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**FEMINIST CONCERNS IN MARSHA NORMAN'S PLAYS:  
A CRITICAL STUDY**



*(Marsha Norman)*

A  
THESIS  
SUBMITTED TO  
SAURASHTRA UNIVERSITY, RAJKOT  
FOR THE AWARD OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN ENGLISH

**Ph.D. Registration No.: 3239**

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**Year: 2010**

**Dedicated**

**to**

**DR. FATIMA T. SUGARWALA**

**who introduced me to the joys of reading**

**to**

**MY BELOVED PARENTS**

**who have encouraged me to be myself**

**to**

**DR. KIRIT M. VYAS**

**who helped me to be what I am today**



**Marsha Norman: Born in 1947**

### Statement Under Uni. O.Ph.D.7

I hereby declare that the work embodied in my thesis entitled as FEMINIST CONCERNS IN MARSHA NORMAN'S PLAYS: A CRITICAL STUDY prepared for Ph.D. Degree has not been submitted for any other degree of this University on any previous occasion.

And to the best of my knowledge, no work has been reported on the above subject.

And the work presented in this thesis is original and whenever references have been made to the works of others, they have been clearly indicated as such and the source of information is included in the bibliography.

---

(Hetal Jyotkumar Mehta)

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## **CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that this thesis on **FEMINIST CONCERNS IN MARSHA NORMAN'S PLAYS: A CRITICAL STUDY** is submitted by *Miss Hetal Jyotkumar Mehta* for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, in the faculty of Arts of Saurashtra University, Rajkot. No part of this dissertation has been submitted for any other degree or diploma award.

**Ph.D. Registration No.:** 3239

**Date:** / / 2010

**Place:** Rajkot

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**Supervisor**

**(Dr. Fatima T. Sugarwala)**

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“And if I fight, then for what? For nothing easy or sweet, and I told you that last year and the year before that. For your own challenge, for your own mistake, and the punishment for them, for your own definition of love and of sanity... a good strong self with which to begin to live. “

- Hannah Green (1)

I never promised you a Rose Garden

Just as history has chronicled change in the representations of women in society, so dramatic literature has reflected those changes. Beginning with the classical Greek theatre and moving forward to the twentieth century, women's roles have reflected the environments in which they have found themselves and the options that have been available to them. Whether or not they have made the right choices or not, often depends on the role society has dictated to them.

The American theatre established by Eugene O'Neill and strengthened by Tennessee Williams depicted the American Adam and the fulfillment of the American dream. However, Edward Albee and Arthur Miller shattered the myth of America as Eden and World Wars changed the social and cultural environment. The drama now focused on the current trends, for the first time the woman became an individual and her dilemma became a social issue. Despite different culture, society or country playwright's presented 'woman' and womanhood in a new light. In Marsha Norman's plays we come across the frustrated Jessie, the repressed Ginger, confused Deedee, mysterious Sarah, and the perverted Arlene or the lonely Mary. I could associate the predicament of her heroines to women around us.

Norman's characters are not just characters of some plays performed on Broadway, but they are live human beings, their pain and sufferings are those of the real persons. Norman has focused on various day to day issues of life which have a deep impact on human psyche. Marsha Norman's plays focus on feminine psyche; her plays show the women characters at a crucial decisive moment of their lives. A lot of work has been done on Marsha Norman, but not much work has been done on the feminist concern in Norman's plays.

Marsha Norman was born in Louisville, Kentucky, the first of four children of Billie and Bertha Williams. Her parents were strict fundamentalists and kept Norman away from other children; in response to this isolation Norman turned to books and music. At Durrett High School in Louisville she was active on the newspaper and yearbook staffs and won first prize in a writing contest. She then attended Agnes Scott College in Decatur, Georgia, graduating in 1969. Two years later she received a master's degree in teaching from the University of Louisville. During this time she taught emotionally disturbed teenagers at Kentucky Central State Hospital, and in 1973 she took a position at the Brown School for gifted children.

By 1976 Norman turned to writing full time, contributing articles and reviews for the Louisville Times, creating a children's weekend supplement to the newspaper. Around this time she met Jon Jory, the artistic director of Actors Theatre of Louisville, who encouraged her to write a play. The result, Getting Out, was based on a young woman Norman had known at Kentucky Central State Hospital. The play won a number of awards and was voted the best new play produced in regional theater by the American Theater Critics Association.

Norman is one of the successful practitioners of playwriting in contemporary American theatre. She gained recognition as a playwright when in 1977 she won the American Theater Critics Association award, and later in 1983 earned the Pulitzer Prize for drama with night, Mother. night, Mother has been translated into 23 languages. She has an impressive array of awards to her credit. Her first play Getting Out (1979) bagged the John Gassner Playwriting Medallion, the Newsday Oppenheim Award and a special citation from the American Theatre Critics Association. night, Mother, won the

1983 Pulitzer Prize, the Hull-Warriner Award and the Susan Smith Blackburn Award. Other honours that have come her way are grants from the Rockefeller Foundation and from the National Endowment for the Arts, appointment as playwright-in-residence at Actor's Theater of Louisville and also at Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles and membership in the Council of the Dramatist's Guild and the Board of the American Theater Wing.

Marsha Norman has written seven full-length plays, five one act plays and one novel The Fortune Teller. Four of her plays are still unpublished. Each of her plays is about the struggle of a person to save herself from complete emotional breakdown, not only that each play examines an act of personal salvation.

I have focused on eight plays which are the published, and tried to analyse the struggle the women characters experience during their quests for psychological wholeness.

I have tried to interpret her plays as they have appealed to me, either endorsing or refuting the views of a large number of critics, and ultimately making a humble attempt at analyzing the plays of such a great artist. To my knowledge, such an attempt has not been made.

These plays warn that women, merely by being women, hold no automatic moral advantage. They have to fight, to struggle against the rigid standards laid down by the society. Modern feminist may learn a lesson or two from Marsha Norman or her women characters that a frailty is no longer for woman; given a chance she can easily become woe-man.

The present research work aims at considering Marsha Norman's treatment of feminist issues as found in her plays. By daring to challenge the universal, by shaping the world into new unities, women playwrights like Marsha Norman redefine culture, and in so doing they broaden our sense of the range of human possibility. The present work is a modest attempt to study Marsha Norman in the light of these remarks that as a sensitive writer she has used realism and humanism to communicate her feminist vision of life.

Norman was subsequently named playwright-in-residence at Actors Theatre, where she wrote her next three plays, Third and Oak, Circus Valentine, and The Holdup. Her fifth play, night, Mother, however, was a great success and received the Pulitzer Prize in 1983, as well as numerous other

awards. The play was adapted to film in 1986. Norman's musical, The Secret Garden, earned an Antoinette Perry (Tony) Award and a Drama Desk Award for best book of a musical in 1991.

In Merry Christmas [Unpublished] (1979) Norman deals with a family who copes up with their mother's sudden deafness when she is released from the hospital for Christmas.

Among her plays Getting Out (1980) presents the case history of Arlene, a poor, uneducated young Southerner who has been sentenced to prison for her part in a robbery that leads to murder. We see her alternately in prison and in the shabby rented room that becomes her home after her release. The play seems to question the legal system, whether it analyzes the psychological trauma of a prisoner, or whether the paroled woman can adapt to a normal life or not.

Third and Oak: The Laundromat (1980) presents a late night conversation between two women, one a widow, the other trapped in a bad marriage. The play examines the pangs of marriage, whether marriage is an institution that oppresses women and men, or not.

Circus Valentine [Unpublished] (1983) reveals an exploration of the private struggle faced by a small family, performing in a shopping mall parking in its final days. It presents the realistic picture of the American life. It reflects the theme of loneliness and ache to belong somewhere in the world.

Night, Mother (1983) by Norman discusses the question of how a suicide can be justified or not. The play focuses on Jessie who decides to take her own life. Norman's protagonist is a woman who chooses suicide as the logical step. With one simple declarative statement of Jessie "I'm going to kill myself Mama", (2) Norman plunges the audiences into a ferocious debate whether suicide should be legal or a crime. night, Mother seems to reflect upon the character's desire to dictate her life.

The Hold up (1987) is based on tales told to Norman by her grandfather. It is about the last of the Old West Outlaws. The play is about the person who always comes out from the difficult situations by using various ways. It also examines the importance of time in one's life.

Traveler in the Dark (1988) presents a picture of loving and supportive mother. The play is about the woman who inspite of the adverse

circumstances, fights all alone with the outside world. The play examines the successful marathon efforts of a mother trying to hold her family together.

The Secret Garden (1991), based on a novel by Frances Hodgson Burnett, tells the story of Mary, an orphan, who comes to live with her uncle. Her uncle broods about and mourns the death of his young wife. Mary befriends his sickly son, Colin, and together they discover a secret garden that brings life back into the mansion. The Secret Garden therefore culminates in an expression of pure, unassailable grief, a statement of promises unfulfilled and dreams denied.

Trudy Blues (1995) Norman's semi-autobiographical creation is about Ginger, a writer experiencing a health crisis. The play seems to question whether Time or Death is the solution through the dilemma of life.

Sarah and Abraham (1998) is an attempt to look at serious matters with humor. The play is about the eternal condition of women, overshadowed by their men, losing their rights and identities in marriage, and being penalized for motherhood. The play tries to question the institution of marriage; whether materialism destroys marriage or it is an important ingredient of marriage.

In D.Boone [Unpublished] (1998) a cleaning woman, disillusioned in love, seeks romance and adventure with a mythic hero. Leaving her dustpan and several men behind, the woman pursues her historic fantasy by fighting Indians and British alongside Daniel Boone - but she finds herself pursued by her most unlikely lover. The play travels the time warp of love to put a human face on heroics then and now. Norman's plays seem to be centered on the fundamental recognition of life that we are "all alone in this world". (3)

Norman's own feminism, however, is not defined by political positions, but by her attempts to illustrate in her dreams the specific choices, values and language relevant to women's lives. Apart from that, Norman's own feminism is defined by her attempts to illustrate in her dreams the specific choices, values and language relevant to woman's lives. Her plays present such characters who challenge the rigid standard of the society who during crisis either face life with an indomitable spirit or subjugate without a

fight. Her plays ignite our curiosity as they probe into the psychological and social factors that directly affect life.

I have tried to delve into various aspects of all her major plays, especially the feminist concerns in her plays. This closely relates with the characters, setting, title and the plot of the plays to enhance the significance of the plays and to gain more insight into women's psyche. Norman's plays are not melodramatic, but realistic presentations.

In light of Marsha Norman's plays, my objective is to examine women facing crisis and their approaches towards life and people. At the stage of crisis, what they do whether they face life or surrender. I also want to probe into the theme of Death and to examine the psychological, emotional and social influences that lead to it. I have made a little attempt to examine whether people experience agony or freedom in their final moments and to explore the emotional trauma of the women characters.

The 2008 figures (4) indicate that there are more than 32,000 suicides annually (89 suicides per day or 01 suicide every 16 minutes). With 11.01 suicides per 100,000 population. Suicide is the eighth leading cause of death in U.S. Psychological autopsy studies reflect that more than 90% of completed suicides had one or more mental disorders. Depression is a common antecedent to suicide. 9 out of 10 attempts of suicide take place in the home. Suicide is more common among women who are single, recently separated, divorced, or widowed. The higher rate of attempted suicide in women is attributed to the elevated rate of mood disorders among females, such as major depression, dysthymia and seasonal affective disorder. Norman's plays probe into women's psyche and motives in committing suicide. This dissertation is as an attempt to explore and understand the root cause of the problems.

Marsha Norman's plays reflect on how people deal with the extremes of a lonely existence. Alienation leads to despair, which leads to desperation, which leads to death. Whether it is the death of a symbol, the death of a real person, or the death of an ideology gone awry, it is this alienation that all human beings must endure, conquer and overcome that permeates American drama during the twentieth century. Although these characters are unable to conquer and overcome their sense of alienation, and

these plays do not meet Aristotle's definition of tragedy, yet all end on a tragic note. The American experience focuses on the fragility of the human psyche and it is through these plays that we are given insight into the overwhelming consequences of alienation.

Norman's feminist message lies not in the options she presents for women to resist oppression, but in her accusation of a society that restricts identity as well as in her representation of the female community. Although Mother Holsclaw fails to offer Arlene compassion in Getting Out, Ruby and Arlene begin to form a caring female community at the end of the play. Ultimately, this community allows Arlene to reconstruct her broken identity and recover part of the banished Arlie.

Norman's characters, such as Arlene in Getting Out, and Jessie in night, Mother share a similar quality, their insistence on gaining and retaining control over their own lives. Mary Lennox, the orphaned heroine of The Secret Garden discovers her own strength through the regenerative powers of a healing garden. Traveler in the Dark aims to be a play about a crisis of faith but becomes an unresponsive argument between a skeptic and a believer. There are revealing moments as we recognize in ourselves the same conflict of faith and reason.

In Kohut's view; "The psychological structure of the self is made up of two poles, the other representing goals and ideas. The successful cohesion of these two poles depends upon integration of what Kohut calls the child's grandiose self and the idealized parent imago. When defects occur at any point during the integration of these psychic structures, narcissistic personality disorders arise." (5) All of Norman's female characters exhibits some more than others, evidence of fragmented selves who are unable to achieve a measure of wholeness necessary for what Kohut calls a "mature narcissism". (6) Because they are unable to do so, they lack, to use Chodorow's term, a sense of "self-in-good relationship". (7) They remain emotional invalids, always searching for someone else to supply the "missing link". (8)

Norman depicts mother and daughter relationships in much of her work. Although at this point in her career, she has not written her memories, she certainly has discussed the pivotal stance her relationship with



her mother and other significant “caretakers” (9) have had on both her personal and professional life.

Norman notes in Interviews with Contemporary Women Playwrights, the tremendous impact her great aunt, Bubbie, had on her as a child and has also emphasized the need for more works focusing on mothers and daughters. When questioned about whether she explored her own relationship with her mother in her plays, Norman replied;

“You don’t think I’ve done that?... Do you think I got this mother out of thin air? Do you think I made this mother up?” (10)

Norman’s women move closer to a fully developed self. They “bond” (11) with their idealized other, thereby internalizing and incorporating images which, ultimately, contribute to a sense of wholeness.

The second chapter focuses on the origin of modern feminist drama and the key contributions of some of the twentieth century modern and post –modern American dramatists. In this chapter, I have also tried to focus the role of leading female dramatists, their works and contributions and how Marsha Norman emerged as a leading voice of the American theatre.

The third chapter deals with five of her major plays, night, Mother, Getting Out, Trudy Blue, The Secret Garden and Third & Oak: The Laundromat in which Norman presents women in search of their identity, of women choosing suicide, women holding their own in a male chauvinist society, revealing the various facets of a woman’s character.

The fourth chapter deals with three plays. The Traveler in the Dark, The Hold Up and Sarah and Abraham in which she has greatly emphasized the need to be loved and wanted and the sense of substance in life.

The fifth chapter illustrates Marsha Norman’s feminist concern. She depicts the problems of women in a male chauvinist society.

Marsha Norman plows on unwavering in her purpose : to give everyday people, in many instances women, voices to make sure someone,

somewhere, is listening. My focus in this study will be on the struggle which the woman characters experience during their quests for psychological wholeness. Marsha Norman through the female characters, voiced important truths in the life of these women.

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## **Chapter: 2 Post Modern American Drama And Marsha Norman**

### **- The Modern Era: the 20th Century and Beyond:**

Realism continued to be a primary form of dramatic expression in the 20th century, even as experimentation in both the content and the production of plays became increasingly important. Such renowned American playwrights as Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, and Arthur Miller reached profound new levels of psychological realism, commenting through individual characters and their situations on the state of American society in general. As the century progressed, the most powerful drama dealt with issues, such as civil rights, AIDS, Cancer, Colour conflicts crisis and the individual's position in relation to those issues.

Individual perspectives in mainstream theater became far more diverse and more closely reflected the increasingly complex demographics of American society. With World War I, European developments in modern drama arrived on the American stage in force. A host of American playwrights were intent on experimenting with dramatic style and form while also writing serious sociopolitical commentary.

One of the first groups to promote new American drama was the Provincetown Players, founded in 1915 in Provincetown, Massachusetts. the play Trifles (1916) by Susan Glaspell, a subtle study in sexism, was among its first productions. The company was headed by Glaspell's husband, George Cram Cook, but its star was Eugene O'Neill, the most experimental of American playwrights in the 1920s. O'Neill's The Hairy Ape (1922) was one of the first plays to introduce expressionism in America.

Expressionism was a movement in the visual, literary, and performing arts that developed in Germany in the early 20th century, in part in reaction against realism. Expressionism emphasized subjective feelings and emotions rather than a detailed or objective depiction of reality. The Hairy Ape depicts a rejected ship laborer who feels he belongs nowhere until he confronts an ape in a zoo. He sets the caged animal free only to be destroyed by it.

The 1920s was the most prolific decade for professionally produced plays on the New York City stage. During the so-called glory days of the 1920s and early 1930s audiences saw incisive and exciting American drama, What Price Glory (1924) by Laurence Stallings and Maxwell Anderson was set in France during World War I. Its portrayal of two soldiers' behavior satirized the often-romanticized vision of warfare. Anderson tried to reinvigorate drama in verse with such plays as Winterset (1935).

African American characters became more visible in plays of this period. In the play In Abraham's Bosom (1926) by Paul Green, the main character, whose father is a white man and mother is African American, works to help the black community but is defeated by the racial prejudice of both the whites and blacks. The play won the 1927 Pulitzer Prize for drama.

Even the musical was overhauled in the bustling theatrical activity of the 1920s and early 1930s. Most notably, lyricist Oscar Hammerstein II and composer Jerome Kern teamed up to create Show Boat (1927), a musical production adapted from a novel of the same name by American author Edna Ferber. This was the first American musical to fully integrate a musical score with meaningful and consistent dialogue and lyrics.

American theatergoers declined severely in the 1930s and after, primarily as a result of new sound technology that gave motion pictures a voice. But films were not the only drain on theater attendance, the economic collapse of the Great Depression of the 1930s closed many theaters permanently. The austerity of the 1930s inspired a new wave of hard-edged drama that tackled economic suffering, left-wing political ideologies, fascism, and fears of another world war. European agitprop techniques, which used literature and the arts for political propaganda, animated many plays about the working class. The most famous of these plays is Waiting for Lefty (1935) by Clifford Odets. In this play taxi drivers decide to go on strike, but the true concern of the play is a more abstract debate over the pros and cons of capitalism. Odets also wrote one of the finest expressions of 1930s anxieties, Awake and Sing! (1935), in which a Marxist grandfather commits suicide for his family's financial benefit, and his grandson ultimately dedicates himself and the life insurance money to helping his community rather than seeking better opportunities elsewhere.

The plays of Lillian Hellman also displayed a social conscience. Hellman's The Children's Hour (1934), in which a child's vengeful anger causes the downfall of a school and the two women who run it, explored the devastating effects of evil in an intolerant society. Langston Hughes paved the way for acceptance of African American drama with his successful play Mulatto (1935), about the complexity of race relations. The global scale of fears in the 1930s was reflected in the plays of Robert Sherwood, whose satirical attack on weapons manufacturers in Idiot's Delight (1936) predicted the impending world cataclysm of World War II. It was awarded the 1936 Pulitzer Prize for drama.

The 1950s saw the delayed impact of modernization and technology in everyday life. Not only did World War II defeat fascism, it brought the United States out of the Depression, and the 1950s provided most Americans with time to enjoy long-awaited material prosperity. Business, especially in the corporate world, seemed to offer the good life (usually in the suburbs), with its real and symbolic marks of success -- house, car, television, and home appliances.

However, loneliness was a dominant theme for many writers. Generalized American alienation came under the scrutiny of sociologist David Riesman in The Lonely Crowd (1950). Most of these works supported the 1950s assumption that all Americans shared a common lifestyle. The studies spoke in general terms, criticizing citizens for losing frontier individualism and becoming too conformist or advising people to become members of the New Class that technology and leisure time created.

After World War I, popular and lucrative musicals had increasingly dominated the Broadway theatrical scene. Serious theater retreated to smaller, less expensive theaters "off Broadway" (1) or outside New York City. This situation repeated itself after World War II. American drama had languished in the 1950s, constrained by the Cold War and McCarthyism. The energy of the 1960s revived it. The off-off-Broadway movement presented an innovative alternative to commercialized popular theater.

Many of the major dramatists after 1960 produced their work in small venues. Freed from the need to make enough money to pay for

expensive playhouses, they were newly inspired by European existentialism and the so-called Theater of the Absurd associated with European playwrights Samuel Beckett, Jean Genet, and Eugene Ionesco, as well as by Harold Pinter. The best dramatists became innovative and even surreal, rejecting realistic theater to attack superficial social conventions.

The most influential dramatist of the early 1960s was Edward Albee, who was adopted into a well-off family that had owned vaudeville theaters and counted actors among their friends. Albee actively brought new European currents into U.S. drama. Albee's plays The American Dream (1960), and Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf (1962) deals with the loss of identity and consequent struggles for power.

Poet Amiri Baraka, known for supple, speech-oriented poetry with an affinity to improvisational jazz, turned to drama in the 1960s. He portrayed Black Nationalist views of racism in disturbing plays such as Dutchman (1964), in which a white woman flirts with and eventually kills a younger black man on a New York City subway. The shocking end of the play risks melodrama to dramatize racial misunderstanding and the victimization of the black male protagonist.

Shepard produced his first play, Cowboys and The Rock Garden, in 1964, his most esteemed are the three interrelated plays evoking love and violence in the family: Curse of the Starving Class (1976), Buried Child (1978), and True West (1980). The play registers Shepard's concern with loss of freedom, authenticity, and autonomy in American life. It dramatizes the vanishing frontier (the drifter) and the American imagination (the writer), seduced by money, media, and commercial forces. In his writing process, Shepard tries to re-create a zone of freedom by allowing his characters to act in unpredictable, spontaneous, sometimes illogical ways. The most famous example comes from True West.

