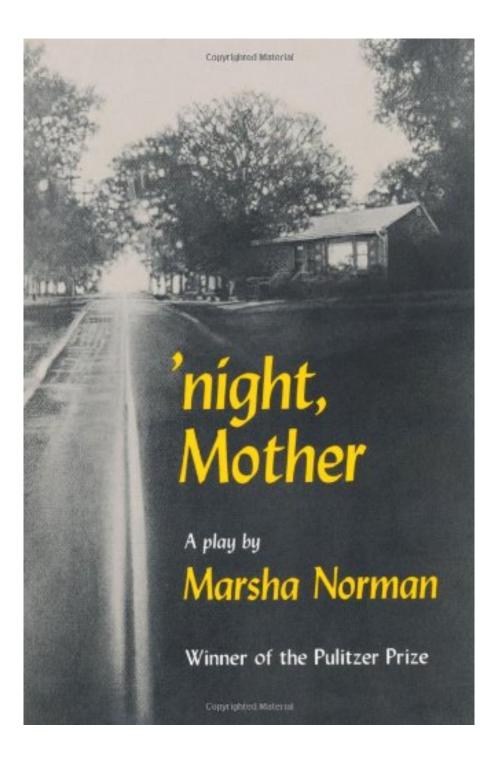


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Review

"The subjects are suicide, love, and the meaning of life--as huge as they come; but they are treated with the specificity of threading a needle or choosing the right breakfast for your needs. Humor and pathos pop up as naturally as wild flowers or fences by the roadside; there is devastating psychological accuracy and nothing seems contrived; and there is that bustle of minutely perceived existential details that bespeak the master." ?John Simon, New York

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'night, Mother is a taut and fluid drama that addresses different emotions and special relations. By one of America's most talented playwrights, this play won the Dramatists Guild's prestigious Hull-Warriner Award, four Tony nominations, the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, and the Pulitzer Prize in 1983.

'night, Mother had its world premiere at the American Repertory Theater in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in December 1982. It opened on Broadway in March 1983, directed by Tom Moore and starring Anne Pitoniak and Kathy Bates; a film, starring Anne Bancroft and Sissy Spacek, was released in 1986.

- Sales Rank: #842775 in Books
- Brand: Hill and Wang
- Published on: 1983-08-01
- Released on: 1983-08-01
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 7.97" h x .1" w x 6.09" l, .27 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 96 pages

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a mother-daughter play about life, love lost, depression and suicide

By Frank L. Greenagel II

Marsha Norman's play won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1983. It's set in a small house on a lonely, country road. Jessie is middle aged, epileptic, divorced, jobless, mother to a thieving son and lives with Thelma, her mother. Thelma is the only other character in the play. The play is one long scene - there are no changes, acts or intermissions.

They have a believable relationship. Their family, their whole town is average. The know they are boring and accept it. They don't complain about it. Thelma is fine with her life. She has a son, a few friends and her crocheting to keep her busy. Jessie has nothing - she is empty and is tired of life. At the start of the play, she tells her mother that she is going to kill herself. Thelma does not take her seriously at first, but eventually does. The rest of the play is a volley of truth telling, stories and the occasional begging by Thelma.

It's sad, heartfelt and decent. It's neither brilliant nor terribly interesting. Without know the other nominees from 1983, I can't say it was the wrong choice for the Pulitzer, but I can write that it was a very very weak winner.

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Terse, Direct, and Chilling

By Kevin L. Nenstiel

Convinced she has no control over her own life, Jessie Cates resolves to end it. But this is not an impulse decision. She has spent months carefully laying the groundwork so that when she is gone, her needy mother Thelma will be able to carry on. Now nothing is left but to make sure Mama is aware of what's going down so she can prepare herself for when it happens.

Since its first production in 1983, this play has ascended to the ranks of theatrical classics for its almost operatic language, its intimate one-on-one tension, and its shocking denouement. The most stunning surprise in this one-act is its lack of surprise. The crisis point is already past when the play begins; what we're left with isn't conflict so much as conflagration.

As tensions run high, Jessie and Thelma lock themselves into a downward spiral of emotional revelation and high-strung confrontation. Personal disclosures come out with a degree of quiet honesty that many current histrionic playwrights would shy from like a branding iron. And Jessie proves to be one of the most strong-willed characters in theatre for the last generation.

Though remarkably short, this play is extremely compact. Not one word is wasted. And despite the dense subtext, the refreshingly direct language makes a break from all the recent plays that need to be decoded to

be understood. This DPS edition includes updates the author made for the 2004 Broadway revival, bringing some of the dated language into the 21st Century.

This play plows a field so unique that subsequent playwrights have fled from this level of stunning lucidity. There is precious little else quite like it in the current theatrical scene. Terse, candid, and powerful, "'Night, Mother" casts a shadow on every writer currently working.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Devastating

By booknblueslady

Night Mother by Marsha Norman, the 1983 Pulitzer winning drama is an emotionally draining play. It has only two characters, Jessie Cates, the daughter who lives with her mother, Thelma Cates. These are both simple country women, with Jessie being the quieter and less demonstrative and Thelma being more talkative.

Jessie is around 40, epileptic, divorced with a son who is turning into a criminal. She sees her life as lacking in the positive and feels that it will not change. She makes a final decision about what she will do about that and this play is about the night she means to implement her decision.

It is short play and takes little time to read, but prepare for the emotion it engenders.

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