gowan saw as the absurdity of being a woman in the early decades of the 20th Century: the absurdity of attempting to be and act fully as a human being in a time and place where – even amidst the sweeping changes and opening vistas of the new century and the new Canada and the new theatre – it remained too true, in the echoes of an older humanism, that to be a man was to be a “‘piece of work’ ... the heir of strength, power, courage and opportunity”, whereas to be a woman was to be a “‘frailty’ ... an unforgiveable error in judgement” (307) whose very existence in this brave new world was “completely illogical”. (293)

WORKS CITED:

DAY, Moira (ed.) *The Hungry Spirit: Selected Plays and Prose by Elsie Park Gowan*. (Prairie Play Series 11). Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1992.

- . "The 'Womanly' Art of Theatre: Women and the Development of the Canadian Prairie Theatre 1918-1939". *Theatre InSight*, 6, No.1 (Winter, 1995) 43-52.
- . (with Marilyn Potts). "Elizabeth Sterling Haynes: Initiator of Alberta Theatre." *Theatre History in Canada/Recherches Théâtrales au Canada* 8, No.1 (Spring, 1987). Special Issue on Women in Quebec and Canadian Theatre. 8-35.
- DOUGLAS, Ann. *The Feminization of American Culture*. New York: Knopf, 1977.
- NELSON, Esther. Personal interview. 29 October 1985.
- PRENTICE, Alison... [et al.] *Canadian Women: a History*. Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988
- SPERDAKOS, Paula. "Canada's Daughters, America's Sweethearts: The Careers of Canadian 'Foot-light Favorites' in the United States." *Theatre Research in Canada/Recherches Théâtrales au Canada* 20, no. 2 (Fall 1999): 131-58. Special Issue on Canada Within the Context of World Theatre.
- STUART, Euan Ross. *The History of Prairie Theatre: The Development of Theatre in Alberta, Manitoba and Saskatchewan, 1833-1982*. Toronto: Simon & Pierre, 1984
- WAGNER, Anton. Ed. *Establishing our Boundaries: English-Canadian Theatre Criticism*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999.
- WALLACE, Robert. Ed. *Canadian Theatre Review* 43 (Summer 1985). Special Issue on Feminism and Canadian Theatre.

ŽENY A ZÁPADOKANADSKÉ DIVADLO V LETECH 1918-1960

Moira Day se ve své stati „Ženy a západokanadské divadlo v letech 1918-1960“ zabývá postavením a úlohou žen v kontextu rodící se kanadské divadelní kultury od prvních desetiletí dvacátého století až po období po druhé světové válce. Příklonem ke klasické humanistické tradici evropského (britského) divadla Kanada zároveň přejala i pojetí ženy jako „negativní, pasivní formy nedostatku mužnosti (ne-mužnosti)“, které nakonec v kanadské kultuře přetrvávalo hluboko do dvacátého století. Zatímco v druhé polovině století devatenáctého nacházely kanadské ženy stále větší uplatnění v rámci britských a amerických komerčních divadelních aktivit, situace se změnila na počátku dvacátého století, kdy došlo k mimořádně těsnému provázání osudů žen, divadla i Kanady jako národa. Po skončení první světové války vystupuje mnoho Kanadank z domácí sféry. Začínají se angažovat ve veřejném životě, především aby se podílely na sociálních, kulturních a politických reformách. V oblasti divadla se zapojují do nových hnutí, jako např. do hnutí „malých divadel“ (the Little Theatre movement), do vzdělávacích aktivit divadla pro děti a mládež, ale i divadla v rámci osvěty a vzdělávání dospělých, což bylo běžné zejména v západních provinciích Kanady. Autorka podává nástin této divadelní osvětové a pořadatelské činnosti, která se stala doménou právě ženských osvětových spolků, a konstatuje, že kanadské meziválečné divadlo tak často svým nekomerčním, vzdělávacím a komunitním zaměřením vlastně mělo (přeneseně i doslova) ženskou tvář. V období po druhé světové válce, které charakterizuje optimismus a prosperita, se kanadské divadlo profesionalizuje, avšak ženy v něm pod vlivem urbanizace, industrializace i centralizace státní správy paradoxně ustupují do pozadí. Nově vzniklá pracovní místa totiž převážně obsazují muži a matky-zakladatelky se stávají pouze obdivovanými osobnostmi. Situace, kdy jsou ženy aktivní spíše v okrajových oblastech profesionálního kanadského divadla, ale do jeho hlavního proudu zasahují jen omezeně, trvá až do osmdesátých let dvacátého století. Moira Day následně interpretuje výrok dramatičky Elsie Park Gowan, podle níž je pozice žen ve dvacátém století „naprosto nelogická“, a to z toho důvodu, že skutečnost vůbec neodpovídá soudobým ideálům celosti a stále se rozšiřujících možností bytí a konání. V poslední části své stati podává autorka souhrnnou charakteristiku významných žen (jejich životních i profesních zkušeností) činných v kanadském divadelním hnutí.