Equally important is David Mamet (1947) , whose writing was influenced by the Stanislavsky method of acting that revealed to him the way "the language we use...determines the way we behave, more than the other way around." (2) His emphasis on language not as communication but as a weapon, evasion, and manipulation of reality gives Mamet a contemporary, postmodern sensibility. Mamet's hard-hitting plays include American Buffalo

(1975), a two-act play of increasingly violent language involving a drug addict, a junk store, and an attempted theft. The most acclaimed play Glengarry Glen Ross (1982), about real estate salesmen, was made into an outstanding 1992 movie.

Like Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman and All My Sons, Mamet's plays deal with the need for dignity and job security, older workers; competition between the older and the younger generations in the workplace; intense focus on profits at the expense of the welfare of workers; and the corrosive atmosphere of competition. Mamet's Oleanna (1991) effectively dissects sexual harassment in a university setting. The Cryptogram (1994) imagines a child's horrific vision of family life.

- **Post Modern American Drama:**

American theater grew out of the milieu of sweeping economic, political, social, and cultural changes that occurred in the last half of the nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth. The fall-out of the Industrial Revolution and the shock wave of new psychological theories resonate throughout American culture. American dramatists found inspiration in the intellectual arguments of Charles Darwin, Karl Marx, and Herbert Spencer and especially the psychoanalytical concepts of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung. The vibrancy of the themes and forms of modern American drama resound with these influences.

American theater addressed the individual who had been increasingly cut loose from the traditional anchors of religion, socio/political alignments, family relationships, and a defined self-image, American dramatists such as Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller, crafted forceful statements of psychological and spiritual displacement, loss of connections, loneliness, self deception, and retrogression into sexual hedonism. In confronting problems of the lost individual in an industrial mechanized society, they lay bare human passions, exposed the raw tensions of the American family, and challenged Victorian/Puritan morality. (3)



Whether delivered in the shocking hyperbole of overstatement, the ambiguity of images and symbols, or the heartbreak tone of understatement, the messages wrought indictments of a "wasteland" (4) in which the term heroic was redefined. The protagonist was no longer an idealistic doer but was an alienated tragic hero seeking to belong in an eroded jungle society, or an everyman trying to cope through false compensations of pipe dreams or a muted survivor living a life of quiet desperation, a victim of societal pressure, animal desires, and loss of integrity.

Such themes now required for fresh designs in form. Freudian and Jungian theories and the innovative patterns of visual art helped point the way. Such psychological delineation as layers of the inner self, the duality of "anima" and "persona," (5) the delusions of neuroses, the power of association and simultaneous experience in stream of consciousness provided ideas for provocative structural patterns. Impressionism, Expressionism, and Surrealism served as inspirations for the evocative imagery and symbolism. Lighting, music, visual props, and set design became an integral part of dramatic scripts, deepening characterization, punctuating dramatic tensions, reinforcing theme, and achieving heightened intensity in presentation.

From different perspectives and with varying degrees of emphasis on social themes, America's great dramatists become both the consciousness and conscience of America, digging deeply into the American psyche, probing the implications of the Freudian "Id", (6) pulling back layer after layer of the social "ego," (7) scrutinizing the probity of the American Dream.

The themes and forms of the work of one of America's most gifted and innovative playwrights, Tennessee Williams, showcase many of the influences and trends that characterize modern American drama. Williams, on the periphery of the Southern Renaissance group of writers that include such names as William Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor, and Robert Penn Warren, have build many of their themes around the old South's lost aristocracy in tension with the invading materialism of the reconstructed South.

In the 1970 the post modern movement (8) found expression in the American theater. This came primarily through staging and direction,

rather than in the subject matter, the postmodern directors sought to uncover multiple layers of meaning in their plays. In particular, these approaches were effectively used by feminist playwrights such as Maria Irene Fornés and Wendy Wasserstein. In Fefu and Her Friends (1977) and The Conduct of Life (1985), Maria Irene Fornés employed spatial experiments such as moving the audience from room to room instead of changing stage scenery.

In 1975 Wendy Wasserstein wrote When Dinah Shore Ruled the Earth (1975), a parody of beauty contests, and The Heidi Chronicles (1988), about a successful woman professor who adopts a baby due to her loneliness. Wendy Wasserstein continued exploring women's aspirations in The Sisters Rosensweig (1991), An American Daughter (1997), and Old Money (2000). In the late 1970s Lanford Wilson perpetuated the ensemble tradition of Williams, Clifford Odets, and William Inge. American musicals also enjoyed experimental developments in the work of composer and lyricist Stephen Sondheim's Little Night Music (1973)

By the 1980s American playwrights depicted the topics of current interest. The Normal Heart (1985) by Larry Kramer confronted the devastation wrought by the AIDS epidemic. In his M. Butterfly (1988) David Henry Hwang artfully used the famous opera Madama Butterfly (1904), by Italian composer Giacomo Puccini, to examine the ways in which Western civilization feminizes Eastern civilization. Eric Overmyer used sophisticated language, satire, and vibrant theatricality to dissect a corrupt social and political infrastructure in On the Verge (1986) and In Perpetuity Throughout the Universe (1988). August Wilson was another American playwright who came to prominence in the 1980s. Wilson uses African American vernacular English in his narrowly focused domestic dramas, each of which is set in a different decade of the 20th century. Among the best of these are Fences (1985), portraying the conflicts between a father and son, and The Piano Lesson (1987), which focuses on the dispute between a brother and sister over selling a family heirloom to buy the land that their ancestors worked as slaves. Both plays won the Pulitzer Prize.

- **Feminist Drama and Marsha Norman:**

Feminism is the view that women are oppressed in significant ways and that this oppression should be ended. (9) The first period of feminist social activism in the United States began in the mid-nineteenth century with the Seneca Falls Women's Rights Convention. That struggle focused primarily on equal legal rights for women, particularly the right to vote. The struggle for national suffrage lasted until 1920, when the nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution was ratified. The struggle for the right to vote has come to be called the "first wave" (10) of U.S. feminism.

The "Women's Movement" (11) or the "second wave" (12) of feminist activism, started in the late 1960s and remained intense during the 1970s. As a result, people have come to look at the social world in profoundly different ways. Violence in the home e.g., wife battering, child abuse, and marital rape and sexual harassment in the workplace have been focuses of growing intellectual and political activity since the early 1970s.

The feminist theater in America is an offshoot of the feminist movement, which has been steadily gathering momentum in the twentieth century. The demand for votes for women, their entry into the workforce to replace men during the world wars, their contribution in their jobs after the wars, the gradual disintegration of the traditional roles of man and woman as provider and home-maker respectively, the resulting tension in family relationships - all these have contributed to a new image of woman.

Women have now become conscious of the patriarchal power structure in society and culture. As Simone de Beauvoir puts it, in a male-defined culture, "humanity is male and man defines woman, not in her- self, but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being." (13)

In America modern feminism began with the publication of Mary Ellman's persuasive book, Thinking about Women in 1968, and it was followed by Kate Millett's hard-hitting, influential work, Sexual Politics (1969) which exposes Freud's male prejudices and some novelists's degrading presentation of women as objects of sheer sexual gratification. She is vehemently critical of the social system giving men power to perpetuate their unjust domination over women and the latter's miserable subjugation.

Feminism asserts the basic humanness and selfhood of women; that they are not objects but persons. (14) The feminist movement arose primarily as a protest against the stereotype images imposed on woman by a male vision. Woman demanded the right to define herself.

Feminists claim that literature, like all other spheres of human activity, bears the stamp of male domination. According to Elaine Showalter, "Too many literary abstractions which claim to be universal have in fact described only male perceptions, experiences and options." (15) A basic assumption in feminist writing is that a major portion of literature has been written from the man's point of view, ignoring, belittling or suppressing the woman's point of view. Simplistically speaking, 'feminism' (16) means the doctrine which advocates for woman's complete equality with man in all spheres of life and the feminist movement is an organized effort for achieving such an equality and rights for women. In other words, it aims at providing women with full freedom in all respects - sexual, professional, personal, educational, political, cultural, religious etc. and thus liberating them from oppression.

As Christine Gomez rightly points out; "Taking literary history, woman has almost no place in it. Her impact, if any, is marginal. Women have no sense of their place in literary history due to the absence of role models, spiritual ancestors." (17) Till the eighteenth century, Western women had neither the time nor the opportunity to write or to publish what they wrote. As Virginia Woolf has pointed out, "financial independence and freedom to think without interruptions are essential prerequisites before a woman can take up writing as a profession." (18)

Women dramatists have attained particular success. Prominent among them is Beth Henley (1952), from Mississippi, known for her portraits of southern women. Henley gained national recognition for her Crimes of the Heart (1978), which was made into a film in 1986, a warm play about three eccentric sisters whose love helps them survive disappointment and despair. Later plays, including The Miss Firecracker Contest (1980), The Wake of Jamey Foster (1982), The Debutante Ball (1985), and The Lucky Spot (1986), explore southern forms of socializing – beauty contests, funerals, coming-out parties, and dance halls.

In twentieth century American drama Susan Glaspell, Lillian Hellman, Carson McCullers and Lorraine Hansberry have established a female tradition in the American theatre. The need to have a tradition and to see oneself as extending it is expressed by Karen Malpede, a contemporary American woman playwright, "I've been creating for myself a tradition into which I could fit and which I can hold on in the years to come. A tradition which hopefully my own work may help to extend." (19)

A galaxy of women playwrights have appeared on the American stage. To a large extent, the feminist movement is responsible for this mushrooming of female dramatic talent. It has established and used the feminist theater as one of its channels of communication. The women's movement lent self-confidence to women to explore new avenues destroying the myth that "women could not enter certain professions like playwriting." (20) The movement has built up a positive self-image in women which finds expression in feminist drama.

Another reason is the encouragement given to playwrights in general and to women dramatists in particular by certain institutions and foundations in the U.S.A. The Obie, Pulitzer and Guggenheim awards are given to outstanding new dramatists, irrespective of sex. Certain theaters like Actor's Theater of Louisville encourage plays by women. In 1978 the Ford Foundation established the Women's project at the American Place Theater, under the direction of Julia Miles, where rehearsed readings, development work and studio productions of women's plays were carried on. Annually the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize is awarded to a woman playwright in the English speaking theatre. All this has given an additional impetus to women to take to professional playwriting.

Though feminist drama is the off-spring of the feminist movement, it is not always militantly aggressive. It deals specifically with female experience and turns the spotlight on woman, endowing her with a sense of dignity and selfhood. It dramatizes woman's experience of the restrictions placed on women in a patriarchal society. According to Linda Killan, "feminist theater is the theater written by women which tries to explore the female psyche, women's place in society and women's potential." (21) Janet Brown has defined feminist drama as "one in which a woman,

oppressed by her society, because she is a woman, struggles for autonomy.”  
(22)

Taking feminist drama as a whole certain common characteristics are found in terms of theme, structure, and characterization. The recurrent themes are women’s struggle for self realization, self-definition and autonomy, women’s quest for identity. Some plays deal with sex-role stereotyping in society and carry out debates on the double moral standard in society. Various aspects of female experience are highlighted in feminist drama such as domestic violence, rape, pregnancy, abortion, motherhood, being single, the bonding between women, the mother-daughter relationship, forming a sisterhood and lesbianism. The alienation of woman is explored as an outsider, as an object, as the other. Sometimes there is a presentation of historically important women as role-models of self-definition and a positive self image.

Feminist literary theorists believe that new themes introduced in literature and drama ought to be expressed in new literary forms. As Elaine Showalter points out, “The most consistent assumption of feminist reading has been the belief that women’s special experience would assume and determine distinctive forms in art.” (23) Kate Millet makes an eloquent appeal for new forms: “And if indeed we are saying something new, it does seem to me we ought to say it in a new way.” (24) The flowing verbal monologue or dialogue is advocated by her as the appropriate form for feminine art because it exploits woman’s gift for oral communication. The central characters in most feminist drama are women. Often woman is both the protagonist and antagonist. Women who seek to perpetuate patriarchal structures are seen as enemies to be quelled by the new women. As Janet Brown observes;

“The victim in the new feminist drama is not man but traditional womanhood or traditional woman or male-identified woman.” (25)

In drama, Myrna Lamb's contribution is "a distinctive dramatic form: an intense compact one-act play that relies on audience recognition of familiar, almost ritualistic experiences." (26)

Another approach to defining feminist drama focuses on an intersection of form and content perceived to be uniquely female. For scholars and theatre artists using this approach, a feminist play resists the oppressions of traditional dramatic practice in theme and form as well as in characterization. It also resists the hierarchical power structures of traditional theatre practice. The traditional dramatic form is male centric.

Linda Walsh Jenkins, for example, emphasizes the traditionally domestic and relationship-centered experiences of women; for her, a feminist play depicts those shared experiences in imagery and settings traditionally familiar to women such as a kitchen and in language that tends to be inclusive and circular. (27) Helene Keyssar focuses on women's plays that replace traditional recognition scenes (which she defines as intrinsically male) with conventions of role transformation, arguing that such transformations "emphasize the commonality of the stories told and . . . refuse the old hierarchies of the theatre". (28) Rosemary Curb, too, has defined a "woman-conscious" (29) theatre that unravels women's collective imagination in a multi-dimensional, psychic replay of myth and history. One play that illustrates the value of such an approach is Susan Griffin's Verse drama Voices (1979). A Voice particularizes the separate experiences of its five female characters. The women are from different age groups, socioeconomic backgrounds, family structures, sexual orientations, and have different expectations from life. Yet as each character narrates the story of her life to the audience (the characters never interact, further emphasizing their uniqueness as well as their isolation), it becomes clear that they do have things in common. This is most apparent at the midpoint of the play, when each in turn describes a frightening turning point in her life, ending with the phrase "I had no place to go". (30) In quick succession each then laments "I was frightened". (31) Griffin combines the notion of female autonomy and strength with that of collective experience. Her play illustrates that the attempt to create a distinctly female form can provide important insights into women's experiences and that the study of women's history can empower women.

Marsha Norman's Getting Out and Wendy Kesselman's My Sister in This House both rely on the formal structures of realism to depict female characters' entrapment in material conditions. According to Marsha Norman, "The appearance of significant women dramatists is a sudden understanding that they can be, and indeed are, the central characters in their own lives." (32)

The setting in night, Mother is unlocalised and encompasses both realistic details and surrealistic implications. Norman is very particular that the play should not represent any specific region through the accent or stage properties. This is to universalize the stage experience and ensure audience involvement and identification. "What I want to present is the theatrical equivalent of once upon a time.... Which lifts you up off the stage and sends you back into yourself for the reference points" says Norman. (33) Her plays reflect a powerful message about ordinary people confronting extraordinary circumstances. "I always write about the same thing: people having the nerve to go on," (34) she once commented. She further adds;

"The people I care about are those folks you wouldn't even notice in life—two women in a laundromat late at night as you drive by, a thin woman in an ugly scarf standing over the luncheon meat at the grocery, a tiny gray lady buying a bick sack of chocolate covered raisins and a carton of Kools. Someday I'd love to write a piece about people who can talk. The problem is I know so few of them." (35)

Marsha Norman is a leading voice in American theater today. Her insight into the human heart is raw, honest, and a no-holds barred look into the emotions people rarely reveal. With strength and self-determination, her characters act as guides through the darkest parts of our lives and point us toward the light of hope at the other end. The loneliness that cripples all of us



at times can be healed, and Marsha Norman has a cure. Norman is an American writer with the courage to look unflinchingly into the black holes from which we normally turn our faces.

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This chapter deals with five of Norman's major plays, night, Mother, Getting Out, Trudy Blue, The Secret Garden and The Third & Oak: The Laundromat which present women in search of their identity, and reveals the various facets of a woman's character. Norman has explored the secret worlds of women like Trudy, Jessie, DeeDee, Mary, Thelma, Arlene or Alberta in her plays.

The very first drama, night, Mother encompasses realistic details and surrealist implications; which transpire into something close to real time. night, Mother provokes the audience into introspection, to analyze why one commits suicide, what deeply rooted reasons promote suicide.

Getting Out, was produced in 1977. The play focuses Arlene Holsclaw's first day of freedom after she is released from the prison, being accused of robbery, kidnapping and murder.

Trudy Blue is a play within a play. It revolves around a popular novelist Ginger, who escapes from reality by retreating into conversations with her alter ego, Trudy Blue, the heroine of her novels.

The secret Garden is an evocative portrait of a young girl's attempt to find happiness through the simple act of putting seed to soil. It is a story that reminds us that what you grow depends on what you are growing it in. As Mary transforms the garden, she herself is transformed, and she in turn transforms others.

The Laundromat deals with the high and low tides in life, inspired by a place in Louisville, Norman has described that play as about how close you can be to someone without ever really being able to talk to them, to ask them for what you need and to cherish your dream.

All the plays celebrate the secret worlds of women.

### 3.1 NIGHT, MOTHER

#### MOTHER- DAUGHTER ANGST, WITH DEATH IN THE WINGS

“ In this life it is not difficult to die. It is  
more difficult to live. “

-- Vladimir Mayakovsky (14th April, 1930) (1)

Vladimir Mayakovsky, heralded poet of the Russian Revolution, writes these lines condemning the suicide of Sergei Yesenin, the last poet of what he calls “wooden Russia”. Feeling completely alienated from the Bolsheviks, on December 27, 1925 Yesenin slit his wrists, writes his last lines of poetry in his own blood and then hangs himself. In the new production of Marsha Norman’s night, Mother, Jessie like Yesenin, being completely alienated from life shoots herself and commits suicide. night, Mother encompasses realistic details and surrealist implications; which transpire into something close to real time.

As grandmothers or therapists probably tell, there is something to be said for staying busy in times of crisis. The setting in night, Mother does not have any particular location. night, Mother provokes the audience into introspection, to analyze why one commits suicide, what deeply rooted reasons promote suicide. Suicide occurs breaking across all age, ethnic, economic and social boundaries. In this age of competition, stress, tension and suicide has become a universal problem.

References to suicide – to taking one’s own life – are found throughout written history. Dido, the founder and queen of Carthage, kills herself because of unrequited love; Zeno, founder of Stoic philosophy, hangs himself at the age of 98 suffering from minor injury. Attitudes toward suicide vary greatly from one society to another. For example, the early Greeks have considered suicide an appropriate solution to many stressful situations, such as dishonor, disappointment in love, and painful conditions in old age. The Romans have also considered suicide, an acceptable solution to such conditions, however, suicide has been forbidden when property rights or

interests of the state are involved – as when a slave or soldier deprives the state of his services by killing himself. On the other hand, suicide has been condemned by both Judaism and Mohammedanism, and Christianity, as a grievous sin. During the Renaissance, however, some philosophers have dared to challenge the prevailing views. Merian (1763) concludes that suicide is neither a sin nor a crime but a disease – thus paving the way for consideration of suicide as evidence of emotional disturbance. However, the French physician Jean Pierre Falret (1794-1870) deals extensively with the subject of suicide as an indication of mental disorder.

Suicide has been stated as the eleventh leading cause of death in the U.S. Suicide rates among youth (ages 15-24) have increased to more than 200% in the last fifty years. More than 54% of the individuals committing suicide have used firearms.

Suicide rates are the highest among the divorced, separated, and widowed and lowest among the married. It is generally estimated that there are 25 attempts for each death by suicide. Risk of attempted (nonfatal) suicide is greatest among females and the young. (2) Mental health diagnoses are generally associated with a higher rate of suicide. Psychological autopsy studies reflect that more than 90% of completed suicides have one or more mental disorders like: depression, schizophrenia, drug and/or chemical dependency and conduct disorders (in adolescence). Feelings of hopelessness (e.g., there is no solution to my problem) are found to be more predictive of suicide risk than a diagnoses of depression per se. Socially isolated individuals are generally found to be at a higher risk for suicide. (3) Norman states;

“ What I want to present is the theatrical equivalent of once upon a time... which lifts you up off the stage and sends you back into yourself for the reference points.” (4)

night, Mother opens with Jessie Cates calmly telling her mother Thelma that she is going to kill herself. Jessie asks her mother where her

father's gun was and also for a piece of plastic sheet. The play takes place in the living room and kitchen in the rural home of mother Thelma Cates and her daughter, Jessie. The play follows real time as displayed on a clock on stage. The hour and a half length of the play matches exactly the hour and a half of dialogue and action between Jessie's opening lines and Thelma's final call to her son Dawson to inform him of his sister's death. Jessie lives with her mother, separated from her husband and son.



(Opening of the Play)

[Jessie, after declaring once again begins the next task she had “on the schedule, “which is refilling all the candy jars, taking the empty papers out of the boxes of chocolates, etc...]

Jessie finds the gun hidden away in an old shoebox in the attic. While cleaning the weapon; she casually declares her fatal intention of committing suicide accompanying this announcement with a stream of idle chatter that describes the ease with which she has purchased the ammunition and even had it delivered to their home. An hour and a half later she shoots herself. Jessie's actions reveal meticulous planning, a concern for her mother's comfortable existence and thoughtfulness.

When the play begins, Jessie is seen collecting old towels and black plastic garbage bags, presumably to spread on the cot and floor in the bedroom so that the bed - linen and floor may not be stained with her blood. Then she calmly outlines her suicide plans to her mother preparing her to accept life without her - Jessie. Finally, she tells her mother what exactly she must do when she hears the shot. The elaborate preparations show care and concern for the mother, anxious that Mama's life must continue undisturbed.

It is a play that involves a woman who decides to commit suicide in the midst of her depression and loneliness. The play reveals how dark Jessie's world is. The dramatic conflict in the play is between two views of life, two attitudes towards existence as exemplified by Mama and Jessie. Christine Gomez states in this regard;

“The predominant theme of the play is the juxtaposition of two attitudes to existence. “ (5)

Like the step of death, Thelma goes through all the motions of denial, trading, anger, sadness and finally acceptance. Throughout the play, Norman has assigned wry observations to Thelma whose perspective is characteristically one of resignation, but she sees her condition as universally human, rather than impersonal. “Things happen’ Thelma says, “You do what you can about them and you see what happens next.” (6) Jessie, on the other hand, is unremittingly personal. Her justification for suicide is “I'm just not having a very good time and I don't have any reason to think it'll get anything but worse.” (7)

The play also illustrates the modern man's dilemma of aimlessness, futility and hopelessness in life. Norman presents, Thelma and Jessie, both living in a void, yet both approach life differently. According to Eric Berne; The Eternal problem of the human being is how to structure his working hours.” (8)





(Thelma: “You gotta keep your life filled up.”)

