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Paula Vogel And The Modern American Female Playwrights

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Abstract

Reading and analyzing Paula Vogel's plays, the readers can attest that she achieves success in drama or theater because she is passionate about theater. Vogel is a modern American playwright who won the 1998 Pulitzer Prize for drama. Her success and insight in playwriting or in adapting do not come all of a sudden; she is influenced by many writers. Vogel is influenced by many American dramatists, including Eugene O' Neill, Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, and Edward Albee, and by other non-American writers, including August Strindberg, Anton Chekhove, and Bertolt Brecht. Certainly, there were female playwrights who wrote preeminent plays and they influence Vogel as well. Nevertheless, dramas by female writers, as a

matter of fact, remain marginalized. This paper focuses on the influence of some female playwrights on Vogel.

Keywords: myths, adaptation, production, the unconventional.

In 1911, David Belasco in *Good Housekeeping Magazine* called playwriting "the great opportunity" for women (p.626). Reading and analyzing Paula Vogel's plays, the readers can acclaim that Vogel achieves success in drama and theater because she is passionate about them. Vogel is a modern American playwright who won the 1998 Pulitzer Prize for drama. She reports, "theatre is vital to American life—and no, it's not ridiculous to love theatre so much that you devote your life to it" (McDonald and Paige, 2002, p. xvii). Vogel succeeds and influences other modern American female playwrights, and she develops a legacy as an adapter and as a writer. But her success and insight in playwriting or in adapting do not come all of a sudden: "Vogel was no overnight success at playwriting" (Smith,1993, n.p.). As she influences the new generation of American female dramatists, she is influenced by many writers before her. She says in an interview that what she did in a summer break while she was a sophomore in school was to read as many dramas as possible:

> I would go through the set of Oxford literature, and I would look up every playwright. I just set myself a task. Read all the O'Neill. And then I read all the Tennessee Williams I could get my hands on. And it never occurred to me to be a playwright, because other than Lillian Hellman, I couldn't find any women. (Tichler and Kaplan, 2012, p. 114)

Vogel is influenced also by other American dramatists, including Edward Albee and John Guare (1938-), and by other non-American writers, including August Strindberg (1849-1912), Anton Chekhove (1860- 1904), Bertolt Brecht (1898- 1956), and the Russian formalist Victor Shklovsky. Certainly, there were female playwrights who have written preeminent plays and they were contemporaries of Eugene O' Neill (1888- 1953), Arthur Miller (1915- 2005), and Tennessee Williams (1911- 1983). There are other female names rather than Hellman (1905-1984) mentioned by Vogel above who were influential and contributive to modern American drama: Susan Glaspell (1876-1948), María Irene Fornés (1930-), Marsha Norman (1947-), Wendy Wasserstein (1950-2006), and Beth Henley (1952-), to name only very few. Nevertheless, dramas by female writers remain marginalized just like "a chorus surrounding the dominant voices of our decidedly 'major' (i.e. male) playwrights" (McDonald and Paige, 2002, p. 1). It is helpful to examine some major American female playwrights in order to recognize Vogel's position among them.

To begin with, Glaspell was the founder with her husband, George Cram Cook, of the Provincetown Players. This theater was dedicated to producing only original American plays written by American playwrights. This foundation was the significant contribution of Glaspell to American drama. The Provincetown Players also helped Glaspell to create and represent the image of the new woman on stage (Burke, 1996, pp. 51-52). Glaspell was always concerned in her dramas with women. She wrote about women who did not enjoy freedom or independence. She criticized or showed no trust in the patriarchy. Her plays are described by Sally Burke and Yvonne Shafer as daring plays for they challenge male dominance and reject such concepts as women's honor and abstract justice (1996, p. 63; p. 152). Glaspell revolted against established patterns and conventions of playwriting

