

FROM STONEWALL TO MILLENNIUM:
LESBIAN REPRESENTATION IN THREE LATE 20th-CENTURY
PLAYS BY AMERICAN WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

From Stonewall to Millennium: Lesbian Representation in Three Late 20th-Century Plays by American Women explores the relationship between the lived experiences of LGBT people (especially lesbians and bisexual women) and staged depictions thereof. In the dissertation's three analytical chapters, I offer close, critical readings of three representative plays by American women, one from each of the final three decades of the 20th century: *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* by Jane Chambers, *And Baby Makes Seven* by Paula Vogel, and *Stop Kiss* by Diana Son. Motivated by the New Historicist perspective that the significance of literary texts "can be fully grasped only in relation to the other expressive possibilities with which it interacts,"¹ I illuminate deeper meanings within the plays by investigating the social/political climates in which they were written and debuted.

Exploring past modes of living and staging LGBT identities and experiences is valuable because it helps contextualize the current historical moment, which is marked by aggressive social/political campaigns aimed at LGBT empowerment and enfranchisement. This project's woman-centric scope is motivated by the ongoing marginalization of women in the American theatre, typified by the disparity between productions accorded to male and female playwrights, and the corresponding disparity between productions accorded to plays by gay men and those by lesbians. These disparities are reflected in critical scholarship; as

¹ Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 13.

John M. Clum has noted, “The 25 percent or less representation of lesbian playwrights in major anthologies of gay and lesbian drama is a sign of the relative invisibility of lesbian playwrights ...”² This project will be of interest to artists and scholars in the varied, but often intersecting, fields of Theatre, Performance Studies, Communication, Women’s and Gender Studies, and Queer Theory, as well as those outside of the academy who take interest in LGBT history, American history, and the arts.

² John M. Clum, “Contemporary Drama.” *Glbq: an encyclopedia of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, & queer culture*, last modified November 17, 2007, http://www.glbq.com/literature/contemp_drama,6.html.