Mama evades her problems occupying herself with eating candy, watching T.V., knitting, crochet and needlework. In spite of this enmeshing herself in frivolous activity yet sometimes she has momentary glimpses of the purposelessness of her existence. On the other hand Jessie Cates suffering from epilepsy and alienation sees her existence as futile and painful. She tells Mama, “I’m tired, I’m hurt. I feel sad. I feel used.”(9) Mama questions her about the cause of her pain and anguish but Jessie says casually that she is tired of “It all”, and that she is sad about “the way things are”. When her mother questions and expresses deep concern, she says, “oh, everything from you and me to Red China.” (10) Jessie adds by way of explanation, “I read the paper. I don’t like how the things are. And they’re not any better out there than they are in here.” (11) This reveals Jessie’s deeply embedded anguish and the futility of life in its macrocosm outside and the microcosm within herself.

Mama and Jessie exemplify, respectively, an unthinking drifting through life and a struggle to achieve autonomy, and assert identity. Mama tries to fill the emptiness of her existence with trifles. “You gotta keep your life

filled up” (12) is Mama’s motto of life. Jessie decides to put an end to life’s meaninglessness through suicide.

The play dramatizes one woman’s search and struggle for autonomy, self-definition, and self-actualization. After Jessie kills herself, Mama follows Jessie’s instruction verbatim, clutching the chocolate pan in her hand when someone arrives, then going to the telephone to call Dawson, thus Jessie has succeeded in establishing her identity with her mother. She exists in her mother’s consciousness and exercises authority over her. Gayle Austin sees Norman’s play night, Mother as a drama of the ultimate severing of the bond by the daughter with her mother. She remarks;

” The need for a daughter both to detach her love and yet to identify herself with the mother in order to acquire a “normal” gendered identity, and the need for a mother to support the child is project of autonomy despite mixed feeling regarding separation, is the drama that Jessie and Mama symbolically enact in the play. “(13)

Jessie’s struggle in the play is to separate herself from her mother, at the same time she offers her compassionate support to her mother. She understands that only by comprehending their separation will her mother be free from the guilt and responsibility of her death. Mama grows in the course of the play to accept Jessie’s power to dispose of her own life as she chooses.

The play is an attempt to explore and understand what lies behind a suicide. It is not a defense or endorsement of suicide as a solution. Marsha Norman herself suggests that the play may be an attempt to understand suicide. In this regards the dramatists observes;

“ We all know people who have killed themselves And we are hurt and confused, and we would like to understand, even if we can't accept what they did. But they didn't give us the opportunity. The play should not be seen as something from my life, but as something from our lives.” (14)

As Mama gropes for an explanation of Jessie's suicide, she questions herself, she somehow feels responsible for and guilty about Jessie's suicidal decision. Dr. Hendin & Miller remarks;

“ Suicide occurs due to the Interpersonal difficulties which includes a combination of stressful factors – such as frustration and hostility over feelings rejected, a wish for revenge against a loved one, and a desire to withdraw “from the turmoil of a relationship that is highly conflictful and hurtful but on which the individual feels dependent. “ (15)

Thelma asks Jessie - “What did I do?” ‘You are mad at me.’(16) The question brings out her guilt complex revealing that she has somehow failed her daughter. It's a feeling typical of those around a person who threatens or attempts suicide. The second reaction ‘you are mad at me’ points out to the psychological fact that suicide is often an act of vengeful anger against the loved ones.

Mama asks Jessie if she is driven to suicide because of her dislike or disappointment with her son Ricky who has turned out to be a petty thief and a drug addict or because of Jessie's frustration with her husband Cecil's desertion of her or because of her epilepsy and ill health. Thelma Cates also mentions Jessie's father as one of the possible reasons, she says,

“He died and left you stuck with me and you’re mad about it.” (17) She also refers to the death of her favourite dog King. Jessie confronts her saying that none of these specific problems has led to her decision to end her life, and coldly states that she-Jessie is no longer her child. Jessie is extremely depressed, she says;

“I am what became of your child.... It’s somebody I lost, all right; it’s my own self. Who I tried to be and never got there....So, see, it doesn’t much matter what else happens in the world or in this house, even. I’m what was worth waiting for and I didn’t make it.” (18)

Thelma finds herself in an agonizing situation. Facing the loss of ones child is surely the most painful state for any mother to grasp. She recollects that during the last few hours before the suicide, Jessie had wanted to communicate, but Thelma had been too engrossed in suggesting alternatives to evade the suicide rather than giving space and opportunity to Jessie to come to terms with her mental trauma. The stark reality of the tragedy dawns on Mama, collapsing against the door, behind which lies Jessie’s body, Mama speaks through her tears, “Jessie, Jessie, child.... Forgive me. (Pause.) I thought you were mine.” (19)

All these years Thelma has never realized that she does not exist for Jessie, that there is a deep void in their relationship. In the play, most of her words and actions are reactions to Jessie’s announcements of her suicide. She adopts various approaches and ploys to alter or delay Jessie’s decision on suicide. The many devices suggested, reveal Thelma as a spontaneous, resourceful and quick thinking person. At first she treats the suicide announcement as a poor joke. (20) Then she tries to dissuade Jessie by saying that father’s gun and bullets are too old to be of use. Next, she suggests that Jessie needs to talk it over with her brother Dawson, or the doctor or at least the ambulance driver! She frightens Jessie that she might miss the aim and permanently disable herself. She also warns Jessie of

damnation, because those who commit suicide go to hell. Then she puts a legal obstacle by claiming that the towels, gun and house belong to her and so Jessie can not use them for her suicide. She then probes Jessie's motives for suicide and offers solutions like getting another dog, buying new dishes, acquiring a driver's license, rearranging the furniture and taking up a job. She tries to entertain Jessie with amusing stories, threatens her with the fear of death, accuses her of self-pity, offers her vague hopes for a better future and throws a tantrum, flinging pots and pans. She tries to rationalize and pleads with her, finally resorts to physical struggle in order to prevent or delay the suicide. As Jenny S. Spencer points out,

“Mama acts out all the practical suggestions for the preventions of suicide; she listens, she attempts to provide alternatives she offers transfusions of hope, she plays for time, she tries to involve others, she attempts to reduce the pain and to fill the frustrated needs and she finally tries to block the exist. “ (21)

Though Jessie denies each suggestion as it is proposed individually, their cumulative powers are sufficient according to clinical standards to motivate suicide. According to Dr. Hendin & Miller;

“A series of personal losses of father, husband, Son and dog, which intensify feelings of depression, betrayal and abandonment which turns to suicide. “ (22)

The play questions how well people know their loved ones. Ms. Blethyn comments; "I think we always assume that we know our nearest and dearest and I don't think we do know them very well at all. We're just used to them."  
(23)

Here's two women, a mother and a daughter who through circumstances, are faced to reexamine themselves. Suicide is a great tragedy for all involved, including the victim and the people left behind. Despite the subject's gravity, the play deals with more than just suicide. Norman has written this play knowing several people having committed suicide with whom she was close. Marsha Norman has often wondered whether one can stop a person from taking his or her life and whether people experienced agony or freedom in their final moments. The Dramatist adds; "I just don't know, and I wanted to know." (24)

Just as Jessie prepares Mama, Norman also prepares the audience in advance through Jessie's prior announcement of her suicide. Jessie's inner strength and courage are brought out in the play. She has no fears of what dreams may come in the sleep of death. In this she is a contrast to Mama who has a morbid fear of death and its aftermath.

The play is an exploration, a journey through life. Human behaviour is highly unpredictable, circumstances provoke uncontrolled actions. Although philosophers like Benjamin Disraeli remarks that "Man is not the creature of circumstances, circumstances are the creatures of Men", (25) yet highly stressed and unsecured people like Jessie fall a prey to their circumstances. Marsha Norman further explains;

"Her approach to the play is to put somebody else in the room, somebody "who has the right to claim (the other person's) life, who has the right to say "Don't leave me, Jessie." (26)

Norman believes in emotional bonding in any relationship, which gives one a right to claim. Despite all her suggestions, Thelma fails to stop her

daughter from suicide, as there is hardly any emotional bondage between mother and daughter.

Thus, night, Mother proves to be a powerful play exploring the psyche of two women, mother and daughter, displaying their bond to themselves, to each other, to others and to existence itself.

### 3.2. GETTING OUT

#### TRAPPED INSIDE THE SOCIETY

“Women are quite validly seeking something more complete than autonomy as it is defined for men, a fuller not a lesser ability to encompass relationships to others, simultaneously with the fullest development of oneself .”  
(27)

Miller states that the term “autonomy” may not be entirely appropriate in describing female psychology, since women often believe that they exist only to serve other people’s needs. In Getting Out by Marsha Norman, Arlene also confronts a community of others as well as her own past self, and struggles to find the appropriate responses to each.

Norman’s first play, Getting Out, was produced in 1977 as part of the Festival of New American Playwrights at the Actors Theatre in Louisville, where it was recognized as the best entry in the festival. Norman has been greatly inspired into writing Getting Out due to her chance encounter with a thirteen year old girl at the central State Hospital as well as some interviews she has conducted of women who have lived for years in the prison. The play focuses Arlene Holsclaw’s first day of freedom after she is released from the prison. She has been accused of robbery, kidnapping and murder. The play chronicles a day filled with confusion, fright; hope and disappointment in Arlene’s life as she learns that life on the outside does not necessarily translate into freedom.

The setting of Getting Out is the “dingy, one-room apartment in a rundown section of downtown Louisville, Kentucky,” (28) which Arlene has “inherited” from her sister. In the Preface to Getting Out, Marsha Norman explains:



“ARLIE is the violent kid ARLENE was until her last stretch in prison. In a sense, she is ARLENE’s memory of herself, called up by her fears, needs and even simple word cues. ARLIE’s life should be as vivid as Arlene’s if not as continuous...” (29)

Throughout the play Norman focuses upon the sufferings and the confusions that Arlene experiences between her inner and outer selves and how both these controversial selves Arlie and Arlene try to overpower each other. Arlie appears first, with a funny, slightly ghoulish story about throwing a neighbor boy’s frogs into the street to be run over by cars. Arlene constantly aware of Arlie, her negative self, tries her best to destroy it. In the process she is grossly misunderstood by people around her.

The play provokes us to think about the existing social systems, influences and realistic consequences. Arlene’s reality is that she has few choices and most of them are unattractive. She has very few skills, so she has to choose between low-paying jobs that will preserve her freedom, although, financially difficult for her to survive on, while the other option for her is to return to her old ways of crime and prostitution, providing larger income, but stripping her freedom.

The play is a transition of dignity, from abuse to respect. Arlene faces tremendous conflict in being aware of and accepting her positive self and denouncing her other negative self Arlie. In this view Mr. Lori remarks;

“ The play illustrates the infinite complications That affects an individual’s struggle to reform. Although numerous sociological theories apply to Arlene’s struggle, the labeling theory best explains the difficulties associated with her reformation.” (30)

This labeling theory claims that the labels people are given affect their own and others' perceptions of them. These perceptions channel a person's behavior either into deviance or into conformity. The labeling theory provides insight into Arlene's possibility for reform. Arlene, the main character in Getting Out strives to redeem herself after being released from prison. In her search for a better life, Arlene counters a multitude of obstacles that hinder her reformation. The majority of Arlene's obstacles occur as a result of negative labels she has acquired from her own family and people around her.

Arlene's mother provides no emotional or financial support because she believes Arlene is incapable of change. She demonstrates her lack of support by repeatedly referring to her daughter as Arlie. Arlene protests saying that "They don't call me Arlie no more. It's Arlene now." (31), but this does not seem to affect her mother's behavior. By refusing Arlene's request, her mother promotes the return of Arlie. When Arlene attempts to discuss different types of employment, her mother laughs at the suggestions. Although, Arlene realizes that certain jobs are not available to her because she has a prison record, yet her mother's critical attitude hurts her.



("Arlie is dead for what she done to me. Arlie is dead an it's God's will")

The ex-convict label also influences Arlene's family life. Arlene tries to make amends with her family by asking her mother whether she can join them for Sunday lunch. Arlene's mother immediately rejects the request, providing an excuse that "Sunday is my day to clean house now." (32)

However, in reality she does not want Arlene to visit them, as Arlene is no longer welcomed at home. Arlene's mother states "Don't want nobody like that in my house. I still got kids at home. Don't want no bad example." (33) Arlene's mother clearly feels that Arlene does not have a positive influence on the family; thereby, ultimately reinforcing the ex-convict label stuck upon her.

In addition to the ex-convict label, Arlene also receives the label of a whore from her mother. When Arlene's mother discovers Bennie's hat in Arlene's house, she automatically assumes that Arlene has returned to her old life style of prostitution. Arlene explains that Bennie is a prison guard and he had volunteered to drive her to Kentucky, but her mother does not believe that any man would "drive a girl 500 miles for nuthin." (34)

Arlene's plea that she "ain't like that no more" (35) fails to convince her mother. Her mother says, "Oh you ain't. I'm your mother. I know what you'll do." (36) These harsh words arouse feelings of hostility and hurt in Arlene. The very fact that her own mother has no faith in her contributes greatly to the difficulty in the progress of Arlene's reform.

Carl is Arlene's second visitor, her former pimp and the father of her baby Joey born in the prison. Carl hopes to persuade her to return to prostitution. While Carl describes the easy life on the streets to Arlene, her attention is constantly interrupted by memories enacted by Arlie and a series of guards, teachers, and peers from her childhood and adolescence in schools, reformatories, and prisons.



(Arlie: “You always sendin me to the bed!...I could git killed workin for you”)

Arlie recalls and tells Carl “You always sendin me to them ol’ droolers...They slobberin all over me....They tyin me to the bed!...I could git killed workin for you” (37), but he argues on economic grounds saying, “You can do cookin and cleanin or you can do something that pays good. You ain’t gonna git rich working on your knees. You come with me an you’ll have money. You stay here, you won’t have shit” (38). Arlene rejects Carl’s offer, she is determined to win Joey’s custody. Despite, her rejection Carl leaves his contact number, incase Arlene changes her decision.

Another character who doubts Arlene’s reformation is Bennie. In the beginning, Norman portrays Bennie as a caring, considerate man, who truly wants to help Arlene. However, in her flashbacks, Arlene recalls the negative labels that Bennie uses to describe her. When Arlene is in prison, Bennie says that she is a “screechin wildcat.” (39) Bennie’s “wildcat” label arouses Arlie residing in Arlene’s sub-conscious mind, resulting in increased “animal-like” behavior. The fact that Bennie dwells on Arlene’s past “there ain’t nobody can beat you for throwing plates” (40) is an additional factor that hinders her reform. The prison guard Bennie takes advantage of her, he derives sexual thrill from the ‘wild cats’, attitude of Arlene when Arlie is

predominating her. Arlie's violent, vibrant and vicious sexual responses ignite his baser animal instincts; hence he searches for Arlie in Arlene's otherwise cold and insecure self. Like Arlene's mother, Bennie continuously focuses on the person Arlene used to be rather than the person she is striving to become. He reminds her of her violent behavior in the prison, where Arlene's rehabilitation cannot take place.

Bennie appears to love Arlene's violent behavior, and he finds it necessary to frequently remind her of these "accomplishments". Perhaps Bennie refuses to accept Arlene's change because he feels more in control with Arlie's wild actions, than Arlene's cool, sensible self. Bennie's attempt to rape Arlene is a prime example of his need to overpower her. The attempt also shows that Bennie does not think Arlene is on the same level as other women. He sees her as "wild-cat" that can only be subdued by force. Bennie's behavior also suggests that he applies the Whore label to Arlene. Although Arlene does not act like Arlie, Bennie feels that she is sexually available to him because she has once been a prostitute. Ironically, only when Arlene calls Bennie a rapist does he stop his attempts at forcing himself on her. The "rapist" label forces Bennie to realize that that she "ain't Arlie" anymore, and he responds, "No, I guess you ain't." (41) Bennie's acknowledgement of Arlene's change is a crucial turning point because it results in the elimination of the whore label.

In contrast to the negative labels imposed by Bennie and Arlene's mother, the chaplain and Ruby provide Arlene with positive emotional support. Arlene tells Ruby how she managed to escape the solitary confinement and eventually the prison. She talks about the prison chaplain, who calls her Arlene and assures her that "Arlie was my hateful self and she was hurtin me and God would find some way to take her away" (42) The chaplain initiates Arlene's reform by convincing her that, despite other's opinions, she is a good person. His advice allows Arlene to visualize a better life. The chaplain is her mentor; he builds her confidence and is a great moral support. When the chaplain is unexpectedly transferred, Arlene suffers an emotional breakdown. She is found in her cell stabbing herself repeatedly with a fork and saying, "Arlie is dead for what she done to me. Arlie is dead an it's God's will." (43) When she regains consciousness, in the hospital, she

believes that she has succeeded in killing her delinquent self, who was trying to kill her.

Ruby, Arlene's upstairs neighbour as well as cook, understands Arlene's situation because labels that apply to Arlene, such as "ex-convict" and "whore", have also once been applied to her. When Arlene considers resorting to her old life-style, Ruby warns her of the adverse consequences, saying if Arlene regresses back into the role of Arlie, prostitution will become her sole source of income. Ruby tells Arlene that she can wash dishes to pay the rent, or "spread your legs for any shit that's got the ten dollars." (44) Ruby's harsh statement reveals the importance of self-respect in comparison to material objects.

Ruby also plays a crucial role in Arlene's acceptance of Arlie, her formerself. She reminds Arlene that it is acceptable to love Arlie because "You can still love people that's gone." (45) The primary message Ruby tries to convey to Arlene is that she has to accept her old self in order to become a new person. Ruby's comforting wisdom motivates Arlene to ignore the negative labels and forgive herself for the past. Mr. Henslin remarks, that although the "deviant" label applies to Arlie's actions, Arlene shows that her new lifestyle overrides the negative impact of the label. Despite her mother's and Bennie's opinion, Arlene's behavior is not consistent with their labels. (46) Arlene's decision to confide in Ruby reveals her strong intention to reform by accepting the past. Arlene has taken the first step towards improving her life. Despite society's continuous discrimination, Arlene's newly acquired inner strength allows her to feel optimistic, and gives her the confidence to adapt to a crime-free life.

Getting Out tells the story of a woman who has served her prison term and lands on the street, only to be refused the chance to succeed. While the woman's intentions to become a better person are quite obvious, the world is oblivious to her new life. People can only perceive the mean criminal she has been. She is held accountable for her past and without a chance to improve herself, she is condemned. Huston- Findley remarks;

“ She’s getting out of one type of prison and into another as she deals with a past that includes an abusive childhood, an inadequate education and a justice system that left her with few options.”  
(47)

In the beginning of the play Arlene has begun the transition from silence to speech. Arlene, silenced by her father, locks herself inside Arlie who could only express her anger physically, bringing increasingly serious punishments on herself in a deadly downward spiral. “I’m not Arlie”, Arlene tells Bennie, bitterly as he abandons his attempted rape. “Arlie coulda killed you.” (48) Arlene learns to use speech instead, first as her defense against Bennie, then as her connection with Ruby, and finally, through Ruby’s supportive sisterhood, as a way to reunite with Arlie and speak as one, complete person – a delightfully exuberant and mischievous person at that.

Later in the play, Arlene’s increasing commitment to an independent existence is shown by her determination to shop for the food she likes, to stock her own shelves in her own home. At the end of the play, Arlene’s determination to make her new life work is clear when, she “Slowly but with great determination, she picks up the [grocery] items one at a time and puts them away in the cabinet above the counter.” (49) For Arlene, such mundane details are palpable signs of her freedom. Moreover, they symbolize the new domestic life she plans to set up with her son. Her newly discovered respect for the material culture of cooking and eating reflects her newfound confidence in herself.

Getting Out reveals to what a great extent, an individual’s life is influenced by the society, which is male dominated. Norman reflects how lascivious men like her father, Carl or Beenie take control of Arlene’s life and lead her to the deep, dark pit of disgrace and destruction. According to Gretchen Cline;

“ Men’s being in power throughout the world was certainly the worst thing that could ever have happened in human history. Arlene being a representative of all the women living and having lived on earth, even if a very extreme one. But in favour of men, I claim that men are not really guilty either because society has become autonomous and can not be controlled anymore.” (50)

Gretchen Cline uses Walter Davis’ theory of the crypt to analyze Arlene being a familial and the subsequent social scapegoat to show how women are shaped by a society in which the most moral institutions, such as family and religion, justify violation and oppression.

The theory of the crypt suggests ways in which core family issues are bracketed by families or individuals. When a human being reaches the stage of the “ego”, he or she has to suppress certain deep desires. According to Davis, that is the very moment the psyche is born. He adds; “What sets off this change is first of all humiliation inflicted by an Other” (51) The human being who has been humiliated starts to envy the Other’s superiority and this envy (often identified with male domination) creates as a byproduct shame (often identified with female passivity) and later on a change which produces a psyche. This experience of humiliation as well as the process of bracketing core issues is lived through again and again until the individual is considered normal by society. (52)

In her early childhood Arlie suffers the trauma of sexual abuse by her father and emotional neglect by her mother. This causes her first crypt. In order to compensate her humiliation she is envious to male dominance and tries to rebel against the humiliation by acting criminally herself. On the other hand, she feels ashamed and needs her delinquency for self defense. Arlene, seeking recognition, tries to get rid of her humiliation by hiding behind her other self Arlie. But in prison, Arlie is abused, humiliated and used. After being released from the prison Arlene thinks that everything seems different from



what she has experienced earlier. But she still cannot rid herself of her crypts because, she resides in the male dominated world of men like Carl who exploit women and suppress issues undesirable to them, or constantly confronted with abusing father figures like Beenie, who care for her, but also attempt to rape her.

Arlene suffers behind this physical, mental, emotional and social humiliation, as there is also a deeper familial background which the society has shaped for her. Arlene's delinquent behavior goes way back to the social order. It's the social institutions that has created Arlie, and has subjugated, tortured and harassed Arlene, but when Arlene tries to adapt to the social norms, and learns to face the society, it uses her as a scapegoat to cover its own weaknesses. Norman reveals the dents in the social system, which although outside, yet gets into and dictates a week individual's life.