(Jouve, 2014, p. 10). In her *Trifles* (1916), Glaspell makes use of the absent woman technique, which means that the heroine does not physically appear in the play, which was a new technique at the time, to intensify the idea of marginalization and to show how patriarchy deprived women of their substance (Burke, 1996, p. 52). Actually, Emeline Jouve argues in her book *Susan Glaspell's Poetics and Politics of Rebellion* that Glaspell's rejection of established patterns is the energy of her plays (2014, p.15). Although Glaspell's plays were not all successful at the time, and although she created a women's discourse that was not recognized at the time, Glaspell demonstrated a possibility towards the formation of the female community. She deserves to be looked at and evaluated in the same way as looking at O'Neill's contribution to the modern American drama (Burke, 1996, p. 64). If he is described as the father of modern American drama, Glaspell is described as its mother, according to *The Longman Anthology of Drama and Theatre* (Greenwald, Schultz, and Pomo, 2004, p. 21). Thinking about Vogel as a contemporary dramatist and looking back at her preceding female dramatist Glaspell, the readers can figure out how Vogel continues and develops Glaspell's concern about the conventions that surround women and deprive them from their rights of independence and of constructing their own female identity. Vogel expresses such concerns in her plays like *Desdemona* (1979) and *Meg* (1977) by challenging and requestioning conventional myths about the male control in these two plays. She shows her readers the other side of the coin: how the historical Desdemona and Meg might behave, think, and hope independently of the myths of the patriarchy. As did Glaspell, Vogel presents a new image of women and gives it a strong voice and presence. And like Glaspell also, Vogel rejects conventions in form and content.

The trinity of the U.S. South— Hellman, Norman, and Henley —are other female, effective dramatists whose steps are traced by Vogel. Hellman concentrated mainly on the U.S. South and the southern woman. She was preoccupied, like Glaspell, with the independence of women, and she criticized the patriarchal system. She succeeded in creating not only a strong woman but also an aggressive female character—Regina in *The Little Foxes* (1939). In the same play, she also created a courageous woman, Alexandra, who rejects and decides to leave the patriarchal system represented by the Hubbards. Hellman believed in the importance of economic independence of women, and this belief is obvious through the character of Regina. We feel the same importance emphasized by Vogel, especially in *Desdemona*. Desdemona envies Bianca for her economic independence and Desdemona herself tries to get this independence too. The same hopes are felt in Emilia, who wishes also to be independent from Iago. Vogel portrays a bold female character—Desdemona—as well as decisive female characters— Meg and even Li'l Bit in *How I Learned to Drive* (1997). We find these qualities in Hellman's characters. Similarly, Jessie, in Norman's *'night, Mother* (1983), appears as a decisive character too. Norman's plays follow, like Hellman's, the conventional rules of writing a play, but they are informed by a feminist value (Gavin, 1999, p. 242). Norman shows a female character taking the first steps in the search for happiness, although the promise of hope she provides is not so great (Berkowitz, 1992, p. 202). Norman announces in 2009 in her article "Not There Yet: What Will it Take to Achieve Equality for Women in Theatre?"[1] that "[w]e have to commit to telling all the stories of this country. We need to make some new rules for ourselves, and do our jobs fairly. We need to stop expecting plays by women to be soft. We need to see what they actually are when we read them" (n.p.). Norman's hopes did not happen at the time and may be they are still striving right now, but

some change is felt when one sees Vogel writing a play whose heroine is abused by a pedophile in *How I Learned to Drive*, or when she explains in *Desdemona* that sexuality for women is a type of agency. These plays are not "soft" plays. Norman describes Vogel, and her student and contemporary Lynn Nottage (1964-), in a recent article in *New York Times* as "the heroes of generations of women writers and readers, actors and audiences… Thank you universe" (qtd. in Paulson, 2017, n.p.). Norman expresses her hopes in the new generation.

Henley is part of the trinity above. She, like Hellman, is much concerned about southerners. She is known in particular for her use of humor in her plays, but beneath her jokes there is a serious vision. Her comic tones appear as a response to writing about the southerners "who turn out to have unexpected quirks or askew, so that mundane events turn into bizarre adventures and bizarre adventures into unnoticed trivia" (Berkowitz, 1992, p. 200). The three sisters in her *Crimes of the Heart* (1979) pass through so many difficult and bizarre situations, but their inherent innocence secures them finally happiness—the three sisters Meg, Babe, and Lenny pass through a tragedy after another; there are love affairs, suicide, psychological problems, shooting, and violence, but the sisters survive and the play ends with their celebration of Lenny's birthday. Henley's loving humor assures all will be well (Berkowitz, 1992, pp. 200-201). It is also found that Henley through her comedy "destabilize[s] the stereotype of the southern 'lady' and explore[s] the anti-authoritarian aspects that can make comedy a socially transformative tool" (qtd. in McDonald and Paige, 2002, p. xiii). Henley used comedy as a tool to portray the southern woman out of her stereotypical model, as a part of the scholarship at the time.

