

CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN FEMALE PLAYWRIGHTS: MARSHA NORMAN,
PAULA VOGEL, WENDY WASSERSTEIN

ABSTRACT

My dissertation focuses on the oeuvres of three outstanding contemporary American female playwrights, Marsha Norman, Paula Vogel and Wendy Wasserstein. My thesis does not deal with feminist drama and theatre, nor with Afro-American and other ethnic playwrights as this topic would require another dissertation. The reason is rather complex: each of them has a different political-social-historical background and objective and – especially the feminist movement – sometimes focuses on platforms and thus is limited in time and space...

The introduction gives a short outlook and evaluation of the situation of female playwrights and theatres, the successes and difficulties of the reception of the plays written by female playwrights. Before analyzing the oeuvres I found it important to give an insight into American history of drama and theatre and groups, movements, creative efforts which show European influence. First, it proves that female drama has a long history and its roots even though the majority of those playwrights are only lexicon entries nowadays. Secondly, the oeuvres of female playwrights demonstrate the hindrances and obstacles of those who wish to get on stage as women writers.

The introduction of the structure of American theatre – regional, education theatre, Broadway, etc. – intends to demonstrate what a long and complex procedure it is while a script finally

reaches the stage. I also found it important to give a more detailed insight into a significant though unfortunately short period of American theatre, the Federal Theatre Project led by Hallie Flanagan which reformed the whole system of the 20th century American theatre, ensured funds, and consequently produced great number of new plays – that plentitude of new dramas and theatre performances had never seen before and maybe neither since then.

After discussing the social-historical antecedents comes the discussion of the careers of the three playwrights. These women writers are all independent personalities who, without belonging to any current school or trend managed to become leading playwrights of the contemporary American drama, winning Pulitzer-, Tony- and Obie-Prize for their work.

My choice is deliberate and intentional: the three playwrights represent three different branches of drama. Wendy Wasserstein is a representative of the American Zeitstück or period piece, Paula Vogel seeks for new forms of drama while harping on taboos and delicate affairs and Marsha Norman represents the more traditional type of psychological drama.

The discussion includes a brief outlook and analysis of the plays which are followed two essays of each playwrights' most famous and critically acclaimed dramas.

Finally, the dissertation gives a summary of the careers of the three playwrights – their place and achievements, and also of their thoughts about the present state of (female) playwrighting.

The dissertation ends with two appendices; Appendix I. is a chronology of drama and theatre history, Appendix II. is a chronological summary of the three playwrights' oeuvre.