Arlene is actually used twice as a scapegoat. Firstly, she is made a scapegoat by her family who fail to recognize her mental and emotional trauma, which manifests itself in the form of aggressive Arlie. Secondly, she is made a social scapegoat, because the society does not realize that the moral institution of the family is responsible for Arlene's wild behavior. By learning to hate her other self Arlie, Arlene in fact allows the society to use her as a scapegoat. In this light Arlie is trapped inside Arlene, and the society in turn abuses and humiliates that self. Despite the hopeful title Getting Out of the play, getting out is the most difficult step for Arlene, because it is all about getting on in life, but she is lost in the maze, struggling to get out.

In Getting Out, Arlene's struggle forms the ongoing flashbacks of Arlie's existence. Arlie is trapped in by a series of figurative or literal prisons, first by her father, then by Carl, and finally by the prison guards, who search her roughly after she tries to set fire in her prison cell. Guaurd-Evance says,

“ So where is it now. Got it up your pookie, I bet. Oh that'd be good.Doc comin' back and me with my fingers up your.... “ (53)

In each of the instances, the stage directions indicate that she is pinned, tied to, or sitting on the bed. Even the reformed Arlene is still in a kind of prison, there are bars on her apartment windows, and she must fend off the vultures like Carl.

Arlene's oppression is based on sex as well as social class; it is a form of "permanent inequality." (54) Miller writes that in any dominant/subordinate relationship, the dominant group holds "all of the open power and authority and determines the ways in which power may be acceptably used". He adds that any subordinate relationship is of "temporary inequality", where the subordinate tries to achieve equality with the dominant. In relations of "permanent inequality", some people are defined as unequal because of race, class, sex, or other characteristics ascribed at birth. (55) Arlene, being a woman, labeled a whore and criminal, coming from a low social order thereby ceases to be respectable, instead becomes a commodity to be used and discarded.

Arlene has learned the lesson of subordination during her last prison term. Although late, she finally realizes that compliance to situation brings relative freedom, as she moves from the hospital to the honors cottage and then finally out of prison. As is often the case with the subordinates, Arlene's compliance is based on repression of her true feelings and rejection of her feeling self. The "murdered" Arlie, "killed" into silence with a fork (56) signifies Arlene's bridging the gap of inequality, symbolic of patriarchal control of women. Arlene finally regains control over her divided self. She is no longer a subjugate self suffering from temporary inequality, neither is she dominated due to her permanent inequality as she has emerged a new woman from the debris of her old self.

Arlene's real progress toward autonomous selfhood takes place in her apartment as she learns to use words, not physical actions, to describe reality and defend her place in it. When, during a prison breakout, a cab driver touches Arlene's arm, she screams at him but, lacks confidence of speech, she grabs his gun and accidentally shoots him. But the new Arlene defends herself from Bennie by naming him a rapist and graphically describing his actions.

At the end of Getting Out, Arlie and Arlene reminisce about a comic episode in their child-hood. At that moment, the two actresses come together and simultaneously speak the punch line of the anecdote. The play then concludes with the joint laughter of Arlie and Arlene. That moment of integration and laughter brings to mind the last line of “Days Without End” by Eugene O’Neill in which the newly integrated John Loving exclaims, “Life laughs with God’s love again! Life laughs with love!” (57)

While both women in night, Mother have been married, and both were disappointed in love, these relationships are peripheral to the central relationship of the play: mother and daughter. Getting Out too presents men as obstacles (usually), or as sources of support. In both the plays, the protagonists seek autonomy in a context of connection with their families: Arlene for a future with her son, Jessie (in night, Mother) for her mother’s future without her. The two plays share a concern for the silenced and overlooked female protagonists with their roots in domestic torture. These protagonists struggle within the patriarchal society to define themselves as autonomous beings who yet maintain a caring connection with others. In short, both the plays celebrate the secret worlds of women.

### 3.3 TRUDY BLUE

#### THINKING TO LIVE AND LIVING TO THINK: TRUE BLUE COLORS OF LIFE

“Successful novelists are the luckiest people. When something really bad happens to them, when they need to hash out the meaning of their lives, they have alter egos to talk to: always available and never bored, if not always sympathetic.” (58) For Ginger Andrews, the heroine of Marsha Norman's new one-act play, Trudy Blue, the lesson may be that alter egos are addictive and no match for the warm-blooded comfort of real human beings, no matter how flawed. Especially when one is told that she has two months to live.

Mark Wedland, who won Kudos for the excellent set design of the Broadway revival of Death of a Salesman, has also created a cleverly effective set environment for Marsha Norman's semi-autobiographical play comments;

“A circle inside a square is as good a metaphor as any for the human struggle; the real world that stands before us vs. the imagined one that lurks just beyond, the defined Vs. the infinite, and on.” (59)

Particularly evocative and realistic photo – panels of a New York co-op and the city- scape beyond are drawn about on a circular rod; the stage's exterior walls and floor form a square, painted in a shade of red that looks like fresh blood. Burke rightly observed;

“Theatre is changing. Tragedy has evolved. Those dead guys you read in English class may form the ever-present background but the modern version has

twisted itself into being well modern.”

(60)

Trudy Blue, Marsha Norman’s “tragic-comedy” (61) as she dubs it, fits into this new age form. Trudy Blue seamlessly weaves the emotion of a tragedy with the light-heartedness of a comedy, and never strays from either extreme.



Trudy Blue is an engaging play that revolves around a popular novelist Ginger, who escapes from reality by retreating into conversations with her alter ego, Trudy Blue, the heroine of her novels. According to Burk, “Trudy Blue is a whirlwind of emotion that should be seen by everyone who has loved anyone in their life.” Burk further states;

“...The play is most certainly a comedy, in the deepest, most heart-felt sense of the word, this is not of the knee-slapping, hearty guffaw variety. This is a gentle comedy. The kind that makes you giggles and smiles a lot. “(62)

Marsha Norman in most of her plays defines the vague disquiet that runs through the lives of many women who seem to have everything, yet they are depressed and disturbed. Sue, the civil rights Lawyer says to her best friend Ginger” "You have nice kids, and a great job, and a house that you like, and terrific friends and you have spent a lot of time and energy getting all that stuff together. And now you want to be happy too? OK. OK. Maybe I do too. But how happy do you have to be?" (63) Trudy speaks;

I am a Woman.

I am beautiful.

I am flawed.

I have secrets.

I will beat this.

I will see my daughter graduate college.

I will live each day like it's my...

I will live each day...

I will live each

I will live

I will....

- Trudy Blue (64)

Trudy Blue is about a misdiagnosis. Most of it takes place in the mind of Ginger between the time she finds her husband sitting up in bed balancing the chequebook and the moment she opens her mouth to tell him the latest news from the doctor. She has to think out her relationships with her thirteen year old daughter, whose science-project mice just died; with her

editor Sue, whom she met for both lunch and dinner that day; with James, the man she met while researching a book about pleasure; with her mother, who, although dead, continues to give her annoying advice; and perhaps most of all, with herself, with the help of Trudy, the heroine of a series of her books and there's her husband, Don.

Determined not to submit to mid-life malaise, Ginger, a successful writer embarks on a wildly irreverent spiritual journey. Her traveling companion and guide is Trudy Blue, the main character of her new novel. "This comic, sexy, revisionist Doll's House of the 90s investigates what happens after 'happily ever after'." (65) Nora Helmer in A Doll's House, goes through the dramatic transformation from a kind and loving housewife, to a desperate and bewildered woman, who ultimately leaves her husband and everything she has known. Ibsen dramatizes the story of a woman's struggle to change her life in order to achieve a sense-of-self and independent identity in the face of social and personal oppression.

Similarly Trudy Blue is all about Ginger's journey through Trudy Blue from inaction to action, from a sense that something just isn't quite right to recognizing what that is and determining what can be done about it. Her companion and alter-ego is the fictional Trudy Blue, who is the main character in Ginger's novel-in-progress entitled Trudy Blue, Girl in Love.

On the one hand, Ginger, a smart, successful woman who thinks twice about her comfortable, cosmopolitan life and on the other hand, she honestly examines what drives women in the 1990s to make the choices. Ginger theorizes that, in fact, the choices are predetermined. To another of her friends she says;

"I mean what if the species is really in charge of everything? What if the stuff we think we need, love and children and a place to live, are really just things the species needs to keep itself going. But the only way the species can get these things is to trick us, with hormones

mainly, into thinking we need them."

(66)

The play continues in its autobiographical vein in other ways. e.g; the title character, who moves between Ginger's novels and Norman's life. "A Nancy Drew type, only smarter, sassier, more sophisticated and older." –according to Marsha Norman. (67) Trudy Blue is the inner voice constantly nattering at and bossing Ginger – until she gets up nerve to tell her to buzz off. The play's action, such as it is, recreates the moment Ginger tells her husband, Don, the bad news of her diagnosis. She fears his reaction, worries about her thirteen year old-daughter, Beth, reviews past events and tries to foresee the future. As Aileen Jacobson observes;

"The play is really inside Ginger's head. Or her dreams. Or a parallel narrative universe, going on all the time...like a movie channel." (68)

Everything else on the stage is an admixture of dream, flashback or interaction with a cast of characters seen only in her mind's eye. Ginger speculates at one point by saying; "May be they're not even my dreams. Maybe it's my mind who is dreaming and I'm just the audience." (69)

Ginger is a novelist who has substituted the "conversations" (70) she has with her characters- chief among them Trudy Blue- for any communication with the people around her : husband, daughter Beth or Sue, her friendly editor. Ginger also chats it up with her mother, who is dead. it appears they didn't talk much while she is alive. Ginger finds herself, not surprisingly, conflicted. She has precious little time to sort out her life, and come to terms with the people she has been marginalizing. The play continues in and out of reality while Ginger tries to put meaning back into her life.



Ginger: “ I’m talking about Don’s work,  
not the other thing.”

Don: “ Stop thinking about what would  
make my life more interesting  
to you.” (71)

The reaction of Don this time is very rude. He is not happy with the situation. He is not supportive to Ginger. Along for the ride, most notably, are Ginger’s best friend Sue and a new love interest, James. Ginger thinks about having an affair with James, yet she finds this indulgent behavior disconcerting. According to Eric James, “the play intertwines between fantasy and reality.”(72)



(Ginger: I’m talking about Don’s work, not the  
other thing.)

Norman's Trudy Blue represents the person you talk to when you are talking to yourself." (73) Norman reveals those emotions, feelings and thoughts that are deeply embedded in the inner successes of the subconscious.

Les Gutman also writes; "For all of its putative reflectiveness, Trudy Blue comes off quite impersonal." (74) The dramatist also seems eager to make her story theatrically hip, shredding up her time line, rewinding and replaying shards of her "moment" and juxtaposing tangible and intangible.



(Ginger trying to add a little something to their life....)

Trudy Blue therefore focuses around the life of Ginger Andrews, a novelist. A mother of two children with a husband who never seems to listen to a word. Ginger tries to add "a little something to their life." (75) In her novel, Ginger describes her heroine Trudy Blue as herself "off the leash" (76) When she is Trudy, Ginger can accomplish all, but as reality kicks in, nobody listens to her or seems to care how she feels. Her desire to be loved by James, the one person who cares for her is both touching and pitiful.

As the play states; "fantasies are not the answer," (77) and this is a harsh realization. Sue, too, dressed in all black, seems to have given up happiness in life, however she is jealous towards Ginger who seems to have found happiness. She stands out as the other supporting characters seem to fade into the backdrop. Only with her creator Trudy talks seriously. Her importance to Andrews remains constant. She guides her through ordeals with her best friend, Sue, husband and lover. In addition, she struggles to provide consistent motherly love to her sole child, Beth.

Ginger's misdiagnosis of a fatal illness, and how she copes with it is told from an extremely internal vantage point, in which one isn't quite sure, where she ends and the people around her begin. Trudy Blue involves her friends, husband, lover, children, and her struggle to reach out to them at the moment of crisis, but it's also about her life as a writer, and a person of imagination. Ginger as an artist and as a wife and mother are two different persons. Ginger suffers from a personal misdiagnosis of herself as well as the medical misdiagnosis. Andrews and her alter ego often switch places, blurting out thoughts of the other. This juxtaposition of novelist and character skirts some theological principles about the role and authority of man and God.

When Trudy tells Ginger that she has missed out on a lot of fun because of the way she dresses "like a nun from a really shy order", (78) Ginger disagrees: "I don't think there's one thing I would've learned from wearing red, not one." (79) Red is the color of passion, Ginger's inner self. Trudy tries to insulate that Ginger's life is like a nun, loveless and uninteresting. Red also symbolizes blood or death. Trudy wants Ginger to wear red and end the life of loneliness. Over the centuries, colors have been used for signifying meanings in heraldry, given to the months of the year and the seasons, religious symbolism, and for everything from weddings to babies. Florists are quick to tell us red roses mean love. We use color to describe emotions. And how about "once in a blue moon everything goes all right" or "it's a red-letter day."

Here in the play, a dark blue signifies the coming of another night and sometimes a storm. Dark blue has long been associated with power and authority. (80) Seeing the color blue actually causes the body to produce chemicals that are calming; but that isn't true of all shades of blue. (81)

People tend to be more productive in a blue room because they are calm and focused on the task at hand. (82) Blue represents truth, wisdom, heaven, eternity, devotion, tranquility, loyalty and openness. (83)

When Ginger hesitates to wait so long for the next appointment in case it really is cancer, the doctor reassures her, "If it's cancer, it'll still be there in three weeks." (84) Julie Crutcher remarks;

“Ginger’s struggle to define herself truly as herself, independent of anybody else’s expectations, forms the backbone of Trudy Blue. In its own quiet, resolute way, her moment of liberation is triumphant. Her spiritual journey over, she chooses to embrace happiness.”  
(85)

Ginger is introspective and somewhat constrained emotionally. Trudy Blue examines the need for happiness in life, and how it is often dangerous to find that happiness in fantasy. Trudy Blue is a vivid and stirring reminder of just what a fine observer of the interior life she is.

### 3.4 THE SECRET GARDEN

#### RELATIONSHIPS BLOOM IN “GARDEN”

*Marsha Norman’s Adaptation of The Secret Garden*



“A place where I can bid my heart  
Be still, and it will mind me,  
A place where I can go when I am lost -  
And there I’ll find me.” (86)

-- Mary in The Secret Garden

Like Mary, everyone needs a secret garden, somewhere peaceful and quiet, somewhere safe from the madding crowd and hardships of life. A place full of wonder, love, kindness and light. Books And lyrics by Marsha Norman, music by Lucy Simon, based on the novel by Frances



Hodgson Burnett, The Secret Garden is simply one of the most positive, uplifting, and heartwarming stories ever written for young people.

In Frances Hodgson Burnett's classic children's novel The Secret Garden, a contrary young girl Mary, loses her parents in a cholera epidemic, she comes to England to live with her uncle, Archibald Craven, and her cousin, Colin. Through her discovery of and experiences in the hidden, walled garden of the story's title, Mary overcomes her contrariness and brings herself back to life. In her relationships with the motherless family that has taken her in, she also learns how to foster the growth and health of another human being- in short, "how to mother". (87)

Pulitzer Prize – winning playwright Marsha Norman, who had never before read the novel (88), wrote the libretto and lyrics for a musical version of The Secret Garden that opened on Broadway in May 1991. For Norman it seems an unlikely choice, given her penchant for dark subjects including sexual abuse, suicide, and despair. "It was very difficult for people to believe that I really wanted to do a musical or had it in me to do one," (89) she asserts.

Her play like Burnett's book is preoccupied with death. Despite the faithfulness of the adaptation, however, Norman has altered the original material in her work. Norman made several changes in her adaptation that would probably strike modern –day feminist readers as salutary. Colin does not take over the play as he does the novel and in the play's final spoken lines, it is Mary's achievement that is recognized, not Colin's as in the book.(90) Moreover, in Norman's version, it is Mary, and not Colin, who has Lily's eyes, as Archibald and Neville Craven note in one of the loveliest songs in the play. This change was evidently the result of a conscious refocusing of the play on Mary.

In Burnett's novel, Mary's psychological problem is not grief but apathy, an indifference generated by her neglectful parents:

Her father held a position under the English government and had always been busy and ill himself and her mother had been a great beauty who

cared only to go to parties and amuse herself with gay people. She had not wanted a little girl at all, and when Mary was born she handed her over to the care of an Ayah, who was made to understand that if she wished to please the Mem Sahib she must keep the child out of sight as much as possible. (91)

It is apparent from the text that Mary has barely known her parents: “she never remembered seeing familiarly anything but the dark faces of her Ayah and the other native servants...” (92). Mary thus responds rather atypically to her parents’ deaths: “Mary had liked to look at her mother from a distance and she had thought her very pretty, but as she knew very little of her she could scarcely have been expected to love her or to miss her very much when she was gone. She did not miss her at all, in fact...” (93)

More seriously, Norman presents Mary’s loss of her parents as traumatic and painful, and certainly that makes psychological sense. But that interpretation of her experience nonetheless represents a dramatic departure from Burnett’s novel. In Norman’s adaptation, on the contrary, Mary misses her parents very much. When she hears someone crying, she imagines it might be her parents calling for her. (94) She asks her uncle what happens to dead people and during the course of the ensuing conversation mentions both of her parents. (95) She is apparently so traumatized by her loss that she represses her memories of the cholera epidemic; when Mrs. Medlock and Dr. Craven reprimand her, Mary recalls what ever happened at the dinner party. She runs out into the maze in a hysterical terror, and sees the ghost of her father, “the last person alive to think of her,” (96) and “runs into his arms”(97) ; he leads her to Lily (Norman’s adaptation of the name Liliias) , who in turn leads her to the door to the garden.(98) And even there Mary is haunted: “Everyone is there, Archibald, Lily, Rose, Albert, Dickon, Martha, and the other Dreamers, the living and the dead, exactly the way Mary would like to see them.” (99)

It is the presence – or omnipresence, as some critics have charged – of these ghosts that constitutes the most obvious difference between Burnett’s novel and Norman’s adaptation. The play has a chorus, identified in the roster of characters as “Dreamers” that consists entirely of dead people: Mary’s parents, Rose, and Albert Lennox; Rose’s friend Alice; Lieutenants Wright and Shaw, officers in her father’s unit; Major Holmes and his wife Claire; a fakir; and an ayah, Mary’s Indian nanny. According to Norman’s own note;

“ The characters referred to collectively as the Dreamers are people from Mary’s life in India, who haunt her until she finds her new life in the course of this story. They are free to sing directly to us, appearing and disappearing at will”.

(100)



( Dreamers... )



It is these characters who, after a brief bit of song from Lily Craven, open the play with their stylized dance of death, a game of “Drop the Handkerchief” played to a macabre version of the nursery rhyme “Mistress Mary, Quite Contrary,” to symbolize their abrupt deaths from a cholera epidemic (101). But they do not disappear in death; rather they remain present as a chorus until the final scene of the play. The game played by the adult dreamers with a red handkerchief has a dark symbolic meaning: death. When the red handkerchief drops on someone, they die from cholera. The characters in this scene- Mary’s father Albert, her mother Rose, their friends, and Mary’s Ayah, are at a party. They play out the spreading of the epidemic in a game of “drop the handkerchief”. One by one, Mary’s family and everyone around her are destroyed. Remarkably, Mary survives. But she is alone and frightened. With no one to care for her, she is sent to England to live with her uncle Archibald. It is the Dreamers who establish the eerie gothic atmosphere of Misselthwaite Manor (102) and seem to haunt it themselves. (103) Mary throughout her journey is guided by these Dreamers.

The garden, too, is given relatively short shrift. Few scenes take place there: Of the eighteen scenes in this *Secret Garden*, only four involve the children in activities out of doors – two before the garden is discovered, which occurs one-fourth of the way through the book but halfway through the musical, and two afterward”.(104) More than one critic has described the resulting atmosphere as “claustrophobic”. (105) Moreover, Mary and Colin do virtually no actual gardening restores both of them to health and well-being. Richards states;

“whereas in the book gardening restores both of them to health and well-being. [N]ature has an incidental role. Ghosts are doing the instructing.” In this way the garden loses much of its importance as a symbol of rebirth and renewal.” (106)

“When you have a garden, you have a future,” Burnett once wrote.(107) But Norman’s play is not about the future so much as it is about the past; as Edwin Wilson observes in his review of the Broadway production,

“ The Secret Garden becomes a musical about ghosts rather than living people, about exorcising the past rather than dealing with the present, about magic and the supernatural rather than the human dimension of Mary’s life.” (108)

Eden, also called Paradise, was the garden in which the first humans created by God (Adam and Eve) lived until the time of the Fall. The fall refers to the moment that God cast Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden for tasting of the Tree of Knowledge. The secret garden is connected with Eden through Martha's story of the divine times. It is also similar to Eden insofar as it represents a Paradise of innocence and ideality for Mary and Dickon. As in Eden, they enjoy a uniquely close relationship with God when they are within its walls. Their work in the garden is compared to the work of "nest-building," (109) which of course has certain marital implications—it is as though they too have become Adam and Eve. Furthermore, their seclusion in the secret garden conjures up images that are once enjoyed by Master and Mistress Craven. This echo is strengthened by the fact that Mary bends down and kisses the newly opened crocuses, just as Mistress Craven kisses her roses.

The Eden-like quality of their time alone together in the garden is only strengthened by the presence of Dickon's docile "creatures," (110) which recall the animals created by the Christian God to keep the first people company. Dickon inspires "rapture" in Mary, which implies both ecstasy and "a mystical experience in which the spirit is exalted to the knowledge of divine things" (Merriam-Webster). Dickson's intimate connection with heavenly nature brings Mary nearer to divinity herself.