Like Henley, Vogel in her plays also resorts to humor as a social tool. As mentioned, Vogel deals with taboos in her play, or "the road less

traveled" as Carolyn Craig puts it (2004, p.213).[2] There are ironies, games, and humor in her plays but they are generated from anxiety, pain, loss, sickness, and even death. There are also resistances to the logic of decline, forgiveness, and reconciliation that lift her characters above their circumstances (Bigsby,1999, p. 297). The readers find resistance to the logic of decline, which means that the non-survival is the logical end, in the final reconciliation of the heroine in *How I Learned to Drive*, for instance. Games are found in Vogel's *The Oldest Profession* (1981)[3] in which Vogel plays the games of expectations with the five women in this play—the five women have expectations that their nation would appreciate their business, and they have hopes in making profit, having government subsidies, and advertising their service. They tell their stories and act out sexual fantasies with clients and for themselves. They imagine that they are still part of an acceptable community that has marginalized them for their age, economical status, and profession (prostitution). For Christopher Bigsby, Vogel's comedy also is found in the humorous gestures and provocative stereotypes as seen in *Desdemona*; her comedy is the two extremes—the two sisters— in *The Mineola Twins* (1996)[4]. Vogel explains the use of comedy in her plays as follows: "I find the excitement of comedy and the excitement of theatre is that we are going to explore something together" (qtd. in Bigsby, 1999, p. 297). Vogel's comedy invites the readers to explore life and see it in a better way. Her comedy is a kind of dark comedy. In an interview, Vogel states that her comedy is "a comedy with a dark undercurrent," and she also states in the same interview that "[t]he dark doesn't really ever go away in my writing" (Sova, 2012, n.p.). She conveys a message through her dark comedy, like Henley and even Wasserstein, about a human situation and people who are in search for love and meaning, as Bigsby contends (1999, p. 297). Because Vogel has chosen the taboo, whenever she has encountered

obstacles, she has managed to turn them into milestones by applying hefty amounts of resolve and humor (Craig, 2004, p. 213). Her humor is a serious humor that urges the readers to reflect on the human situation.

Wasserstein also writes comedies. Her plays deal with women's choices in life. In her *Uncommon Women and Others* (1977), she presents educated women who take different decisions in their life (this play is mainly about a group of women who meet in a restaurant for a reunion, and they recall college days. Some women achieve their goals and others are still hoping to realize theirs). The ability and the right to choose in this play matter the same way they matter for Jessie in '*night, Mother* and for Li'l Bit in *How I Learned to Drive.* Wasserstein's and Henley's comedy and the laughter of their characters become a key to these characters' survival: "a laughter filled with compassion, one that keeps at bay the loneliness, frailty, and loss that otherwise would destroy these offbeat creations . . . [it is a] comic survival" (Roudané, 1996, p. 140). Comedy for Wasserstein and Henley is just like comedy for Vogel: a way of reconciliation. The female playwrights before Vogel wrote successful comedies, and Vogel enriches this use of humor to treat serious social issues and create some anti-mythical plays. This success stands in opposition to what was said about the female playwrights' ability, as Shafer explains, to write comedies during early twentieth century—that they did not have sense of humor: "[p]erhaps laughter was thought to be too vulgar for the ideal women placed upon a pedestal, above men both in morals and manners. Women playwrights helped to change that idea" (1995, p.372).

During the early and mid-twentieth century, women playwrights were trying or even combating to be professional playwrights in a theater that was dominated by men. The female playwrights were working and moving with determination, hope, and compassion to be recognized as a mainstream of

