

WOMEN OF THE NORTHERN STAGE: GENDER, NATIONALITY, AND IDENTITY AND THE WORK OF CANADIAN WOMEN STAGE DIRECTORS

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ABSTRACT

Studies in 1982 and 2006 conducted by the Canadian government and Canadian professional theatre organizations, respectively, revealed that Canadian women directors have been and continue to be underrepresented in relation to their male counterparts. Despite this disparity, however, Canadian women stage directors are creating innovative theatre and re-visioning traditional works. Whether directing work by and about women, re-staging canonical works, developing new multi-media work, or experimenting with new rehearsal methods, these women directors are ostensibly destabilizing conventional aesthetic forms and providing social critique through artistic innovation. Outside Canada, however, these women are largely unrecognized, and English language scholarship that investigates “American” or “North American” theatre often focuses exclusively on the US. Utilizing feminist historiography and qualitative case study methods, this study addresses that omission and investigates the work and directorial methods of four prominent Canadian women directors: Nina Lee Aquino, Kim Collier, Jillian Keiley, and Kelly Thornton. Through one-on-one interviews with each director, rehearsal and performance observations, and available critical reviews and archival documents, this project considers these directors’ artistic contributions, directorial methods, and the ways that gender, nationality, and other intersecting identities such as race, class, sexuality, and regionality impact their work. Ultimately, this project intends to contribute to the current and ongoing conversation about the status of Canadian women in theatre as well as to larger global discourses surrounding issues of gender, nationality and the arts.