“The stories I like are the ones where people are trying to solve their problems, and that is what’s happening in The Secret Garden “. (111) As Esther Harriott observed in 1988, “Marsha Norman called her first play Getting Out , and that could be the subtitle of each of her plays since” (112). Norman writes most often about freeing oneself from the shackles of one’s personal past, specifically through acceptance and reintegration. In plays like Getting Out and Third & Oak: The Laundromat each of her female characters struggles successfully to come to terms with her past, so does Mary. Charles Spencer comments;

“This is a lovely story in which loneliness, illness and loss gradually blossom into friendship, happiness and health. There are storms to frighten the kiddies, the arrival of spring to delight us and a tale of human healing to lift the heart. Norman’s the secret garden explores how people cope with death and loss and can heal with love.” (113)

Where Burnett practiced the instincts of a born storyteller, the creators of the musical prefer to intellectualize. Mary's dead parents and Uncle Archie's dead wife haunt almost every scene. Mary, her uncle and her dead aunt sleepwalk through the haunted mansion, projecting their own deepest familial longings on the sound of a child's crying deep within the night.

The secret Garden is an evocative portrait of a young girl's attempt to find happiness through the simple act of putting seed to soil. Nick Miliokas observed;

“It is a story that reminds us that what you grow depends on what you are growing it in. As Mary transforms the garden, she herself is transformed, and she in turn transforms others.” (114)

The Secret Garden is organized around the idea of secrets. The Secret room represents the inner life of the mind. It appears that we use this space to store our memories of nicest experiences and memories. Mary is a secret from her parents' associates; Colin is kept a secret by both his father and himself. Misselthwaite is full of hundreds of locked rooms which no one may enter; its servants are forbidden to speak of its history or of its current inhabitants. Colin keeps the portrait of his mother a secret from his servants,

and, later, the secret of his newfound health from all but Mary, Dickon, Ben Weatherstaff, and Susan Sowerby.



(Mary in the Secret Garden...)

The secret of the garden itself is the most significant. One by one, each of the secrets are disclosed. “You let in the light, and you use these memories and feelings to create a safe, protected, beautiful environment for yourself and your children.” (115) (The other woman is yourself, your physical self working with your mental self to create something you want.) The secret Room dreams (the pleasant ones, at least) suggests that life holds something more than the physical boundaries.

According to Freud, “dreams are the royal road to the unconscious’, in the sense that dreams could be analyzed in a way that will reveal the hidden impulses in the unconscious. (116) Dreams may thus reveal who we ‘really’ are, what we ‘really’ want and how we want to attain these desires.” (117)

The secret garden is thus about the healing power of love and the miracle of rebirth. Through the lyrical shimmer of Lucy Simon's music and through mysterious lyrics Marsha Norman creates a world where lost loves are found, lost lives are saved, spring comes again, and beauty reigns.

### 3.5. THIRD & OAK: THE LAUNDROMAT

#### THE LAUNDROMAT: LONG DAYS JOURNEY IN TO NIGHT...

“Life is a fountain  
Forever leaping  
Upward to catch the golden sunlight,  
Striving to reach the azure heaven;  
Failing, Falling  
Ever returning  
To kiss the earth that the flower may  
live.” (118)

- The Fountain by O’Neill

The above song contains the essential paradox of the dream: like the falling fountain the dream will never become real. But it will always sustain the flower of life on earth. The Laundromat by Marsha Norman, a one-act play reflects the same idea as the O’Neill’s song.

Throughout the twentieth century the importance of the institution of the family has been an integral part in American drama. Drama has focused on such family conflicts such as drug addiction, marital problems, and coming to terms with past events. The unique combination of familial conflict, language, and mood has produced great pieces of literature such as Eugene O Neill’s Long Days Journey into Night, Tennessee Williams’s The Glass Menagerie, and Marsha Norman’s Third & Oak.

In A Long Days Journey into Night, The Glass Menagerie, and Third and Oak family crisis is the trunk that brings these separate branches together. The authors of these works deal with family deficiencies in different ways, and present their plays in different moods. All three plays incorporate denial as a major family problem, but each family is in denial about something different. In A Long Days Journey into Night the Tyrone family is in denial about Mary’s morphine addiction, in The Glass Menagerie, the Wingfield

family is in denial about each other's problems, and the families from Third and Oak are in denial about death and unfaithfulness.

Despite the fact that most of these family members try to help each other the feat becomes impossible because they are all so involved with their own problems. This scenario is the trademark of the twentieth century drama, and is the basis for most of the works written during this time. All these plays have one central issue at the heart of each, and that is family conflict. Each play focuses on a different crisis for the families involved, and each one utilizes different diction to suit the crisis at hand.

The Laundromat deals with the high and low tides in life, inspired by a place in Louisville, Norman has described that play as "about how close you can be to someone without ever really being able to talk to them, to ask them for what you need and to cherish your dream." (119) The Laundromat is about two women, Alberta and Deedee who meet in a Laundromat and chat with one another while doing their laundry. Alberta is "a reserved woman" who has lost her husband Herb about a year ago and Deedee is a "restless twenty-year old married girl" (120) who is presently in a relationship with a man who is pursuing another woman.

Throughout the play, Marsha Norman portrays Alberta and Deedee, two women who are in denial about an aspect of their life. Alberta is in denial that her husband Herb has passed away and Deedee is in denial that her husband Joe is having an affair with another woman. The two women are able to overcome their denial and come to terms with despair and loneliness. Alberta and Deedee use many defense mechanisms in trying to cope with their losses, the most prominent being denial. According to Freud, "Denial involves blocking external events from awareness. If some situation is just too much to handle, the person just refuses to experience it." (121)

According to Freud's theory of psychoanalysis the mind is composed of the conscious, the preconscious and the unconscious, the goal of therapy simply is 'to make the unconscious conscious'." (122)

Denial is a dangerous defense mechanism because a person who is in denial does not ever come to terms with a traumatizing experience. Alberta goes to the Laundromat to clean her husband Herb's clothing's from

the night that he died. When Deedee asks Alberta if her husband works nights too, Alberta says, "Herb is out of town." (123)

A year after her husband's death Alberta is still unable to tell Deedee that Herb is dead. Later in the conversation Deedee finds that Alberta has forgotten to put one shirt into the washing machine. When Deedee grabs the shirt and goes to throw it into the washer with the rest of Herbs clothing, Alberta takes the shirt away from her and says;

"I don't want to...it's too...that stain will never...It needs to presoak. I forgot the Woolite." (124)



(Alberta:"I don't want to..it's too...that stain will never..  
It needs to presoak. I forgot the Woolite")

This would have been the perfect opportunity for Alberta to tell Deedee that her husband has passed away but she still can not confess. According to Freud;



“the unconscious ...includes all the things that are not easily available to awareness, including many things that have their origins there, such as our drives or instincts, and things that are put there because we can't bear to look at them, such as the memories and emotions associated with trauma.”  
(125)

When Alberta says that her husband is just away on business, she is keeping the fact that he is dead in her unconscious mind. Since psychoanalysis is about bringing feelings from the unconscious to the conscious, talking to Deedee is a form of psychoanalysis therapy. When Alberta is able to transfer this feeling to the conscious mind she is able to work on accepting her loss.

Deedee helps Alberta, through a form of psychoanalysis, bring her feelings and the truth to the conscious mind. Towards the end of the night, Alberta and Deedee grow more and fonder of each another. As Deedee finally tells Alberta about her husband's affair she impulsively says;

“...Like he's dead and now you worship the shirts he wore.” (126 )

Deedee suddenly realizes that Alberta's husband is in fact dead. This reality makes her feel terrible. Deedee apologizes saying;

“I'm sorry, Mrs. Johnson, I really am sorry. You probably been plannin' this night for a long time. Washin' his things. And I barged in and spoiled it all. ” (127)

Alberta responds to the apology saying, “I've been avoiding it of a long time. Herb died last winter, the day before his birthday” (128). Freud

states that catharsis is "...the sudden and dramatic outpouring of emotion that occurs when the trauma is resurrected" (129). Alberta undergoes a cathartic effect.

When Alberta finally tells Deedee the truth about Herb she is relieved to have told someone. Alberta's "secret" (130) is finally in her conscious mind and she is able to experience feelings and emotions about the event with another person. In contrast to Alberta, Deedee is a young woman who is still learning about life and relationships. Deedee is married to Joe who is having an affair with another woman. Joe tells Deedee that he is working a double shift when really he is going to the bowling alley and bowling with a beautiful blonde woman.

Like Alberta, Deedee is also in denial about this aspect of her life. Deedee is in denial that her husband Joe is having an affair. When Deedee talks to Alberta about Joe, she tells her that the reason he is out late is because of his job. She says;

"It's all-the-time, he lately. He says people are buyin' more trucks 'cause farmers have to raise more cows 'cause we got a population explosion going on. Really crummy, you know? People I don't even know having babies mean Joe can't come home at the right time. Don't seem fair."(131)

Even though Deedee has caught Joe cheating on her in the bowling alley, she does not tell Alberta the truth. By pretending that Joe is just working a double shift she is keeping her feelings and emotions locked in her unconscious mind. As the night progresses, Deedee develops a liking for Alberta even though they do not have a lot in common.

A TV review on The Laundromat writes; "In The Laundromat she is writing about two women, one old enough to be the other's mother."(132) Even though the women are so far apart in age, their situation is very similar and they develop a relationship based on that. While sharing a

moment of time in the Laundromat, Deedee tells Alberta about her boyfriend's affair and brings her feelings to the conscious, finally recognizing that she is not being treated right. When Deedee asks Alberta for advice on what to say to Joe when she confronts him about the affair, Alberta says; "Your own face in the mirror is better company than a man who would eat a whole fried egg in one bite. But it won't be easy." (133)



(Alberta: "Your own face in the mirror is better company than a man who would eat a whole fried egg in one bite. But it won't be easy" )

What Alberta is really saying is that Deedee is going to be lonely with or without her husband because he is never home and she knows that he has betrayed her. Deedee would be better off being lonely without letting her husband get the best of her. Alberta is able to help Deedee come to terms with her feelings, moving them from the unconscious to the conscious mind.

According to Freud, insight is one of the important steps of psychoanalytic therapy. "Insight is being aware of the source of the emotion,

of the original traumatic event.” (134) In the TV Review of The Laundromat in the New York Times, O’Connor writes;

“Deedee is in panic about her husband’s increasing indifference. ‘He makes me feel like I’m a TV set,’ she cries, ‘and he’s changed the channels.’” (135 )

These lines are not included in the original play, but on the television version of the play Deedee is describing how the affair made her feel. Expressing the feelings associated with the affair is a form of insight. As Alberta is loading up her laundry basket she says;

“Maybe, in a few months or next year sometime, I’ll be able to give these away. They’re nice things” (136).

Since Alberta has finally come to terms with her husband Herbs death she feels that she finally will be able to move on and take the final steps in mourning for her husband. This final step of acceptance is a key step to being able to cope with life and its obstacles.

Norman also explores the role of familial deficiencies in Third and Oak, but approaches these problems in a different way. Deedee is having marital problems, and Alberta is dealing with her’ husband’s death.

At the beginning of the play neither woman wants to be helped in her plight, but as the play progresses the two end up helping each other come to terms with the truth. Through their laundry mat talk Alberta and Deedee help each other admit to their problems, and pull each other out of a state of denial. Deedee helps Alberta realize that although her husband is dead, yet it does not mean that she has to give up the things they did together, that her life will not go on if she accepts Herb’s death and moves on.

Alberta helps Deedee out of the fog of denial about her husband’s affair. Deedee finally admits to herself that her husband is having an affair and says that she “called the bowling alley and asked for him and the

bartender said, Is This Pasty ? He's on his way, honey? I hope he falls in the sewer." (137) Although Alberta helps Deedee see her problems she is not willing to help her through them, and Deedee continues to suffer through her marriage.

The two women are able to overcome their denial and come to terms with despair and loneliness. Alberta and Deedee were two very different women. Alberta was very refined and in her late fifties while Deedee was a mess and only twenty years old. Despite their differences the two women find something in common that brings them closer and enable them to help each other. By talking about their feelings and their obstacles with their husbands, Alberta and Deedee did something that takes years and years of therapy for others to accomplish. Alberta comes to terms with her husband Herb's death and Deedee comes to terms with her husband having an affair with another women.

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## Chapter: 4

## Answering The Unanswerable

In the work of Norman the woman suffer because a sense of power is denied them by their lack of choices regarding the way in which they can define themselves. Norman's Traveler in the Dark, The Hold Up and Sarah and Abraham presents this stuff in special ways.

Marsha Norman's Traveler in the dark presents stark truths about man's reaction in the face of mystery and powerlessness. It also explores how our sense of loss can transform us into "inhuman" monsters, willing to annihilate those around us in an effort to diffuse or escape the unbearable pain of living in the world.

Marsha Norman's The Hold Up (1983) is an inspiring play. Norman's use of American mythology, the development of symbolic characters, and conscientious manipulation of history makes the play atypical of her work.

In her play Sarah and Abraham, (1992) Marsha Norman depicts a group of actors who have come together as a company to improvise and play the biblical story of Sarah and Abraham. Weaving the personal lives of these actors and actresses into the imagined lives of Sarah and Abraham, Norman gives a mythic resonance to the contemporary counterparts.

In short, with Norman the women have more firmly established identities and move toward more fully integrated selves. Whether they may be Mavis, Sarah or Lily they are now answering the unanswerable.

## 4.1 TRAVELER IN THE DARK

### THE SECOND BURIAL

Marsha Norman's Traveler in the dark presents stark truths about man's reaction in the face of mystery and powerlessness. It also explores how our sense of loss can transform us into "inhuman" (1) monsters, willing to annihilate those around us in an effort to diffuse or escape the unbearable pain of living in the world. In part, this truth seems to return Norman to one of her earliest attempts at writing, a prizewinning high school essay, pursuing the most persistent themes in her work : "Why Do Good Men Suffer?" However, Norman's greatest achievement in this play is the depiction of the psychology of the narcissist and the protagonist's struggle to come to terms with his grief and guilt over his dead mother.

In the play, the traveler's tension resides in Sam's particularly modern crisis of faith: his existential loss of faith in God, Science, and his own intellectual powers. After losing his mother as a child, Sam loses his Christian faith. Even after having preached soul- saving sermons, Sam feels God has betrayed him and he turns to science, medicine, and an unflagging faith in his "mind" to bolster him in the world. (2) However, despite his international reputation as a miracle-working surgeon, he is unable to save his long-time nurse and childhood sweetheart Mavis. Her death destroys Sam's faith in medicine and himself:

"I believed in everything. I even believed in you – or love, I guess. Didn't I? Yes. And in God, and fairy tales, and medicine and the power of my own mind and none of it works!" (3)

In Traveler in the dark, Sam's confusion and pain are translated into vengeful attacks on his wife Glory, whom he threatens to leave, his son Stephen, whom he swears he will take with him; and his father, who decides

to follow Sam's career in the newspapers, but does not want to see him anymore.

Sam suffers from existential anguish. Even faith can not save him. Existence, according to Sam, is "absolute submission to accident, to the arbitrary assignment of unbearable pain, and the everyday occurrence of meaningless death." (4) The loss of his companion, nurse, and childhood sweetheart Mavis, whose funeral Sam has traveled home to attend, engenders in Sam a devastating and bitter existential emptiness. However, when Sam realizes that he is driving away everyone who cares for him, he confronts his own isolation and powerlessness that he can accept, on faith, the mystery and glory of life on the planet. "I have nothing for you," (5) Sam hands Stephen the geode that his mother has loved and refused to crack open, telling him "it's ...your mystery now". (6) Sam's crisis of faith finds resolution in his acceptance of his human condition as a "traveler in the dark". (7)

However, as Sam's crisis of faith moves toward resolution, he is plagued by guilt, deeply narcissistic, ensnared in a bitter oedipal rivalry with his father. Freud's investigations into narcissism are useful for understanding Sam's complex pathology and the tension that gives depth and realism to Norman's Travelers in the dark.

Marsha Norman describes the play's protagonist, Sam, a world famous surgeon, as "a brilliant loner.... [and] preoccupied, impatient, and condescending". (8) Although a brilliant surgeon, Sam is an arrogant and selfish man, he takes sadistic pleasure in psychologically torturing his wife, Glory, and his son, Stephen. Sam's degradation of his wife and his insistence on treating his twelve-year-old-son, as an adult regardless of the damage it might do to him, appear at first to be the result of the grief he feels over the death of his long-time nurse and childhood sweetheart, Mavis. In fact, Sam exhibits many of the traits that Freud has identified in the mourner, including "a profoundly painful dejection, abrogation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, [and] inhibition of all activity". (9)

Sam grieves for Mavis as much as he does for his mother; Mavis's death triggers Sam's unresolved feelings over the death of his mother. Both Sam's nostalgia for his mother and his bitterness toward her can



be explained as elements of his grief. In "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud refers to the ambivalence that the bereaved feels toward the lost love object.(10) According to Freud, the love object is at once highly valued, yet, as the object cathexis and reality testing gradually takes place, the object becomes devalued, and is eventually rejected as no longer belonging to reality. (11)

At one point, Sam describes his mother using images taken wholly from fairy tales; she is, in Sam's memory, "the gingerbread lady," with "curly red hair and shiny round eyes and big checked apron. Fat pink fingers, a sweet vanilla smell, and all the time in the world" (12). However, despite these rosy memories of her, Sam's bitterness toward his mother emerges in his interpretation of Humpty Dumpty, in which he is cast as Humpty Dumpty. In Sam's reading of the nursery rhyme, as Humpty Dumpty he is betrayed by his mother, falls off the wall, and can not put himself back together again. When Stephen asks how Humpty Dumpty got on the wall, Sam replies," His ...mother...laid him there" (13).

Further, Sam suggests that Humpty Dumpty's mother deceived him when she told him that he was a man: "She told him he was a man. See?" (14). In fact, Sam seems especially bitter because he feels that his mother led him to believe that he, too, was a man, and therefore worthy of her affection and attention. Her death is a betrayal in Sam's eyes and both metaphorically and literally deprives Sam of his mother's affection. Moreover, her death leads him to reject the fairy tales and magic he has shared with her, it's his mother who sets him up for his current crisis of faith.

Sam's unresolved feelings of guilt and excessive grief border on psychosis. Sam is hardly aware that he is grieving for more than his friend, and this lack of awareness and unconscious grief suggest a more profound pathology. For example, he expresses extreme dissatisfaction with himself on a moral level that also suggests melancholia". (15) Freud writes that;

"the melancholic displays something which is lacking in grief – an extraordinary fall in his self-esteem, an impoverishment of his ego on a grand

scale...In melancholia. It is the ego itself  
[which becomes poor and empty ]". (16)

Moreover, according to Freud, the melancholiac represents himself as "worthless, incapable of any effort, and morally despicable" and extends his self-abasement back over the past (17). In melancholia, then, Sam's tremendous ego has a longer way to fall than most, since he feels responsible for the death of Mavis and his mother.

However, despite his grief, borderline melancholia, and his self-criticism, Sam persistently overestimates his own ego. According to Freud, the narcissist, like the infant, believes that "he is really to be the centre and heart of creation, 'His Majesty, the Baby'". (18) The narcissist directs libidinal energies onto the ego, choosing the self as love object rather than someone or something outside the self. Freud's theory of narcissism turns on the notion that human beings possess an inherent narcissism and that the choice to love something or someone other than oneself involves an object choice and a subsequent redirecting of one's libidinal energies away from the self and toward an outside object choice. Norman's infantile protagonist frequently displays traits characteristic of narcissism. Longing to be at the centre of everything, when his mother dies, he acts "like it happened to me instead of her. I wouldn't eat. I broke things". (19) Similarly, when Mavis dies, he attempts to break up his marriage and destroy all illusions for his child, caring little for their feelings or how much he might hurt them. (20) In addition, his reaction in both cases also suggests that he believes he should be beyond the touch of death.

Sam's narcissism also surfaces in frequent biblical allusions. For example, the comparisons between Sam and the arrogant, anthropologist-novelist God of his imagination; this is the God who, according to Sam, "sets it up, we live through it, and He writes it down. What we think of as life, Stephen, is just God gathering material for another book". (21) Sam had believed that his mother was his and is bitter when he learns that, according to his father, she belonged to God. (22) Sam projects his own arrogance and malevolence onto God when he describes him as "bored" and "lonely":

“He’s lonely, Stephen. He sits and waits for someone to notice Him, and then, when they don’t, or when they don’t notice Him enough, well, He plays His little tricks. He gives His little tests”. (23)

In reality, however it is Sam who is bored and lonely, Sam whose excessive grief screams for attention, and finally, it is Sam who “plays his little tricks” when he isn’t noticed enough. Sam goes on to compare himself with Job, the sufferer who finally triumphs over God, showing God where he had sinned: “and it was man”. (24) Similarly, when God fails Sam as a youth, Sam finds Sam. Sam’s analogies with God and Job belie his belief in himself as a “supreme being”. (25)

Sam’s overestimation of his ego can be seen in the allusions to the fairy tales. In his version of the story of Sleeping Beauty, the King, according to Sam, “just forgot” about the evil thirteenth fairy- death- and when his kingdom awakens after a hundred- year – long sleep, “some prince is upstairs kissing his daughter”. (26) This story and Sam’s interpretation align Sam and the king. Like the king, Sam attributes his own carelessness and thoughtlessness to a bad memory and then to repression: “He forgot because he didn’t want to remember!” (27). Fairy tales provide the text for Sam’s interpretation of his marriage as well as his own fate. Sam borrows from the story of the frog and the prince, which he reinvents to describe his perceptions of his marriage: “The princess got old and the frog croaked”. (28) Sam depicts the narcissistic child, “His Majesty the Baby,” who is not to be touched by “illness, death, renunciation of pleasure, restrictions on his own will”. (29) His narcissism grows out of having been “abandoned” by his mother’s death, and his response to being rejected a second time, by Mavis, is to act just like a child. He wants to leave his wife, Glory, before she has a chance to reject and abandon him as his mother and Mavis have. Wanting a divorce, Sam believes that “it just doesn’t make sense, this marriage. It never has. Ask your mother.” (30)

According to Freud, a narcissist will “fulfill those dreams and wishes of his parents which they never carried out, to become a great man and a hero in his father’s stead, or to marry a prince as a tardy compensation to the mother”. (31) Sam perceives himself as having fulfilled the dream to save lives more fully than his father. As a surgeon, Sam is able to extend his patients’ lives, even though, as he recognizes, he “can’t save lives... Death always wins”. (32)

Sam’s arrogance and narcissism are also apparent in his attitudes toward those around him. He admits that he feels he is better than the other hometown folks. (33) Moreover, Sam’s love object Mavis embodies the intellect and the self-confidence that Sam admires in himself; who is, in Sam’s words, “as smart as they come” (34) and “ someone exactly like me” (35) . Similarly, Sam believes that he would have been good for Mavis as well. Mavis settled for a relationship with Sam’s father since she couldn’t have Sam. He is probably right, for, as Glory says, Mavis “worshiped” him. (36) Finally, Sam’s feelings of superiority are also apparent when Sam tells his father, Everett, that he “didn’t deserve” or love his mother. (37) The suggestion is, according to Sam’s pathology, that Sam might have been better for her, that he might have provided her with a shining prince. Ultimately, Sam wants Everett to leave his “Mother’s house,” to leave him there, alone with her garden, as if he alone is worthy of her. (38)

Finally, as a narcissist, Sam perceives himself as almighty and believes that he possesses, or can possess, the power to create or destroy his family: “I thought I could save Mavis. I thought I could protect you. I can’t do any of those things. I don’t know what I can do”. (39) Glory finally calls Sam out on his desire to be almighty. When he suggests that he can “save them,” Glory responds with, “I don’t need you to save me!... I’ve already got a God, Sam” . (40) The realization that Sam is not all powerful, that he can be defeated by the powers of death, strikes a crushing blow to his ego.