the modern American drama, as Wasserstein pinpoints in her forward to Shafer's book *American Women Playwrights 1900-1950* (1995, pp. xi-xii). Most of the female playwrights in this period of the century were feminists who looked forward to replace "the negative stereotype of 'the old maid' with the positive depiction of a career woman, single by choice. . . They often focused on the position of women in American society in an unconventional and startling way" (Shafer, 1995, p. 2). It was important for the female playwrights in this period of the century to depict women and their community as seen and evaluated by women themselves. There were male playwrights during this phase who wrote about women's experience but from a male point of view. The female playwrights would evaluate the role and effect of female characters differently and deeply, showing the inner self or inner feelings of the female characters, their talents, and their needs. We can imagine that female effect by comparing Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955) and *How I Learned to Drive* that are both about pedophilia but the former is written from a male perspective and the latter is written from a female perspective. Vogel is truly one of the contemporary female playwrights who recognizes the importance of writing from a female character's perspective by making that character the narrator. This collaboration between the female playwrights during the first half of the twentieth century and the contemporary female playwrights indeed has drawn the attention to the female concerns (Roudané, 2009, p, 13). Consequently, the 1980s is considered an important decade for the female playwrights as Henley, Norman, and Wasserstein whose plays were starting to be produced on Broadway, specifically Norman's musicals. Some of the female playwrights even started to receive awards like Henley who was given the Pulitzer Prize in 1981for *Crimes of the Heart*; Norman who was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1983 for '*night, Mother*; and María Irene

Fornés who won three Obie Awards in 1984 for *The Danube*, *Sarita*, and *Mud*, and in 1985 for *The Conduct of Life*.

As a matter of fact, Vogel admires and is influenced by Fornés as well. She contends in an interview with David Savran that Fornés has "transformed the possibilities, the vocabulary. I wouldn't be able to exist without [her]" (1999, p. 287).While Norman, Henley, and Wasserstein counted on traditional realism in treating women's issues, Fornés (1930-) along with other female playwrights, such as Alice Childress (1912-1994) and Adrienne Kennedy (1931-), found that conventional forms of realism were not suitable to convey or represent women's experiences because "realism is filtered by the 'male gaze.' To shift the 'gaze' to women in the subject position, these playwrights had to develop new theatrical language, gestures, [and] forms" (Gavin, 1999, p. 237). Many female playwrights started to use expressionism and experimental techniques to deal with women issues having in mind social causes like race, intolerance, and sexuality (Shafer, 1995, p. 457). Vogel also does not follow the conventional realism. She defeats the myths around women (the myths that women are unable to be writers) and cares for social unity, following unconventional ways. Vogel has not been a fan of realism; she states that fantasy and imagination are more real (Winer, 1993, p. 48). That is why she continues to reject what Fornés and Kennedy have rejected before, which is the linear plot. The latter playwrights assert that the non-linear technique "allows them a keen sensitivity to language, subjectivity, and emotion" (Gavin, 1999, p. 239). Vogel uses the non-linear narration as a tool to help her highlight a theme or nullify a myth. In the case of *How I Learned to Dive*, she uses the non-linear technique to make the readers re-evaluate the pedophile character, Peck.

From another perspective, the realism that Vogel does incorporate is a domestic realism (exposing family life and concerns). She traces O'Neill, Miller, Williams, Albee, and Shepard in their later works where they resorted to domestic realism to say what they sought to say. This kind of realism gives dramatists the flexibility, power, and richness to express their ideas. Domestic realism enables the American dramatists to criticize various issues and offer insight and spiritual counsel (Berkowitz, 1992, pp. 4-5). Vogel's *Hot'N' Throbbing* (2000), for one, deals with family, domestic violence, husband-wife relationship, and parent-children relationship. Domestic realism maximizes the variety of Vogel's writing conventions and her ability to write the non-traditional play, which is the nerve center of her art.

Generally speaking, after the 1960s, there has been openness to the unconventional and a broadening to the role of avant-garde art that becomes popular and a characteristic of post-modernism (King, 1991, p. 3; p. 8). Fornés, Kennedy, and Vogel are considered pioneers of the avant-garde art. It is significant here to mention that in 2002, the American College Theatre Festival designated the Paula Vogel Playwriting Award,[5] which is a prize that is awarded annually to "the outstanding student-written play that celebrates diversity and encourages tolerance while exploring issues of disempowered voices not traditionally considered mainstream" (Mansbridge, 2014, p. 4). One of the significant approaches that Vogel develops and contributes to the modern or the contemporary American literature is the non-traditional drama. That is why she and a number of the new voices in drama like Sarah Rhul (1974-), who was her student in Brown University, and Suzanne Lori Parks (1963-) deserve to have the opportunity to see their works produced on Broadway,[6] so they will be able to bring their work to a wide audience.

