

Writing about the South in her own way:
gender and region in the work of southern
women playwrights.

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Writing about the South "in her own gender and region in the work of women playwrights

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Abstract

This dissertation examines how identity—gender, race, sex—intersects with considerations of the dramatic genre, cultural factors in the American theatre, and understandings about

complicate how contemporary southern women playwrights bring to light of the always-already "performative" nature of the South, the commercial, and ideological factors that set the South in context. Southern women playwrights face additional difficulties in negotiating authenticity and simulacra, the universal versus the specific, "backwardness" versus northern sophistication, and audience expectations of fetishizing or distancing the South. Using drama as their medium, they address problems—for instance, the multiple layers of authorship, the theatrical format, and the demand for exaggeration within production. This dissertation offers opportunities for southern women playwrights to challenge not only about the South, but also about the assumed universality of the South always been figured as male/white/heterosexual/middle-class. Reading the work of playwrights such as Pearl Cleage, Rebecca Gilman, Marsha Norman, and Shay Youngblood, I draw on several strategies to respond to these problems. Through conscious approaches that involve placing, displacing, and reimagining the South, and by foregrounding their challenges to traditional gender expression and sexuality, community, and domesticity, they bring the stage to reimagine the South and the dramatic genre.

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