
Re-Presenting the Wages of War: Interrogating the Boundaries between Fact and Truth in the War Plays by Helen Benedict and Paula Vogel

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Abstract

The Iraq Wars and the ubiquitous war on terror have generated numerous theatrical productions in the United States that envision the subjectivities of perpetrators as well as victims of violence. Perhaps the most harrowing war stories brought to the stage address "post-conflict" crisis, particularly the trauma that continues to haunt perpetrators as well as victims of violence in their efforts to rebuild their lives. Characters struggle with anger, fear, repression, denial and the competing needs to remember and represent the circumstances of their fraught histories, expressed in dream states and confessional monologues. Gendered identities and subjectivities are integral to these nightmare histories, and the threat of sexual violence hovers over characters even in so-called safe zones. Contemporary theatre about the wages of war often takes the form of docudrama and/or "theatre of the real," and several women playwrights working in this interdisciplinary genre have transformed interviews, journalistic accounts, court transcripts and personal stories into dramatic texts that question the relationship between "facts and truth" As scholar Carol Martin argues, this genre "interrogates the relationship between reality and representation." This paper will examine two theatrical productions by women writers that have worked with returning soldiers to bring their stories to the stage: Helen Benedict's *The Lonely Soldier Monologues* and Paula Vogel's recent production *Don Juan Returns from Iraq*. Benedict is a journalist, essayist and a novelist who has written extensively on this subject and testified twice to Congress on behalf of women soldiers about gender justice and the military. Vogel is a Pulitzer-Prize winning dramatist who worked with veterans in a writer's workshop where she developed a process of engagement and research to create this play.

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