Producing on Broadway is a privilege that has been claimed by men playwrights, and it is sought by women playwrights as well, but Broadway has not been receptive (Durham, 2013, p. 8). Michael Paulson published an article in the *New York Times* in March, 2017 in which he announced that finally two female playwrights arrived on Broadway at the same time. Paulson spoke proudly about this achievement, but he wondered why women playwrights were absent on Broadway for so long. Vogel's *Indecent* (2017) and Nottage's *Sweat* (2017) are the two plays that were produced on Broadway in spring 2017. Those two plays were the only plays in Broadway that season by women playwrights in comparison to eight plays written by male playwrights. Nottage comments on this participation, saying that "[t]he moment in which you walk up and see the marquee is absolutely magical . . . We have been in the trenches, we've fought the wars, and finally arriving feels quite exhilarating" (Paulson, 2017, n.p.). Vogel comments, on the other hand, that "[y]ou feel the ghosts in a really great way . . . and they're the kind of ghosts that are saying, '[w]elcome home'" (Paulson, 2017, n.p.). Paulson's article was mainly about this delay in producing women writers' plays on Broadway. Paulson stated clearly and honestly that both plays have the credentials that some plays written by men and produced on Broadway do not have. He expressed that this appearance of both plays and both women writers is really significant because Vogel is a lesbian and Nottage is African American. Paulson concluded that the delay was because of "sexism, content, scale, or timing" (2017, n.p.). Thus, in addition to sexism, the controversial subject matters of the plays of those two writers keep them from being accepted by Broadway before. Paulson contends that such plays like *How I Learned to Drive* and Nottage's *Ruined* (2009), for example, are famous and mark a turning point for both playwrights even without Broadway productions (Paulson, 2017, n.p.). For her part, the producer of

Vogel's *Indecent*, Daryl Roth, attested that it was an injustice to Vogel that her plays have not been produced on Broadway before *Indecent*. Roth said, "I felt she was due this honor" (qtd. in Paulson, 2017, n.p.). Nottage expressed that she and Vogel do not intend to write controversial plays, but they only feel that writing a controversial play means to be part of the cultural conversation (qtd. in Paulson, 2017, n.p.). Vogel is pleased to be on Broadway. She says that "[i]t's symbolically more important that two plays be there together . . . We can hold and ram up against the door together, which makes it a little easier" (qtd. in Paulson, 2017, n.p.). These words by Vogel make us feel the victory of women playwrights after this long journey of American women writers who always looked forward to making their voices reach a broad audience. We feel also that they are very proud of themselves. Those writers hoped that they could earn the chances that their male peers received.

The brief overview above shows some of the works, themes, and ambitions of some American female playwrights and how their hopes and efforts are felt one generation after another, influencing each other and completing each other till they are now on Broadway. In spite of these positive steps of the modern American female playwrights, the obstacles are still there against women playwrights but they are beneath the surface of critical discourse, as Leslie Durham articulates (2013, p. 2). The challenges of female playwrights have not come to an end, but these challenges reach a kind of optimistic point. It is obvious that Vogel and some new voices—Parks, Nottage, and Ruhl—are really among the leading, influential, and productive writers in the end of the twentieth century and beginning of the twenty-first century. Ruhl dominated the American stage at the beginning of the twenty-first century. She had twelve premiere productions in as many years. Her concerns, similar to her precedents, are passionate interests in the

social and female concerns and ethical questions (Durham, 2013, p. 4). A significant feature of the new American female playwrights is that they do not work in isolation nor should their works be read in isolation. Ruhl is one of those writers who deal with serious matters that connect her to other female writers who also are concerned with the same issues. One of the important connections that Ruhl has is with her teacher Vogel: a relationship that influences the development of Ruhl, and, in turn, it enhances the development of American drama written by women. In fact, one of the distinguishing features of the modern female American dramatists is that several of them teach drama, like Vogel, and this feature enables them to create some direct relations with and have a direct supervision on their students, or the new dramatists (Middeke et. al., 2014, p. xv). Ruhl studied under Vogel at Brown University[7] both as an undergraduate and a graduate student. Ruhl has had techniques in writing before meeting Vogel. Vogel polished these sensibilities in Ruhl's writing at Brown University. Ruhl herself admits Vogel's effect over her writing. Actually, Ruhl admitted that being affected by Vogel's works was the fact that helped her to write her own works. She reported that it was Vogel who introduced Ruhl's first play *Passion Play*, a play which Ruhl began to write in 1996 while she was Vogel's student, to the New Plays Festival at Trinity Repertory Theater. The performance of Ruhl's play there turned her into a playwright (Durham, 2013, p. 75). Vogel, who finds illusion truer than reality, taught Ruhl to write provocative stories and to give her loyalty and love for the artists who "experiment the wild fancy and then invite *everyone* to the table to partake" (Durham, 2013, p. 11). Ruhl mentioned that one of the major lessons that she learned from Vogel is that playwrights are people and that great plays are written by people not Moses; they are people who eats cookies and talk in