In fact, Sam finds that death is the ultimate threat to his own ego (ego-ideal). Confronted by death and his inability to surmount it, Sam faces a crisis unlike any he has faced before. As he says; “Other people die, Glory – not me, not my family, not my friend” (41 ) According to Freud;

“ .. at the weakest point of all in the narcissistic pattern, security is achieved by fleeing to the child. Parental love, which is so touching and at bottom so childish, is nothing but parental narcissism born again, and, transformed though it be into object- love, it reveals its former character infallibly . ” (42)

According to Freudian theory, the egoist and narcissistic Sam retreats from death by transferring his own narcissism onto his child, Stephen, and what appears to be his only tenderness and unselfish emotion and attachment to Stephen is, in fact, Sam's own narcissism.

Sam's deplorable treatment of his family can be explained in part by the threat to his ego posed by his mother's death, and the bitter rivalry between him and his father. The root cause of this rivalry in the Oedipal dynamics. The death of Sam's mother is tied up with the loss of Mavis, as both have been objects of Sam's affection.

At the same time Sam's ambivalence towards his mother demonstrates that he has experienced her death as a rejection of him, yet he struggles to overcome her loss. Sam believes that he is better suited than his father for caring and loving both Mavis and his mother. This rivalry with his father does not diminish despite his mother's death. According to Sam, if his mother hadn't died, he would have been the "biggest momma's boy you ever saw." (43) He displays his jealous and bitterness toward his father for not having loved his mother the way he, Sam would have. Sam tells Everett that he "didn't deserve her" or love her. (44)

Similarly, Sam's father shares a special relationship with Mavis, one based on a respect for mystery and magic, a respect that Sam does not share. He is jealous of his father's close relationship with Mavis. When Glory states that Mavis loves Josie Barnett, Sam jealously retorts, "Mavis loved dad". (45) Sam's insistence on pointing out Mavis' love for his father belies an undue interest in her choice of her love object. As Mavis stands in the position of symbolic substitute for his dead mother, Mavis' love for his father rekindles

in him an Oedipal rivalry, for the mother's affections. For example, Sam flatly denies that he and Mavis are involved- much to the chagrin of his father. He tells Glory that he married her "to spite [his] father". (46)

During the tension between father and son, Sam seems trapped in a pre-Oedipal stage, in which he is less interested in battling with the father than in merging completely with the mother, in identifying with her completely, perhaps as a means of restoring his childhood image of himself. But his wife refuses to allow him to wallow in total mother identification, although, in part, Sam recants later, he tells Glory that he married her "to spite [his] father" (47)

While Sam does not attend his friend's funeral, he presides over the "other funeral" (48) his mother's funeral for. In order to absolve himself of the guilt he feels for her death, Sam must find an object that is suitable as her substitution. As a female friend completely devoted to him, Mavis resembles very closely the mother that Sam lost at such an early age. Like his mother, Mavis "worshiped him" and was always there for him.(49)

The close identification in Sam's mind between Mavis and his mother allows Sam to find forgiveness through Mavis for his mother's death as well. Moreover, the decision not to cut the geode open simultaneously allows Sam to reverse his decision to operate on Mavis and preserves the symbol of his mother. Sam is highly protective of the geode as an object (symbol) that, first, belonged to his mother and is closely associated with her, and second, is a symbol whose meaning must not be investigated.

With the discovery of the geode, an apt symbol of the mother, Sam is able to admit his weakness, his human fallibility. With the restoration of the garden and the stone Mother Goose, and the preservation of the geode, Sam's mother is symbolically restored and his grief abates.

Freud states that once the narcissist has been "partially freed from his repressions, we are frequently confronted by the unintended result that he withdraws from further treatment in order to choose a love object, hoping that life with the beloved person[s] will complete his recovery". (50) Sam is able, then, to redirect his feelings/energy toward things outside of himself, such as his wife, son, and father.

Traveler in the dark is a play that presents itself as a philosophical and theological debate, yet it is driven by deeper psychological conflicts. Norman presents us with a portrait of a narcissistic character, searching desperately for symbols that will restore his beloved mother. The realism with which Norman paints this subtle psychological portrait moves the play beyond the merely philosophical into a personal realm. Sam's philosophical debate, and his deeper psychological dilemmas resonate for us on a personal level. Because Sam accepts that he will continue in the dark, his philosophical crisis is resolved. Similarly, Sam prefers to continue in the dark created by symbols of his mother, rather than face the truth of her death. Like Sam, if we look at all, we look only with reluctance into the dark through which we must travel.

Norman seems to convey that like Sam, all of us are reluctant to step into the strange dark, but if one takes courage and travels through the dark then he is bound to find light. Every cloud has a silver lining!

## 4.2 THE HOLD UP

### VISION OF TIME

Marsha Norman's The Hold Up (1983) is an inspiring play. Norman's use of American mythology, the development of symbolic characters, and conscientious manipulation of history makes the play atypical of her work. The play manages to blend these ingredients to form a vision of the future. The play is a historical framework that dominates, its characters either adhere to history or attempt to break free from the shackles. The force of history is omnipresent, shaping lives, the country, the world, and the play.

The Hold Up takes place in New Mexico in the fall of 1914, "miles from nowhere and long past Sundown". (51) Two brothers, Henry and Archie Tucker, are working with a wheat-threshing crew, The Outlaw, "a worn, grizzled desperado," (52) appears at the cookshack looking for food and to meet Lily, his estranged girlfriend of twenty years. Henry, a self-styled expert on the Old west, challenges the Outlaw to reveal his name, leading to a fatal gun fight which kills him. After burning Henry, the Outlaw attempts suicide with an overdose of morphine, but he is nursed back to life by Lily and Archie. The play concludes with Archie going off to seek his fate and Lily and the Outlaw looking forward to their approaching marriage.

Norman tries to revive the tradition of the Western holdup play, which Rudolf Erben defines as "obviously contrived and conducive more to thought and talk than action and plot." (53) By The Hold Up, Erben means stagnation or entrapment rather than robbery at gunpoint. Norman makes use of symbolism, allowing the historical components of time, place, and mythological treatment of character, to remain at the forefront. She is precise in temporal specifications, either in stage directions or in dialogue: "Some Archduke Somebody-or-other got killed and it's all about to blow up!" (54) Ofcourse, it is the outbreak of World War I to which Archie refers and the global impact of the war is immediately felt, even "miles from nowhere" (55) in New Mexico. Although the script seems indifferent to the impending danger of the war – there are no extended discussions about either the glory or the horror of war, nor even the specific causes that led to the outbreak of



hostilities – Norman wants World War I to figure prominently in The Hold Up. Significantly, the play concludes with Archie's departure to the "faint strains of some World War I song". (56)

The fact that a war will take place in 1914 is of great importance as device whereby Norman can examine the advance of civilization and the effect of progress. Indeed, it is progress that distinguishes 1914 from other eras of the past, and historians paint a dynamic portrait of it as a year of milestone advances in science, technology, and business. Page Smith's America Enters the World, for example, "highlights the "explosion of technology" (57) that characterizes the first decade of the twentieth century. Norman does not ignore these facts: e.g; Henry and Archie's wheat-threshing crew owns a new separator that "threshes ten times as much wheat as the old one in half the time" and It is also through Archie that we learn that in 1914, humanity has more powerful and deadly means to wage combats: "They're gonna fly airplanes in this war, Henry!" (58)

Lily, the businesswoman from the enterprising East, signals the steady march of progress just by her arrival: she "rushes onstage, wearing a Barney Oldfield-type duster," (59) having just parked her buick. The presence of an automobile in the uncivilized New Mexican "scrub country" (60) is shocking to the others, especially Archie, who gasps, "Did you really come all the way out here in a car?" (61)

As the embodiment of progress, Lily is delighted by the advancement of civilization, especially since it has made her rich. She describes her hotel business in terms of the new inventions and improvements found in it: "There's actually trees growing in barrels all along that front hall. Oh....and Roy Luther hooked me up a waterfall, inside the dining room. And I'm about ready to go order another automobile....," (62) and she brags about the telephone she has added for all the "fancy Eastern folks coming through". (63) Although the Outlaw suggests that at one time Lily was a stereotypical saloon gal, progressive 1914 has made her an entrepreneur: "Do you know what year this is? I'm not a whore. It's not a whorehouse. It's a hotel now and I own it." (64)

However, not every character shares Lily's enthusiasm, for the evolution of civilization. Indeed, it is their responses to this evolution and to

the future that define each character, a typical Norman device, according to Leslie Kane, who argues that “for Norman the issues of past [and] future... are inextricably linked to how a person perceives herself” (65). Archie Tucker, seventeen and wide-eyed, is at first impressed with the progress made in 1914, but from an immature perspective. To Archie, World War I means a chance for him and Henry to save the world:

Archie: ...it's all about to blow up!

Henry: What is?

Archie: The world, Henry! Unless we  
get there in time! (66)

Archie is aware that airplanes will forever change the nature of war, but he fails to recognize the ominous ramifications of that change. Instead, he glorifies a war fought in the skies as an exciting adventure: “You’d like that, zoomin’ around in the sky. You could be the Outlaw of the Air, Henry!” (67) Here Norman may be guilty of forcing a World War II mentality on Archie; American response to the outbreak of World War I was generally “horror and incredulity” (68). Still, it is Archie’s idealism that is the point, an idealism further exemplified by his reaction to Lily’s Buick. However Archie loses his boyish idealism for progress when his brother is gunned down by the outlaw. The post- Henry Archie is less enthusiastic about the war and indifferent to his possible role in it: “The war could need me, I guess,” (69) and he no longer equates the development of the airplane solely with warfare. The mature Archie clearly wants more than some fictitious military achievement, as he recognizes that his isolation from civilization has been stifling and his perspective childlike. He now wants to make contact with “crowds... things, people, cars...,” (70) for he knows he cannot save the world daydreaming in New Mexico.

In addition, the Outlaw’s deadly gun has shown Archie the terrible price that society pays when warfare progresses and when he asks Lily, “Do you believe there’s airplanes?” (71) his unstated query is, “Do you believe there’s airplanes that can kill so many so swiftly?” (72)



(Archie: “Do you believe there’s airplanes?”)

Archie realizes that the bullet that ends his brother’s life is to be multiplied a thousand fold by progress and because “some Archduke Somebody –or-other got killed.” (73) Contrary to Archie, Henry understands an evolving civilization and as a result chooses not to accept the realities of the present. Instead, the coarse and unlikable Henry absorbs himself in the study of the uncivilized Old West, the tales of gunfights and saloons where the heroes were villains like the Sundance Kid. The appearance of the Outlaw is therefore of particular interest to Henry, for the old gunslinger represents the living embodiment of a past he relishes and mythologizes. As Archie says, “Henry believes in outlaws,” (74) a fact that Norman parallels with Archie’s religious convictions to show how deep a believer each brother is:

Archie: That stuff is made up,

Henry ....

Henry: 'Bout like the Bible, I guess.

Archie: The Bible is the truth. (75)

One can surmise that the Old West is for Henry what the Bible is for Archie, and neither would relish thinking about his life without his sacred beliefs. Even more resistant to the future is the Outlaw himself, a man mired in the past. The Outlaw wants no part of the march of history and the advancement of civilization that inevitably accompanies it. He is uneasy with Lily's Buick for two reasons: He thinks it forward for a lady to drive a car, and it's not a horse. The Outlaw dreams of traveling to Bolivia, which he believes he'd prefer even to the isolation of the New Mexico he sees as being threatened by civilization: "We'll have a wonderful time [ in Bolivia] and we won't think about... all the people like you back here building houses and running for mayor" (76). When Henry tries up Archie and plans to ride off with the outlaw, the desperado voices his disgust with modern life:

Nobody I know ever tied up his brother... I mean, we got rules out here for this sort of thing, or used to. Is this how people do now? Cause if it is, I don't want any part of it. I'm goin' right back where I been and I'm stayin' put this time. I mean, you drop out of sight for a little while and look what we got for boys now. And you're drivin' a car and talkin' hard, girl. (77)

The Outlaw is skeptical of the future, even at the conclusion of the play, when he is to marry Lily and live on her farm: "I'm glad I'm not gonna be there for the future," (78) he tells Archie just before he departs with his betrothed.

If The Hold Up defines the characters in relation to the future, then it also places them in relation to the past, and specifically within a mythological framework. Each character either symbolizes a mythological icon himself, or defines his existence in terms of the mythology of the Old West. The most obvious mythological figure is the Outlaw, a man who embodies the Old West in appearance as well as attitude towards civilization and the future. The Outlaw, resistant to give his rightful name (Tom McCarty) , tries to say he's any number of famous bandits, although Henry, a student of the Old West, is not fooled:

Henry: You tell me who you are!

Outlaw (Grinning): Kilpatrick.

Henry: Dead.

Outlaw: Sundance.

Henry: Bolivia

Outlaw (Laughing, mocking): Nope.

Dead. I'm Billy the Kid. I'm Jesse  
James. (79)

By defining himself as Billy the Kid and Jesse James, and by using their names almost simultaneously as if he were both at once, the Outlaw proves himself to be a sort of a "Platonic Outlaw," (80) a man who embodies all the gunslingers of Old West lore and thus a mythic figure himself. Norman is careful, however, not to make the Outlaw completely a legendary figure (which would make her characters types rather than flesh-and-blood people). He is also a man with very human faults and frailties, such as his resistance to change.

There is no question as to where Henry fits in relation to the Old West and to the Outlaw. Henry is a true believer whose interest in the Outlaw stems from his concern that the aging gunslinger is not "the real thing" (81) (that is, a mythological figure). At first Henry mocks the Outlaw as "just some old prospector lost track of the mother lode," (82) but soon he comes around to believe that maybe the desperado is in fact a relic of a bygone age. Henry becomes so taken with the Outlaw as an embodiment of the past that he

attempts to join his nonexistent gang: “He needs somebody to ride with him and I’m it!” (83). Finally, however, Henry despairs because he does not know who the Outlaw really is or what he may represent: “You tell me who you are,” (84) he challenges the Outlaw just before the gunfight that takes his life. By challenging the Outlaw, Henry is challenging the myth of the Old West, and because he thinks the Outlaw may not be the real thing – that is, the myth may be meaningless. Thus, the deadly gunfight, brought about by his taunting of the Outlaw, is purposefully staged by Henry so that he may die:

Henry: Coward! Coward!

Outlaw (Turns around): Why does it  
have to be you? Why couldn’t it  
be somebody I --

Henry: What are you waiting for,  
coward?

Outlaw: You’re asking me to kill you,  
boy. (85)

His death a few moments later is no accident. It is a suicide brought about by the existential angst that accompanies a shattering of belief. Ironically, the act of a gunfight confirms the Old myth of the West, as the Outlaw reaffirms his position as a mythological icon.

Henry’s death is significant, for it creates a feeling of remorse in the Outlaw that, in keeping with Norman’s development of his character, is explainable on both human and mythological levels. He reveals himself as Tom McCarty, a man he claims to have “buried ... alive,” (86) which demonstrates his conscious effort to bury his past and to put to rest the myth that he represents, a myth as old and worn out as he is.

Despite all attempts of self-destruction, the Outlaw is “still alive”. (87) and he expresses dismay that no one has attempted to do him in: “Yes sir... things are pretty bad when you can’t count on somebody else to kill you”. (88) The Outlaw implies that he is being kept alive despite his obvious death wish; as he remarks over Henry’s deadbody, “You got something I want, Henry.” (89) In this context, the Outlaw can be understood as Norman’s

mouthpiece, arguing that the myth cannot and should not be put to rest despite the fast-paced, changing world of 1914.

In an attempt to finish himself off, the Outlaw takes an overdose of morphine and it is up to Archie and Lily, the two characters for whom the future is eagerly anticipated, to keep him alive. Norman dramatizes the battle between the past and the present. If the Outlaw has his way – death – then the past will cease to be of use to the present and the future is unknown. The Outlaw appears on the brink of death several times during the struggle, demonstrating that his death wish is nothing more than bravado, for he is quick to repent when he fears that he may actually perish: “ I don’t want to die. Don’t let me die...”. (90) However, the morphine proves powerful and he passes in and out of consciousness, waking sporadically to find himself completely enmeshed in the spirit of the Old West: “Keep firing... one at a time... slips through. Take Teapot North. (Now slumping as quickly as he awoke before) Brakeman...shoulda killed the brakeman”.(91)

When he finally regains full consciousness, the Outlaw is disoriented but alive and a changed man. He now grudgingly accepts the future by agreeing to marry Lily and live on a farm, although he characteristically complains about it. Archie, too, is a changed man; indeed, he sounds more like the Outlaw of old complaining about the lack of discipline in uncivilized New Mexico:

" We're far away from everything, everybody acts like there's no rule at all and anybody can just do whatever they like – well they can't. Or if they can, I don't have to sit here and watch them, not anymore. I've got my own ideas about how people should live and this ain't it. No sir. " (92)

The newly liberated Archie then burns “the newspaper articles, wanted posters and other bits of evidence of the Outlaw’s exploits,” (93) thus destroying some of McCarty’s personal belongings. Archie, however, refuses

to burn the Outlaw's satchel, an act that symbolically preserves the past. The myth of the Old West has been retained into the present, symbolized by the satchel that McCarty passes to Archie, a gesture demonstrating a past which finds its way into the future. "I'm gonna need something like this," (94) says Archie, a remark that underscores Norman's conviction that an appreciation for and an understanding of the past- even if that past is glorified as myth – is vital in shaping the future of her characters and, by extension, the future of the country.

At the conclusion of the play, Archie and the outlaw, the two characters who were most at odds concerning the past, present, and future, find common philosophical ground. The Outlaw now understands the present, Archie the past, and both accept the future after a maturation process involving death (the Outlaw's near-brush with mortality; Archie's witnessing of Henry's murder). Norman highlights their meeting of the minds through a technique whereby the Outlaw relates, almost verbatim, and takes as his own, a story Archie has told him about being nicknamed "Doc." (95) While they still debate the nature of the human condition, their perspectives have radically changed; the Outlaw states his case without regard to the past, and Archie without regard to the present:

Outlaw: This is how things are...here.

Archie: (Very Strong): Were...here.

Outlaw: (Stronger still): Are!

Everywhere!

Archie: No! Not anymore. Not  
everywhere! (96)

Both the outlaw and Archie finally accept the reality of life, its progress, change and future development.

Norman also tinkers with theatrical spectacle when she has Lily and Archie emerging from the cookshack in the morning light after spending the entire night together. The dawn of a new era is ushered in with an appropriate light cue as Archie loses his innocence and virginity, and Lily performs her gender –specific roles as mother figure and lover. But Norman



makes Lily much more than the embodiment of all traditional/symbolic female functions. Unlike Archie and the Outlaw, Lily has no need for a maturation process in order to accept the present. It is quite significant that when she is introduced, Norman specifies that her costume incorporate elements of both the civilized East and the uncivilized West, both the promise of the future and the truth of the past: "It all looks very expensive, but is clearly Western and meant for hard use." (97)

Here, clothes clearly make the woman, for Lily embodies the perfect balance of past and present. Although her reaction to the future is one of delight, she possesses a keen grasp of realism, which forces her to be cautious: "I don't know what's going to happen in the morning," (98) she characteristically remarks. While she is very much a woman of the past – her beloved Outlaw – is a sorely missing element from her life: "I waited for you to come back, you know. I kept eggs in the house for two years for you"(99). Lily is modern enough to run a hotel and old – fashioned enough to play the role of a coquettish female in order to please her man: "A girl needs to hear a man talk a little"(100). Lily is, ofcourse an atypical hero in Norman's mythological/historical setting, but she is also the only character (significantly the only female character in the play) who is not restricted either by archaic or hopelessly idealistic conceptions of time. Consequently, she is the agent who links the past and the present and is therefore responsible for "linking" (101) the minds of the Outlaw and Archie; it is through Lily (specifically through her sexuality, as her symbolically -laden night with Archie demonstrates) that these men are able to come to an agreement to accept the future.

For her modern audience, Marsha Norman may have more compelling purpose, and this is where her use of mythological and factual history, as well as genre, may be at its craftiest. The frontier myth, the Wild West myth, the western holdup play, and the general worldwide *zeitgeist* (102) at the onset of World War I all reveal a world at a crossroads. The myths show a new and unique America developing out of a discarded European past (this is the part of Turner's theory that caused such dissent among academics). The Western holdup play, as defined by Rudolf Erben, "presents the American West in dramatic tension, between past and present" (103).

Turner himself labeled the frontier as “the meeting point between savagery and civilization” (104). The world in 1914 “had reached one of those dramatic and essentially incomprehensible turning points,” (105) as well as a belief “that a new and better age was dawning” (106).

