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جامعة مولود معمري تيزي وزو Université Mouloud MAMMERI Tizi-Ouzou



The Department of English at Mouloud Mammeri University

in Collaboration with

The Intellectual and Cultural Representations Research Laboratory

Organize the

*Representations of Women in Theater: The Algerian Context and other Realities*  
National Study Day

21 Novembre 2021

Call for Papers

"Theatre is plainly a difficult field for women to write in" because, according to Michéle Wandor in her study on *Theater and Sexual Politics*, among other reasons, "A woman writer has more than a man to overcome before she can be accepted as an artistic 'equal' in the theatre" (p. 29). Wandor's argument is appropriate to past and present realities, in Algeria, Africa, and even in the West, where women taking part in the theater industry whether as playwrights or performers were seen an anomaly against both societal norms and the literary genre itself. Theater remains a male-dominated enterprise while women are on the margin of the stage. They are usually accorded minor roles as performers and script writers, and their concerns, in most cases, are insufficiently represented on the stage. Because theater is mostly directed towards political and rigid social criticism especially during moments of crises, public audiences built more expectations around the role of male playwrights in addressing issues of critical concern to society. Male playwrights were regarded as more authoritative in voice, more trusted and imaginative when it comes to discussing politics and morality, and more physically fit to survive the limitations usually imposed by the public sphere on the freedom of individual writers.

Despite exclusionary practices, playwriting and acting served as two important venues at the hands, for instance, of the London street suffragettes in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century who, through performing famous female-centered plays like Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, aimed to inveigh against a macho superiority over the public scene and against the "angel of the house" rhetoric which confined women artistic voice to home-based personal diaries or to the novel as a genre. Within the precincts of the 1960s and 1970s emerging feminist tradition, for women to actively take part in the theatrical experience meant challenging the stereotypical image of women in the theatre which was for long "hedged in by the invisible, servicing female on the one hand, and by the visible, glamorous, or sexually desirable female

on the other” (Ibid). This association between female sexuality/character (i.e., the attitude of linking women, when it comes to both writing or subject matter, to glamorous postures, lack of confidence in front of a wider public, sense of domesticity, motherhood and wifeness, old age customs, physical incapacity..etc)and the possibility to exist in the theater incited more reactions on the part of female reform movements and theater groups who sought out to give more voice to women in the world of the stage as both playwrights and performers.

In the Algerian context, women’s place in theater is still marginal. It is true that woman’s situation improved with time in all artistic fields, but it remains dimly hinted at inside the literary and intellectual circles. There is a great lack of plays about or written by women. Moreover, limited and superficial images of women were conveyed. Female figures were always present in the plays, even if their representation was without significance. They appeared 'alongside' the main male characters or were utilized as part of the environment where the action took place. The representation of the woman is limited to her roles as mother, wife and daughter, was linked to a socio-political and patriarchal discourses. The focus of some plays is, in fact, based on the need of Algeria to create a national identity. The family acted, for example, as a microcosm of the whole social system. In the familial sphere, the representation of women, in roles defined only by their relationships with male figures, consolidated religious, social and political values.

Against this background, this study day invites contributors to discuss the contexts and realities of women in theater, their presence and absence, the obstacles women writers had to deal with to enter the abode of playwriting and the different, often socially and culturally imposed, challenges which stand in the face of women eking out their path to the theater scholarship as dramatists/script writers, performers, directors or theater practitioners. This study day seeks to give possible answers to the following questions: to what extent can women be regarded as an artistic equal in the theater? Have they ever been perceived as such? Is theater, in Algeria and elsewhere, a gender biased area of artistic engagement? What kinds of social/cultural or personal structures women had to surmount to have their voice through in theater? Can male playwrights, for one reason or another, be regarded as more artistically fitinaccording efficacy or depth to the theatrical experience, or as more theatrically valid?How much impact did feminist historiography have in communicating this exclusionary reductive picture of women in theater?

### **References**

MichelineWandor (1986).*Carry on, Understudies: Theatre and Sexual Politics*. (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London and New York)

Possible topics could include, but are not limited to:

- Literary genre and sexual politics
- Personal accounts of individual female dramatists
- Women, theater and social expectations
- History of women in theater
- Radical Feminism and theater emancipationism
- Cross-cultural perspectives to women and playwriting
- The Algerian women writers and theater
- Women Performers in the theater: limitations and challenges
- Female characters in male playwriting: between center and periphery
- Female performers as public anomalies.

Papers are invited from any area of Post-colonial Studies, Performance Studies, Subaltern Studies, Feminism and Feminist Literature, Sociology of Gender theories, Comparative literary studies, Cultural studies. Prospective presenters are thereby called to submit an abstract of no more than **300** words by 18 of July **2021**.

All queries and submissions should be sent to [womentheaterstudyday.2022@gmail.com](mailto:womentheaterstudyday.2022@gmail.com). Please attach a word document to your email that includes your abstract, name, institution, email address, and a brief bio of 100 words or less. Accepted proposals will be notified by September, 03<sup>th</sup>, **2021**.

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**Event Venue:**

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Department of Arabic, Faculty of Letters and Languages, Hassnoua, nouvelle ville, Tizi Ouzou.

**La Directrice de laboratoire**