the telephone. Moreover, Ruhl says, the plays are "not only written by people in general, but yes, written by women" (Durham, 2013, pp. 19-20).

Vogel's bold strokes with which she writes *How I Learned to Drive* tell that women's stories are compelling and stageworthy, and no one can write them better than women themselves (Craig, 2004, p. 247). These bold strokes taught not only Ruhl to write provocative stories, but also taught Parks to write some disturbing plays such as *TopDog/ UnderDog* (2001). Parks in this play displays the aggression and violence between two brothers and she reflects on a violent twenty-first century America. Sometimes violence appears shocking in her works. She is preoccupied with the racial history and women's issues. Parks shows in some of her plays how women possessed and dispossessed of their bodies, their children, and their freedom. Hester, in *Fucking A* (2003), for instance, shows to what extent a woman will be able to possess her own self and what she most cares about. Hester cannot have her son and she is obliged to kill him at the end of the play, and after that her life goes on. Parks also is preoccupied, like Vogel, by the idea of a past that one cannot escape even if he wishes to. Parks' works contain many symbols and references to the past. Craig asserts that Vogel, as one of the new wave of women playwrights, is providing bold and diverse role models for the next generation (2004, p.247).

Vogel always encourages her students to write unconventional, challenging plays (Mansbridge, 2014, p. 8). She becomes happy when they break the fourth wall; she encourages them to use their ultimate imagination, and to concentrate once on language in writing a play, on form or structure in another play, and on available theatrical devices in writing another one. She explains to her students that it is not always the theme that should be their concern or the centrality of one character. Through these lessons, she makes her students aware of the limitations of theater devices, means of production,

and small theaters. She provides them with variety; it is not only one theory or one method. For instance, one of the assignments she gave to one of her classes was to write a play that cannot be performed on stage. Obviously, she was promoting their creativity and imagination.[8] Vogel's dramaturgy and pedagogy really underpin each other and enrich the new generation of playwrights' insight and writing. It is significant to mention here that Vogel evaluates her affective role as a teacher to be reciprocal. She admits, "I think teaching has had a huge impact on me" (Savran, 1999, p. 280). She essentially appreciates the experience of teaching or mentoring that brings her face-to-face to the new, younger generation. She also appreciates and recognizes the generational gap; she comments,

> Aging allows you to come apart and deconstruct your own generational art. You're unknitting and unraveling the commercial theatre of your time and actually speaking to audience members a generation younger than you. Your own generation wants to see everything comfortable, put together in the status quo, they don't want to see it taken apart. You've got to reach the age and have the experience with the theatrical apparatus to be able to take it apart. (Savran, 1999, p. 285)

She admits also that "I don't actually teach"; she sees her role in the classroom as a facilitator. She believes that playwriting is a collaborative task: discussions and peer-directed workshops (Mansbridge, 2014, p. 8). That said, she believes in others' or the younger playwrights' ideas and impact. She says that she is watching what the new playwrights are doing to the form. She deems that Ruhl has had an impact, for instance (Tichler and Kaplan, 2012, p. 134). Vogel conceives of herself and her generation as

having a responsibility of mentoring the younger generation and as having a legacy for the ones who come after them; "[they] pick up on us," she says in her conversation with Savran. Then she adds, "our generation and those older have to give up the reins to let younger people in" (1999, p.285; p. 286). Vogel appears to understand her age, role, and time. She does not find aging a defect in her as a dramatist. She explains, further, in an interview with Kath Sova that "[o]ne of the nice things about being 45 is that I don't feel paralyzed by rage. I'm able to see things from a comic perspective" (1997, n.p.). Vogel proves to be an inspirational playwright and professor. Nottage's and Ruhl's success and efficiency are evidence that Vogel has been a nurturing mentor (Rousuck, 2008, p. 48). She proves also that she is an embracing, humble playwright who stood with her student, Nottage, on Broadway as colleagues, holding hands and wishing success for each other.