Norman seizes upon these inherently dramatic situations and applies them to the modern day with the hope that a perceptive audience will comprehend the implied link between past and present. She takes her source materials – the legends of great men on the frontier, in business , and on the battlefield – and twists them to conform to our contemporary notions of how the world really works. The past, even a mythological past, becomes a respected advisor, not a hindrance to be dismissed in the name of progress, and women become active as nurturers and nation-builders. And, as Lily proves, a man need not be present as a guiding force in order for a woman to make her mark in the world and to be a harbinger of progress in the untamed West. We accept these changes in our present, and this acceptance gives Norman license, essentially, to rewrite the past.

In The Hold Up Marsha Norman argues for a return to the “good old days” (107) before nuclear bombs and unchecked epidemics. The contagious excitement of likable characters such as Lily and Archie indicates that she genuinely favors the advances of an evolving civilization, be they scientific , technological, artistic, or military. But Norman seems to take Turner’s warning to heart – that the frontier supported democracy “with all of its good and with all of its evil elements. “ (108)

Norman’s play begs for prudence on the part of the civilization (that is, the new democracy) that benefits from such “good” (109) advances. It is this prudence that will allow us the intelligence to be as concerned with the present and the future. (110) It is only when we create a secure present that we can bravely face the fact that we “don’t know what’s going to happen in the morning.” (111)

### 4.3 SARAH AND ABRAHAM

#### MARRIAGE COMING APART

“ Man endures pain as an undeserved punishment; woman accepts it as a natural heritage.”

- Author unknown

In her play Sarah and Abraham, (1992) Marsha Norman depicts a group of actors who have come together as a company to improvise and play the biblical story of Sarah and Abraham. Weaving the personal lives of these actors and actresses into the imagined lives of Sarah and Abraham, Norman gives a mythic resonance to the contemporary counterparts.

The play is based on a traditional triangle in which Sarah/Kitty and Hagar/Monica fight over the protagonist Abraham/Cliff. Norman has redefined the biblical myth giving a new dimension and understanding of Woman. Norman's Sarah and Abraham is about “the disintegration of a marriage due to commercial factors.” (112) Norman the eldest of the four children was brought up in a strict fundamentalist household in which church attendance was mandatory and the Bible was read everyday.

The biblical writers made Abraham the Patriarchal centre of the tale; Norman represents the original myth giving significance to women's roles. In her treatment she does not neglect the Hagar figure, but her emphasis is on reclaiming Sarah as contemporary feminist- with a difference.<sup>1</sup>

For Norman, the play is an attempt to update feminist history, by rewriting and righting – Sarah's story, and at the same time an opportunity to use the development and subsequent success of the play-within-a-play as a metaphor for fame and commercial success. Norman has made it clear in the drama that more real strength comes from the pagan, moon-worshipping Sarah/Kitty than from the newly emerging, sun-worshipping Abraham/Cliff <sup>2</sup>.

Virginia Mason, a scholar from the University of Wisconsin, joins the group to contribute her knowledge to rehearsals and to create a script out of the improvisations of the troupe. Her name is suggestive both of virginity (Virginia) – she is in a sense the novice in the group but also a source of wisdom- and of building (Mason) – she is helping to construct a new fiction that is built on what may be hidden in the biblical tale. That she is drawn into the play as actress/Scribe gives another feminist dimension to Norman's dramatization of the biblical tale.

Virginia's research evokes biblical scholarship on Sarah as a high-priest of "the old Mesopotamia Moon Worship"(113), which was apparently prevalent in the society that is being portrayed in Genesis.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the Jewish distrust of the moon, and its forbidden air, the moon has remained an important idea in Western culture. The Jewish calendar is a lunar one, the first of every month being the day of the new moon, most Gregorian or solar calendars depict the moon and its phases, and farmers today depend on the moon to determine harvest times. By endowing her "scribe" with an awareness of the power of such moon worship, which the Bible takes such pains to suppress,<sup>4</sup> Marsha Norman plays upon these natural associations with the moon and reworks its image in her play, using its positive connotations, which have survived the biblical negativity. The moon, it would seem, has something to teach, something to offer us.<sup>5</sup>

Cliff's associations with the sun and Kitty's with the moon begin to take shape with the first improvisations on the biblical story. As Cliff worries about the who and where he is, Kitty encourages relaxation: "Just rest, Cliff. It's the first time you've been in the shade all day."(114) She, quips, diagnosing his problem as a sun worshiper from the very start. Cliff's efforts to understand Abraham's movement to a new land in terms of a move to California offer further amusing definition of him as a sun worshiper. Kitty sees this move to the "coast" as one in which he can buy a new wife, suggesting in her improvisation the subtext of their relationship and her desires: "I want our life to stay the way it is". (115)

As they continue to work on the play-within-the-play, the text develops not only in terms of God's calling of Abraham to a new land and new role as patriarch, but also in terms of the subtext of Kitty and Cliff's power

struggle. Feeling uncomfortable with his written script, Cliff improvises his own inner conflicts while commenting on the writing. Speaking of Sarah's relationship with Abraham, he says;

“This is *her* town and he knows it.  
That's why He wants to get away. They  
worship her here.” (116)

Since this is Kitty's town, where she plays the leading roles, the conversation about the play is clearly about their own relationship. When Kitty/Sarah explains that “It's not her fault she's a priestess,” (117) and that the entire tribe is depending on her, Cliff's says, “if she doesn't want to be a priestess, why doesn't she quit?” (118) is met with his wife and Sarah's very real question: “Would that make him happy?” (119)

By exploring in further dialogue what happened to Sarah when she did follow Abraham to the "coast" to make him happy, Kitty begins to see the future of her own relationship with Cliff as he gets involved with Monica. The biblical tale (and its continued rehearsal) becomes a cautionary tale leading to her own decision not to follow her husband to New York.

Although in Genesis Sarah is barren, the interpretation of Genesis that Norman employs suggests that the real reason for her childlessness is that her position as moon priestess precludes childbearing (120). At this point in the play, Sarah/Kitty is still too involved with her feelings for Abraham/Cliff simply to let him go, and hence she enlists Hagar as surrogate mother. This is also the proper role of the moon priestess, who enlists another to have her child. Still, the possibility of losing Abraham to Hagar or even of relinquishing Cliff to Monica, which is Kitty's final choice, is in the air in this early scene in Sarah's exchange with the scribe.

Virginia: (looks up from her writing)

Send her away, my Lord.

Sarah: I cannot. I fear that Abraham  
would follow her.

Virginia: Then you must let him go.(121)

At this point, Sarah/Kitty can't do this, but it is what she will do. When she plays the scene out, bringing Hagar to Abraham, all of the actors are impressed with her acting. Jack exclaims, "There's not another actress in this whole country with that kind of power, Kitty" (122), and even Cliff and Monica are in awe of this "power". The power that Kitty displays as an actress, is so enmeshed with what she leans as a person, emerging from Virginia's insights about Sarah as a moon goddess. Just as Virginia and Kitty colluded earlier in appreciation of moon worship, now Monica joins them, begins to intuiting the power of Kitty/ Sarah's moon-teaching; Kitty begins to separate from Cliff, to develop her independence.

Just as Norman turns the biblical story upside down by characterizing Abraham's journey as a "descent into the patriarchal State" , (123) her portrayal of Sarah as a dominant force wholly independent of her obligations as wife and mother is in line with such revisionist texts as Harold Bloom's 'The Book of J' (which posits that the Bible was written by a Woman) and a stream of feminist readings of early religion that have appeared in most recent years.

"Once people began to worship the  
knows - the sun instead of the moon,  
trade instead of crops and farming-  
then religion came into the male  
domain." (124)

Norman argues, suggesting that Sarah's role as the High Priestess of the Mesopotamian Moon Cult was consequently written out of the accepted history and biblical texts that are known today.

The contemporary aspects of Sarah and Abraham, however, recall Wendy Wasserstein's "The Heidi Chronicles" (125) in which the title character ends the play as a single parent of an adopted child – a twist of plot that draws fire from those who reject what they see as Wasserstein's doom – and – gloom vision of a career woman ending up alone, dependent on a child for happiness.

Sarah and Abraham covers the thematic territory encompassing feminism, motherhood, religious faith and theatre. In Norman's revisionist view of the story, Sarah's pregnancy and Abraham's assumption of the patriarchal role are the turning points not only in the accepted codification of religious experience, but also in the lives of Kitty and Cliff, the married couple portraying Sarah and Abraham. Cliff's transition, e.g; from a second- fiddle, struggling actor from being "Sarah's helper" (126) into the dominant patriarchal figure. "Throughout the play", Norman explains;

“ We see Cliff struggle and begin to transform himself into this Commercial being. It was really easy for me to talk about that moment when Abraham is sitting out in the farm.” (127)

Positioning the career-versus-child conflict as a central component of the play, Norman sees in Sarah and Abraham her own attempt “ to look at the forces that work on people by gender and through history.” (128) Furthermore, Norman stresses that although the play is as much an illustration of Abraham \ Cliff's journey, yet it also about “women”, (129) defined by motherhood.

Marsha Norman has a number of ideas afloat and afoot in Sarah and Abraham The biblical story, defines Sarah as the power figure in the community, the priest of a matriarchal religion which is replaced by the traditional Hebrew one when Abraham – just a Jewish businessman until then- becomes a patriarch when he is willing to kill his son Isaac at God's command. Similarly, the actor, who has always been a minor figure alongside

his wife, attains stature through the director's demands on him, and is presumably ready for the success in the big world that his wife foregoes.

There are feminist overtones in the momentary alliance of Sarah and Hagar, or the performers who play them, against Abraham and God, or the actor and the director, but there is an antifeminist suggestion in the assumption that a woman is wisest to give up priestly power or theatrical fame to bear a child. Norman's play here seems to become something of a feminist midrash; that is, a feminist exegesis of the biblical tale of Sarah and Abraham.

Norman draws on the tradition of involving the Hebrew Bible, as the ancient Jewish sages did, in explaining, defending and justifying their own writings, their own interpretations of what may not be explicit in the Bible provide new texts. Like these ancient rabbis, Marsha Norman employs biblical language and motifs in her feminist midrash to reclaim the lunar power that the ancients have repressed.

The men in Norman's play are concerned, as were their biblical counterparts and the biblical women, with paternity. God assured Hagar that despite her suffering, her son Ishmael would be the father of a great people. Sarah, too, is assured of her son's importance in the future of the Jewish people. Elie Weisel, who is critical of Sarah in her treatment of Hagar, suggests that emphasis on the importance of the male heir has resulted in division between peoples of the Western World (130).

In Marsha Norman's play, neither woman is concerned about paternity. Kitty does not care who has fathered *her* child. She seems to be experiencing, as she assures Cliff that she is not dying but merely staying home, a sense of generation that gives her and her unborn child a renewed sense of a less divisive kind of life. Alvin Klein notes in this regard;

“Ms. Norman is playing serious theater games here. First, she intersects two incongruent triangles. The ancient one involves Sarah, Abraham, and Hagar. The contemporary one consists of the company's leading actress, Kitty, and



Clifford, who are married and, not so incidentally, playing the biblical couple, and Monica, the resident vamp, who happens to be cast as Hagar. Ergo, Monica seduces Clifford, and Clifford walks out on Kitty, who is pregnant. But who fathered the child? Jack, the director, who on one level or another plays God, or Clifford? Pushing for resonance may be the name of this game. “ (131)

Whereas the play's internal critic is enthusiastic about the drama's depiction of the decline of pagan moon worship with the rise of the patriarchal Abraham, Norman's play ends with the rise of the patriarchal Abraham, with a single light that holds on Sarah/Kitty- surely a light that is lunar.

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## Chapter: 5 MARSHA NORMAN'S FEMINIST OUTLOOK



(Marsha Norman addresses the audience at the time of winning Tony Award)

The work of playwright Marsha Norman ranges from gritty urban dramas like night Mother, which won the Pulitzer Prize, to musicals like The Secret Garden, which won the Tony Award. Recalling her girlhood in Louisville, play-wright Marsha Norman once said, “I would sit in the theater and think, ‘I could do that; I would be really good at that.’” (1) But at first she didn’t believe she would ever have the chance to write plays. “I didn’t know any writers, and I certainly had no local playwrights as role models,” (2) she has said;



“Kentucky’s writing tradition was mainly a mountain one; I thought...I was from a working-class family. I figured playwrights mostly came from wealthy East Coast families who had big libraries in their homes and whose children went to prestigious colleges....I was 29 years old before I finally believed I could have a life as a writer.” (3)

During periods when women's equality has been a powerful social issue, feminist concerns are often central to plays by women. Deborah Kolb has observed a close relationship in America between the rise and fall of the professional feminist movement in the early twentieth century and the "rise and fall of the New Woman in drama." (4) This characterization, often attributed to the influence of Ibsen's Nora in A Doll House, was developed by American dramatists of both sexes who were inspired by the impact on the public of the early Women's Movement. The contemporary feminist movement has created an audience for women playwrights who write from their experiences as women. (5)

However, feminism as theme could not be understood as simply a call for women's rights on the part of the playwright or her characters. Rather, it is a statement about feminine consciousness, the feelings and perceptions associated with a female character's identity as a woman. As Sydney Kaplan asserts, the feminism of a writer may be reflected in "a consideration of the effect upon women's psyches of the external events around them." (6)

The experience of woman as outsider, devalued, objectified and often subservient is a recurrent theme in women's drama. It is a protest to an imposed silence, an expression of the need to create new lives, public lives that underlie the playwrights' depiction of women's experience. These concerns constitute feminist themes in that they portray the social and

psychological restrictions placed upon women in a male dominant society, as well as the attitudes and values of women who confront these restrictions.

By 1916, with the establishment of New York's avant-garde little theatre groups, the actor-manager's theatre was giving way to the playwright's theatre. One development in this burgeoning American drama was the proliferation of women playwrights. For women playwrights this often meant exploring the condition of women as a social and psychological phenomenon at the base of a movement for social change.

In Marsha Norman's plays issues of feminist concern often constitute the central conflict. The play of Norman takes woman as a protagonist, which itself suggests a concern with the exploration of women's lives. These inner conflicts may be interpreted as a response to external forces: a social order which deems that women are solely responsible for the domestic sphere, limiting their chances of success.

Norman portrays the various aspects of feminine consciousness and the specifically female experience out of which that consciousness evolves. Free of the constraints of the conventional theatre, Norman explores forms such as realism and expressionism, which are conducive to portraying the psychology of women. As a dramatist of ideas, her characterizations embody a statement about women's condition and women's frustration at the heart of Norman's plays.

Norman depicts the psychological motives for a woman's attempt to suicide by giving the significance of home and family in women's lives, and the female network through which women form close and supportive relationships. In the sparsely populated Prairie, the women in Third and Oak: the Laundromat understand the stillness of existence, and the psychological repercussions of her enforced isolation from other women.

Norman has portrayed a woman's acute consciousness of self and a rudimentary feminism in her understanding of a relationship based upon power. Sarah in Sarah and Abraham, is a woman who is aware of the social and psychological role that her husband requires her to act out and of the effect of that role on their relationship. In The Secret Garden however, the female protagonist struggles to break free of deceptions. She refuses to accommodate herself to stagnant norms that confine her, and struggles to

create new forms, new meaning, new reality. Her goals are boundless, and it is only this boundlessness that she seeks to preserve. Unlike Arlene in Getting out, Trudy in Trudy Blue , Mary in The Secret Garden and Sarah in Sarah and Abraham is very much alive, though somewhat detached from those around her. In fact, she is completely absorbed in her routine activities.

Norman has created an expressionist setting which not only reflects but also extends Jessie's psychological state. Jessie has been moved by a powerful force which finally wrenches her apart. She seeks relief in committing suicide rather than lived in her isolation and alienation. Critics have regarded Norman as an "extreme feminist," (7) but it is not Jessie's rejection of husband, lover and child that constitutes a feminist stance. Nor does her mental illness necessarily reflect the consequences of her aspirations. Rather, this portrayal renders the impulses of a woman like Jessie who painfully feels her bounds. It is the awareness of her immanence and her desire for transcendence that make this characterization feminist. Norman dramatizes her feminist outlook around concrete issues. For example, her characters express conflicts about the double standard, and raise questions regarding the effects of woman's economic independence upon traditional sex roles, as well as upon her own identity and aspirations. In some instances, this search for identity is expressed through a character's writing or art, a device which gives the character an additional platform from which to expound.

Norman reflects the social forces that shape women's activities, aspirations and values. She also dramatizes the conflicts of a woman who has made commitments of being a wife and mother, but who is still in the process of defining her role and ordering her priorities. In Getting Out, the protagonist Arlene wants to start life anew, but her violent self, Arlie moves around in the prison cell and at times lingers about Arlene like a cruel memory. The play ends on a hopeful note, with Arlene finding a way to own up to her old self without giving in to it. Marsha Norman reflects; "My whole life I felt locked up. I think the writing of Getting Out for me was my own opening of the door." (8)

Norman is one of the first female dramatists to make relationships in women's lives and the social and economic constraints on middle-and lower-class women into appropriate matter for powerful plays.

Characters in several of Norman's plays wrestle with issues of religious faith and redemption. In Getting Out Arlene remembers the prison chaplain who tells her that Arlie was the evil inside her, which could be banished for Arlene's salvation.

Frequently in Norman's plays women and men have conflicting expectations and understandings; their conversations are characterized by misunderstanding, manipulation, or hostility. In Traveler in the Dark, Sam and his wife, Glory, never connect. Even in 'night, Mother, where there are no male characters onstage, the men in Thelma and Jessie's lives are remembered and discussed with a mixture of hurt, confusion, and contempt. In Trudy Blue too Ginger suffers from midlife crisis, an alienation with her husband.

In Getting Out, an oppressive system of patriarchal beliefs controls and inhibits the female characters. Arlene and Ruby submit to the identities constructed for them by the society. Through the establishment of a supportive female community with Ruby, Arlene is able to redeem part of her former self and come away with a fuller sense of identity. Through Arlene's union of her two selves as well as through her friendship with Ruby, Norman depicts a beginning of female autonomy and suggests the hope for a future and more successful challenge to patriarchy.

Similarly in 'night, Mother, Jessie is divorced, she suffers from epilepsy, her son has turned into a drug addict and thief, she has tried to hold a job, but can't, and she has no friends. She decides to commit suicide. She calmly informs her mother that she plans to kill herself later that evening. Norman reflects on the patriarchal forces that lead a normal woman to such a stage of desperation, that she wants to kill herself than allow those forces to kill her, thereby gaining victory over them. Even before she dies, she has such feminine sensitivities that she is concern about her mother to such an extent that she puts the house in order - arranging grocery delivery, writing directions for where to find things, while her mother tries to undo her daughter's decision, to distract her from it, to argue, cajole, beg. The dialogue moves naturally through Mama's efforts to put a positive face on their conflicts and losses, but Jessie remains adamant. By the end of the play, Jessie rejects every argument for living her mother could come up with. The play evokes pity

for these isolated souls and ignites a deeper understanding of, and appreciation for, what it means to be alive. Here also the female characters are controlled by a male-centered belief system. While Thelma has contended herself with her stifled existence, Jessie chooses to defy authority, through her suicide, however, she not only negates her identity and paves the way for Thelma's despairing future; but also destroys the hope of female solidarity and with that, female autonomy.

In Getting Out, the psychological continuity between the staged Arlie and Arlene scenes reveals first, that the process of internalizing social norms grips the very depth of Arlene's relationship to her self and others, and second, that the family is the first and most vicious site wherein certain "emotional restrictions" (9) become instituted and regulated. Through Arlene's partial reclamation of Arlie's strength, Norman communicates a more satisfying message to the feminist spectator of the play. The spectator sees that women like Arlene have the potential to challenge in perhaps a more constructive way than before, the boundaries that prevent them from progressing in society, Arlene stands as a model of female solidarity that enables female autonomy.

While a burgeoning female community enables self assertion in Getting Out, a lack of female community entails the women's destruction by restrictive patriarchal ideals in night, Mother. Ultimately, through opposing methods Norman communicates in night, Mother, and Getting Out, the need for female solidarity to successfully confront patriarchy and preserve female autonomy. The social institutions that Arlene encounters ensure that hostility and violence stay in place. The sexism of Arlene's world manifests itself in a necessary gender split that secures the violence through male domination. In the play, Norman depicts a social world that justifies the systematic violation and oppression of women through its most moral institutions: religion, society and the family. Through the protagonist, Arlene Holsclaw, and her alter-self Arlie, Norman presents a psychodrama that explores the complex psychological process of female socialization. Together Arlie and Arlene create a psychological continuity that reveals the awful price Arlene as exconvict pays for her successful socialization: her inwardness.

Norman's approach to the closure of Arlene's predicament shifts from one that she has developed throughout her dramatization of Arlene's psychological processes and conflicts, which suggest that her subjectivity is neither wholly ideologically constituted nor biologically or familial determined; she explores the multilayered forces that create a psyche in process. In this sense, Norman has developed her own dialectical and psychodramatic method, exploring Arlene's psyche dialectically and psychodynamically. The play discloses the complex dialectical processes of the psyche; its ending reflects a reductive linear approach to Arlen's psyche.

Marsha Norman's female characters progress further in their psychic journey. Ultimately, they come closer to a more cohesive self. Norman accomplishes this feat in ways similar to those of her literary progenitor particularly in cases where a female suffers because of family relationships. Many times that relationship is fore-grounded through a mother and daughter. Getting Out, serves as an example in which the daughter's identity surfaces as a completely split self in case of Arlene and her alter – self Arlene. Thelma and Jessie Cates, the mother and daughter in Norman's night, Mother, also wrestles with problems surrounding the daughter's identity. Unlike Arlie, however, Jessie opts out of life through a carefully planned suicide rather than remain in an unfulfilled life. In both these works the mother is present and on stage. However, in Third & Oak: The Laundromat, Norman presents us with an absent mother-one who never appears on stage but who controls the daughter's life nevertheless. Norman through plays like night, Mother and Getting Out, create representations of women working to fill that psychic hunger experienced when faced with the limited options for self-determination present in patriarchal society. Norman's character, Jessie Cates, assumes control of her life and chooses death rather than face an unfulfilled life like her mother's. Even though Jessie chooses death, she triumphs because she, alone, decides what constitutes her proper nourishment.