In addition to her role as a professor and a mentor and to her influence as an avant- garde, she has a significant role as an adapter. Adaptation is her major tool to dismantle the myths and stereotypes that are around society in general and women in particular. The main process to be noticed in her adaptations is the infidelity to the resource; she disagrees with the original source that keeps everything within the secure boundaries of the normative, as Joanna Mansbridge terms it (*Paula Vogel* 11). Vogel's plays or adaptations promote a discussion and a discourse away from the "albatross fidelity" (Griggs, 2016, p. 5) that has hovered around the theory of adaptation till recently. Studying the original text and the adaptation of some of Vogel's plays in the current project unfolds apparently how Vogel has a critical eye; she enters the old text from a new critical direction and defies the ideas and the myths woven within it. She illumines a revision of the cultural conflicts and anxieties that were around the original text. She recognizes very well what to change and what to preserve. In Yvonne

Griggs' opinion, the question of where to draw the line between the original and the adaptation or what to jettison and what to keep are the same questions that writers and critics ask themselves, and the answers to these questions will determine the quality of the adaptation (2016, p.13). For example, what Vogel changes in *Meg* are the character of Meg, the details of her daily life, conversations and relations with her father and husband and the details of the death of More and Meg's reaction to it. Vogel changes these details to show the readers the real feelings, conflicts, and influences of the female characters in history, and how it is important to talk beyond the "boundaries of the normative" because simply beyond them there are truer stories. On the other hand, Vogel keeps the end of More and the documentation of this end by Meg's husband in order to prove that truths can be easily hidden, and history can be faked easily by the one who writes it. Therefore, by keeping the end the same as the original, she creates a prompt to the readers to go and verify all historical records and stories.

The quality of her adaptations, hence, is analyzed through the fidelity and the infidelity in her works. She is prone to infidelity as a tool of demythologization, and she succeeds in writing distinct, impactful plays. If her adaptations have not been successful or if they do not stand as original, new works, they would not reach or would not have their audience. As Griggs illustrates, "[t]hoes who cling too fiercely to the old text, the thing to be adapted, the old ways, the past, are doomed to produce something that does not work, an unhappiness, an alienation, a quarrel, a failure, a loss" (2016, p.14). Vogel proves that fidelity to the original is not the aesthetic criterion with which her adaptations (or any adaptation) should be evaluated. Actually, according to Gary Bortolotti and Linda Hutcheon in their essay entitled "On the Origin of Adaptations: Rethinking Fidelity Discourse and 'Success'—Biologically," shifting the attention from the fidelity concerns

and studying the adaptation as an original work will allow new analytic opportunities to present themselves (2007, p. 445). Vogel chooses to adapt classical works not only because she questions the social and cultural myths, but also because she is fascinated by the past and its relation to the present and by the actions of the memory where the past remains and controls the present and directs the characters. This fascination pushes her to use innovative ways to connect the past with the present. She uses techniques and deviations to emerge past in the present. The present is no more independent of the past, and the past itself becomes debatable and turns to be a web of possibilities for investigation (Schroeder,1989, p. 126). This need to explore and verify the past and the history becomes "a compelling literary theme" (Schroeder, 1989, p. 23). The complexity of the past and its obscure relationship to the present require innovative form and structure, and Vogel, as we discussed earlier in this paper, concentrates on and develops experimental techniques and discusses new ideas.

Vogel, in her adaptations, says what has not been said or rephrases what has been said over and over (Mansbridge, 2014, p.11). She says in *How I Learned to Drive* what has not been said in *Lolita*, in *Desdemona* what has not been said in *Othello*, and in *Meg* what has not been said in *A Man for All Seasons* (1966), for example. She creates in every single adaptation moments of epiphany for the readers to acknowledge the myth of that work. Readers of *Desdemona* after centuries have learned that there is a considerable possibility that Desdemona is actually the whore that Iago creates in his and Othello's imagination. Adapting almost all her dramas, Vogel's adaptation and infidelity to the original will be an important part in her legacy to the coming generation of playwrights. Being an influential as a teacher, an adapter, and an award-winning dramatist with multiple plays on Broadway, Vogel heralds in her voice along with the voices of her precedents,

contemporaries, and the new female playwright generation that "women were capable of creating major careers as playwrights, that they could successfully compete with male playwrights for awards and audiences, and that they could treat a wide range of subjects in a variety of styles" (Shafer, 1995, p. 154). The female playwrights' success and persistence were and will remain a collaborative effort passing through the female playwrights from one generation to another.

Notes

[1] Norman writes passionately in this article about the problem of equality between male and female playwrights. She presents facts, statistics, links, published essays, and examples that prove or refer to the fact of ignoring women's productions in American Theater. She argues that the problem is not that women are unable to write good plays, but the reason is sexism. In her opinion, this is a "disaster" that nobody is trying or succeeding to solve. Norman is giving suggestions and solutions by the end of her essay one of them is that American female playwrights should not accept this inequality status, and they should be more "aggressive" in claiming their rights and supporting each other. I highly recommend Norman's essay for any reader who seeks to understand the issue of female American playwrights and the unfairness of American stage productions.

[2] Craig uses here, possibly, Robert Frost's expression in his poem "The Road Not Taken" when saying, "I took the one less traveled by,/ And that has made all the difference" (2004, pp.19-20).

[3]*The Oldest Profession* was first produced in April 1988 by Theater Network in Edmonton, Canada. The play is set as President Ronald Regan entered the

White House. The play is about five women who have been prostitutes for many years. Four women are in their seventies and one is eighty-three. They speak about their suffering as aging women, and they speak also about the struggles of this profession, the competition, and their economic problems in a comic way. Nevertheless, they remain dedicated and proud of their profession. They fight to find new tricks to keep their jobs. One by one, they slip from the story, dying offstage during a series of blackouts.

[4] This play takes the audience on a journey from Eisenhower's America to the time of the Bush administration. The play is a mock morality tale about twin sisters, Myrna and Myra. One is conservative and the other is radical. They are, obviously, two extremes, having contrasting personalities, although they are identical twins. Again the presentation, as in *The Oldest Profession*, is humorous. Bigsby finds that the implication seems to be that they are two aspects of a divided sensibility and beyond them there are two aspects of a divided nation (1999, p. 317).

[5] Vogel won her first award for her play *Meg* in 1976 as a graduate student at the Ninth Annual American College Theatre Festival in Washington D.C. This prize earned Vogel some recognition, and then this Award becomes in 2002 the Paula Vogel Playwriting Award that is given annually to a non-traditional play written by a student (Mansbridge, 2014, p.4).

[6] Roughly speaking, for the first half of the twentieth century, Broadway was for all intents and purposes the entire American theater. Gerald Brekowitz in his book *American Drama of the Twentieth Century* conceives that this fact is "obviously an imperfect state of affair. When virtually all the new plays, all the major playwrights, all the best actors, directors and designers were to be found in one square mile of one city, then the overwhelming majority of the population was being deprived of the opportunity to experience American theatre at its best. Meanwhile the intense competition for a limited

audience meant that many talented artists were inevitably squeezed out or not given a chance. On the other hand, the concentration of the best and most ambitious in one place had some salutary effects" (1992, p.6).

[7] In 1985, Vogel began teaching playwriting at Brown University, where she remained for twenty-three years. She taught many fabulous new playwrights, including Nilo Cruz, Gina Gionfriddo, Lynn Nottage, Adam Bock, and Sarah Ruhl. In 2008, Vogel accepted a position as the Eugene O'Neill Chair of the Playwriting Department at the Yale School of Drama. At the end of 2012, she stepped down as a chair to focus on new projects. She continues teaching drama at Yale as a lecturer (Mansbridge, 2014, p. 3).

[8] "Vogel adapted this assignment from Austrian playwright and enfant terrible Wolfgang Bauer, who developed the notion of unplayable plays or *mikrodramen* (microdramas), which set out to stage condensed ideas in seemingly impossible ways" (Mansbridge, 2014, p. 8).

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باولا فوكل والكاتبات الامريكيات الحديثات

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المستخلص

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الكلمات المفتاحية: الاساطير، الاقتباس، الانتاج المسرحي، اللا تقليدي