Jessie's suicide, however predictable it may appear, is an extreme act by definition abnormal. As a psychological case study of deviant behavior, (10) however, 'night, Mother' differs markedly from such plays as Equus or Agnes of God. Without institutional representatives to provide

measures of deviation, without an analyst figure to focus questions and issues, without distancing devices of any kind, Marsha Norman invites her audience to identify directly with the characters on stage, relying on our own inner resources, to share their experience in unmediated fashion. The subjective quality of the event is heightened by the absence of community; no social or political framework provides a broader perspective, and even the references to the world outside of Mama's living room are remarkably vague: "I read the paper," Jessie says, "I don't like how things are. And they're not any better out there than they are in here". (11) This is a psychological drama aimed directly at the psyche, the very antithesis of Brechtian theatre. (12)



(Jessie: "I don't like how things are. And they're not any better out there than they are in here" )

Indeed, the conditions for Jessie's suicide are naturalistically plausible by clinical standards. (13) As she has suffered a series of personal losses, she is not only depressed but also feels betrayed and abandoned. Or as she first explains: "I'm tired, I'm hurt. I'm sad. I feel used". (14)

Norman probes into the mental health and social behaviour of such alienated souls like Arlene, Jessie and Ginger. Although presently in

good health, Jessie's epilepsy has resulted in a lack of social experience and an increasing detachment from communal ties: her only "friends" (15) are medical personnel, she can't get a job or keep the ones she's had, and she so unnerves her mother's best friend Agnes that the neighbor no longer visits. Jessie's denials, cannot be discounted, her denials become a kind of refrain, underscoring each cause as both necessary and insufficient. Like that of most suicidal individuals, Jessie's emotional life is dominated by a sense of helplessness, hopelessness, and an overpowering lonely feeling. She expresses less than halfway through the play when she responds to Mama's growing hysteria with the following lines:

“ I can't do anything either, about my life, to change it, make it better; make me feel better about it. Like it better, make it work. But I can stop it. Shut it down, turn it off like the radio when there's nothing on I want to listen to. It's all I really have that belongs to me and I'm going to say what happens to it. And it's going to stop. And I'm going to stop it. So. Let's just have a good time.” (16)

This reflects the connection between Jessie's decision and her desire to establish some personal authority, even her life. Here Jessie sits for the first time in the play as Mama offers to make them hot chocolate and a candy apple, both trying to recover some loving, symbiotic moment from the past. But the temporary reversal, in which the daughter sees the mother as an extension of herself, is quickly shattered by Jessie's double realization that Mama's gesture is a "false" (17) and selfishly motivated one, and that neither of them likes the taste of milk (18).

According to Freud, “suicide represents unconscious hostility directed toward an interjected, ambivalently viewed love-object and as such, is the very symptom of an underdeveloped ego”. (19) In Jessie's conscious



mind, however, the suicide that ends the play is a deliberate, fully reasoned action. She describes it as private, personal, her own, freely chosen, and rational. However, Jessie's suicide raise more questions than answers them. Jessie's will power and mental state seems irrevocable from the start: she has no desire to be saved, and as Mama occasionally recognizes, she is "already gone." (20) Linda Brown observes;

“Ironically perhaps, it is the strength of Jessie's resolve, a rather unrealistic detail, which frees us to identify with and to accept Jessie's action in the play. while profoundly disturbing on one level, it is the inevitability of the conclusion that gives us, like Mama, time to mourn Jessie's loss, to work through the brutally ambivalent feelings that the play's action provokes, and to experience some aesthetic pleasure in the promise of ‘cathartic resolution’.”  
(21)

night, Mother because of its particular emotional charge, makes it more of a play about mothers and daughters, about feminine identity and female autonomy, than a play about suicide. As an action that inextricably unites the forces of idealizing love and irrational hostility, self-assertion and self-negation, sadism and masochism, separation and identity, suicide is but a “representation in extreme form of the contradictory relationship mothers and daughters share in our present historical situation.” (22)

Marsha Norman indirectly focuses on the alienation cropping into a mother – daughter relationship, the needs and impulses of the changing generation. By the time the mother realizes her daughter's needs, it is too late. The comprehension to accept her daughter's differences and giving her ‘space and time’ is Thelma's predicament. Like most mothers she is not only

too involved in her problems, but also too submissive to revolt against her fate. Hence she can not understand Jessie's response to her life.

Marsha Norman goes to great lengths to portray Mama as anything but ideal and Jessica as anything but sexy; but for the female viewer, the characters' sexual identity is simply never in question. Using T. J. Scheff's definition of cathartic effect as "crying, laughing and other emotional processes that occur when an unresolved emotional distress is re-awakened in a properly distanced context" (23) Norman's 'night, Mother' is "aesthetically over-distanced for men (producing indifference) and aesthetically under-distanced for women (producing pain)".(24) Indeed, the power of the play for women rests not only on the ways in which Marsha Norman self-consciously addresses a female audience through subject matter, language, and situation.

The text also presents a psycho-dynamically charged situation that symbolically mirrors the female viewer's own, a narrative movement at least partly generated from the desires, fantasies, resentments, and fears originally connected with the very process of gender acquisition. night, Mother provides an interesting case since it both self-consciously addresses a female audience and subconsciously works upon the female psyche in powerful ways, positioning male and female viewers differently in the process. Similarly in Third & Oak: The Laundromat Norman presents two women, one a widow, the other trapped in a bad marriage. Actor James Earl Jones, who starred in a televised version of The Pool Hall, said, "Marsha writes deep, painful stuff that's not always 'up on the crust.' It's all bubbling beneath the surface." (25) In The Laugh of the Medusa, Helen Cixous has written;

"Everything will be charged once woman gives Woman to the other woman. There is hidden and always ready in woman the source; the focus for the other. The mother, too, is a metaphor. It is necessary and sufficient that the best of herself be given to woman by another for her to be able to love herself and

return in love the body that was “born” to  
be her. “(26)

It is precisely this complex of “giving the mother” (27) to the other woman that is being staged in Norman’s Third & Oak: The Laundromat, despite the fact that neither woman is actually a mother to the other. In the midst of their own unmediated losses, DeeDee and Alberta mothers the other across the chasm of economic, social, and perhaps even spiritual disparities and find solace and solutions to their depression in life.

Norman has also focused on the jitters of a female writer in a male chauvinist world. Trudy Blue reveals the psychic journey of Ginger a novelist who not only goes through stress in her professional life, but a pathological misdiagnosis of cancer tips the scales of normality. The play came out of a turning point in Norman’s own life, at a time when she realized that she was “not attached enough to my own life, I’m not living in a way I have respect for,” (28) she said in a 2000 interview in Bomb magazine with April Gornik, an artist and friend. She further adds;

“It was the beginning of a serious  
exploration: how I really wanted to be  
living, what kind of work I wanted to do,  
how I wanted to relate to the people I  
was with, and what I was willing to do to  
get there” (29)

Ginger, dissatisfied with her life enters into her alter ego Trudy Blue, the protagonist of her novel Trudy Blue. Ginger’s mental and emotional state is a wreck. She finds solace in hallucinating imaginary happenings and conversing with imaginary people. Thereby adopting an escapist attitude to the realities of life. The play is based on Ginger’s stream of consciousness, trying her best to think the past, present and the future. Norman states; “Each of my plays is about the struggle of a person to save herself,” (30) She further adds; each plays examines “an act of personal salvation.” (31) Norman’s

Trudy Blue reveals those emotions, feelings and thoughts that are deeply embedded in the inner successes of the sub-conscious.

Traveler in the Dark is a play that presents itself as a philosophical and theological debate, yet it is driven by deeper psychological conflicts. Norman presents us with a portrait of a narcissistic character, searching desperately for symbols that will restore his beloved mother. Norman paints this subtle psychological portrait moves her play beyond the merely philosophical into a personal realm. If we do not see ourselves in Sam's philosophical debate, then certainly his deeper psychological dilemmas resonate for us on a personal level. Because Sam accepts that he will continue in the dark, his philosophical crisis is resolved. Similarly, Sam prefers to continue in the dark created by symbols of his mother, rather than face the truth of her death. Like Sam, if we look at all, we look only with reluctance into the dark through which we must travel.

Suffering is described as any emotional activity a character presents. Ginger in Trudy Blue, Mary in The Secret Garden, Arlie in Getting Out, and Alberta in Third & Oak: The Laundromat suffers a lot. Alberta's suffering in Third & Oak: The Laundromat is her immense and overwhelming grief at the loss of her husband. This is exhibited by her jitters at the beginning of the play, and her desire for privacy. In her heart of hearts, she may want someone to talk to as badly as DeeDee, but her pride won't allow her. Dee Dee's suffering includes her need to find understanding and sympathy with someone else, someone she can confide in besides her mother. Dee Dee really wants a friend, and goes looking for one at three a.m. in a Laundromat.

It is Alberta that seems to resolve the conflict, although not much of a true resolution takes place. She simply puts an end to the conversation. Alberta does not reach out to Dee Dee, doesn't give her any promises of friendship or her phone number or even any parting words of advice. She simply leaves as politely and gracefully as she can, perhaps knowing that she may hurt Dee Dee's feelings, but still determined to leave. Alberta, in her late fifties, functions as an "idealized other" (32) to DeeDee, a young woman trapped in an unsatisfying marriage to a factory worker, Joe. DeeDee has a mother who "hovers" (33) and tries to keep her daughter a little girl rather than allowing her to mature. Ultimately, Alberta empowers DeeDee to be true to

herself, to leave Joe, as she tells Dee Dee: “Your own face in the mirror is better company than a man who would eat a whole fried egg in one bite....but it won't be easy.” (34)

Norman's play Third & Oak: The Laundromat, demonstrates both the means and the limits of the conversation of experience into narrative that constitutes the access to difference. As Bordo Susan comments;

“By listening and telling stories, Alberta and Dee Dee, who come from immeasurably antithetical perspectives, are able to make contact and to go their separate ways without judgment, but with a sense of support from the one who is different, who is literally other. For both women, the listening and telling is difficult because they speak across great divisions”. (35)

The vast Wasteland of social class and generation that separates them from the very instant their paths intersect in the play is not overcome, but investigated by the tenacity of the lower-class woman and the educated experience of the middle-class woman, producing a catharsis for both in the period of the hour in which they meet and exchange stories of their lives.

Marsha Norman by making the laundromat the locale for the play's development provides a particularly rich site upon which to foreground the confrontation of the two “socially other” (36) women, as the privatized activity of doing laundry is presented, contrastingly, in a publically accessible space. In this way, the laundromat not only represents an intersection for differing social groups of women, but also, of female-associated activity with male-identified public space. Each woman's claim to the public space is neutralized in respect to the impeded by their status as women. When Alberta continues that she has never understood why men like to have women watch

them work, she again implies the traditionally public nature of male occupations. It is only men's occasional relations with women that are considered off-limits within the public realm. As Bordo Susan further adds; "Of course in the usual distribution of power dynamics, a woman's watching of a man will not diminish the man as his watching of her diminishes her." (37)

The contradiction of this dynamic of social intercourse among women pervades the play's composition. As a specific woman, each assembles her personal items to be laundered on a particular morning in a certain laundromat located on Third & Oak: The Laundromat in order to escape a distinctive personal loss, but like the woman before and after her, she is Everywoman doing her husband's laundry, suffering loss alone or in silence, and finding the circumstances of her life unimportant or incomprehensible to the flurry of other lives around her. Norman's choice of location is not simply the early feminist acknowledgement that the personal is political, but Norman, the humanist believes that any airing of female laundry must be given a public forum, even if that forum is only obtained in the momentary absence of male attendants. This shows a Norman true humanist.

Norman also deals with the significance of "sharing" and 'confiding' which influences a person during emotional crisis. Arlene's 'sharing' and 'confiding' of her predicament to Ruby and the priest, has a positive influence. She comes to learn with Arlie and gathers enough resistance to face the difficulties of life. However, Jessie's sharing of her feelings with her mother Thelma came too late. Actually she is not interested in sharing, rather informing in a decisive tone her determination to end her life.

Social support has been identified as a key predictor of psychological morbidity following adverse life-events. According to Collins & Miller "sharing" and 'confiding' to the other reduces stress. One who cannot do so ends up in perversion as Ginger does in Trudy Blue. Her relationship with her husband is alienated hence she finds comfort in her alter – ego Trudy, or as Arlene finds expression of her repression in Arlie in Getting Out.

Self expression, sharing, confiding are emotional needs. Marsha Norman has a deep understanding of feminine psyche and feminine sensitivity.

Marsha Norman probes into childhood trauma and the influence of parental relationship in several of her plays. In The Secret Garden, based

on a novel by Frances Hodgson Burnett, tells the story of an orphan, Mary, who comes to live with her uncle Archibald in an old English mansion. Norman presents Mary's loss of her parents as traumatic and painful. Although she comes to live with her uncle Archibald in an old English mansion, she misses her mother who has died in an epidemic; she withdraws within herself, but finds solace in hallucination. She evokes all her happy memories of her childhood.

At its most simple, The Secret Garden is an exploration of the powerful effects of nature upon human beings. It is also a celebration of nature's beauty, and it could be argued that it examines the wonder of all living things' capacity for survival. In a way, the garden can be seen as a metaphorical representation of Colin.

All of Marsha Norman's plays and musicals take on the theme of imprisonment, either metaphorically or literally. "I'm always writing about confinement, about being trapped. When I'm writing about that, I'm really good," she said. (38) She further adds; "My theme is how do I get out of here? Most writers get talent and a topic. When we're writing out of that central core of our being, about our deepest personal questions, we can be great." (39) The genesis of her confinement can be traced back to her childhood in Kentucky and her mother, a fire-and-brimstone religious fanatic subject to violent rages. "She was catastrophically sick," (40) Ms. Norman said. She and her brother half-joke that they have successfully eradicated the "beat-the-children" (41) form of raising kids from their lineage.

In The Hold Up, Norman gives an "honest-to-God" (42) true Western story straight out of the mythical mystery. Norman presents a 20<sup>th</sup> century Lily who proves her mettle and hope. She brings the Outlaws Archie and Henry to face a new era of automobiles and airplanes. She brings them to the reality of life and inspires them to embrace new horizons. The play is about what happens when someone confuses fantasy and reality or perhaps when one seeks succor in fantasy to obliterate the harsh truths or fears of real life. Henry's death is significant, for it creates a feeling of remorse in the Outlaw that, in keeping with Norman's development of his characters, is explainable on both human and mythological levels. He reveals himself as Tom McCarty, a man he claims to have "buried ...alive," (43) which

demonstrates his conscious effort to bury his past and to put to rest the myth that he represents, a myth as old and worn out as he is. The Outlaw being Norman's mouthpiece, arguing that the myth cannot and should not be put to rest despite the fast-paced changing world of 1914.

In an attempt to finish himself off, the Outlaw takes an overdose of morphine and it is up to Archie and Lily, the two characters for whom the future is eagerly anticipated, to keep him alive. Norman dramatizes the battle between the past and the present, a battle she prolongs so as to heighten audience concern about the outcome, which determines America's direction and its attitude toward history. In The Hold Up, Marsha Norman argues for a return to the "good old days" (44) before nuclear bombs and unchecked epidemics.

Sarah and Abraham cover thematic territory encompassing feminism, motherhood, religious faith and theatre. For Norman the play is an attempt to bring feminist history up to date by rewriting- and righting-Sarah's story, and at the same time an opportunity to use the development and subsequent success of the play-within-a-play as a metaphor for fame and commercial success.

The end of Norman's plays is most positive, the protagonist learns to adapt, accept and resolve her dilemma. Some feminist resist imbuing Norman with the title "feminist writer," (45) but Norman speaks to those charges by asserting that "If it's a feminist to care about women's lives, yes, I'm a feminist writer" (46) Norman realizes that, "On the whole the American theater, dominated by men, does not perceive women fighting for their lives as a central issue". (47) However, she appreciates her fortune at being born during a time when she can give women a voice on the American stage. For her, this important task, to tell the truth, cannot be shoved aside until some more convenient time. She feels that she must "... capture the sunlight and focus it and burn the hole right through". (48) At the same time, she feels that her work such as night, Mother she proves "... that the mother – daughter relationship is as deserving of attention as the father-son." (49)

Determination, hope, and compassion characterize the women in Marsha Norman's plays. For her, it is an act of determination to attempt to become a professional playwright in a theatre dominated by



male producers, directors, theatre critics, and playwrights. Norman's plays characterized by hope - even those which depict in tragic form the consequences for women who step outside the accepted norms of society. Third and Oak: The Laundromat involves characters coming to terms with various types of bereavement and loss, and with their debts to the people in their past and present. The Hold Up is a feminist perspective on the frontier experience. night, Mother, which portrays daughter Jessie's preparations and conversations with her mother, Thelma, on the night Jessie plans to commit suicide, is Norman's most complete exploration of mother-daughter relations.

Norman the humanist and realist reflects women's struggles through her plays, giving a new outlook to feminist issues. This is Norman's greatest contribution to the male chauvinist American theater.

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## Chapter: 6

## Conclusion

Helmer: First and foremost, you are a wife and mother.

Nora: That I don't believe any more. I believe That first and foremost, I am an individual, just as much as you are. (1)

- Henrik Ibsen

A Doll's House

The world of woman has long remained confined to the four walls of house. Home is also a favourite topic for the dramatists like Ibsen to depict the happiness and the lack of it. It is a place where the panorama of human emotions gets displayed. The dramatists like Marsha Norman also assumes the role of a preacher here at times and presents the code of conduct which is the mixture of old and new values through her drama. Woman and her domestic world find prime space in the plays in spite of the playwright's preoccupation with other issues.

Understanding Norman's work in a feminist context is thus important and interesting not because she is a woman playwright, nor because she writes about women, infact like Shashi Deshpande in Indian literature, she dislikes being labeled as a feminist writer. She does not compartmentalize the feminine woes and versions into "little boxes" (2) as she terms it, but considers the feminist issues as catalyst that leads to larger world problems. Without presenting unnecessary details about her characters, she delves deep into the psyche of her characters and poetically lays bare their inner strifes and struggles with a rare profundity. She has probed into the suffering, love and passion of ordinary women and presented them with a touching sensitivity.

Today Marsha Norman is one of the powerful voices of International renown to emerge on the American Stage after the Second World War. Norman's plays like night, Mother explores the psyche of someone who plans and coolly organizes her suicide. Norman's observation

probes into different ways in which Jessie commits suicide, while Ginger resorts to her alter ego.

A critical study of the feminist concerns in Marsha Norman's plays also help to formulate a perspective of attitudes which determines the constitution of the female character therein. Women's writing, as it grows, becomes a manifestation of a woman's potential and rights and a consciousness of the essential biological and cultural collectivity which consolidate the experience of being female into an intrinsic imaginative continuum.

Marsha Norman's approach to life is always positive, there is an affirmation of life amidst suffering. She upholds the policy of compromise between the two extremes of life - orthodoxy and modernity, materialism and idealism, spiritualism and industrialism. Her humanism is also evident from her choice of hunger and freedom as the recurring themes. The various types of hunger and her plea for different kinds of freedom are essentially an outcome of her humanistic vision. Freedom is necessary for women to realize her potential for a complete life.

Examining female-authored dramatic works like Marsha Norman's provides crucial insights into analyzing the struggles women have experienced as they work through is thus significant. To that end, drama provides a powerful and important medium for portraying representations of women as well as the patriarchal constraints which have historically impeded their psychological development as fully functioning cohesive selves.

Although a woman's experience occasionally has been acceptable subject matter for the American stage, the last twenty years have seen an increase in plays featuring such themes. In the past, the "Broadway Bobs," (3) eager to please the masses and make a profit, often have chosen to ignore material deemed risky. However, women's voices, frequently inaudible in the past, are increasing in volume in American theatre. Certainly, America's history includes a number of female playwrights who have made important contributions to the American theatre, including playwrights such as Rachel Crowthers, Lorraine Hansberry, and Susan Glaspell. Their contributions are of great significance to the society.

However, Marsha Norman who begins assertively speaking her mind deserves special recognition for her part in placing female characters and their experiences centre stage. She plays an important part in paving the way for the proliferation of plays focusing upon women's issues. By showcasing female characters searching for psychic cohesion, she opens, more widely, a door in American dramatic literature which had, more often than not, been locked, in so doing, she goes beyond melodrama. Trudy Blue and Sarah and Abraham are the best example which reflects women characters searching for psychic solidity.

Norman's women move closer to a fully developed self. They "bond" (4) with their idealized other, thereby internalizing and incorporating images which, ultimately, contribute to a sense of wholeness. She focuses upon mother and daughter relationships, but all of Norman's depictions show women with clearly established identities moving toward more integrated selves. All of her female characters exhibit evidence of fragmented selves. They remain emotional invalids, always searching for someone else to supply the "missing link." (5) With Norman the women like Jessie and Thelma in night, Mother, Arlene and Arlie in Getting Out, Mary and Lily in The Secret Garden, Trudy and Ginger in Trudy Blue, Sarah and Kitty in Sarah and Abraham, Alberta and DeeDee in Third & Oak: The Laundromat have more firmly established identities and move towards fully integrated selves.

As contemporary women struggle to define themselves anew, they battle to break the patriarchal past which relegated them to a low status in society. However, they face a more difficult task than merely making themselves over into the fully cohesive selves they yearn to be. Psychically fragmented and often docile, they have been used to having society dictate their roles to them. Psychoanalysis, particularly object-relations theory, offers a way to study these psychic splits and possibly answers why women would want to split off an unwanted aspect of themselves. In my study I have found that, although society plays a crucial role in how women view themselves, criminal charges cannot be placed entirely at the door of cultural essentialism. Marsha Norman provides a vehicle in theater for women's voices to be heard. By featuring female characters such as Jessie Cates, in night, Mother or Arlene Holaclaw, in Getting Out playwrights such as Marsha Norman

illuminate women's psychic struggles in a powerful way. She is a realist who is keen on exploring the realities of life. She has a sensitive understanding of the problems of contemporary society. Her plays communicate a humanistic vision of life. Norman is a conscious artist who holds definite views on the human psyche, and behaviour.

The emotional world of woman has been gracefully explored in Norman's plays such as Trudy Blue and Sarah and Abraham. Norman's protagonists are mostly women, although they have reached different stages in life, are all fragile introvert "trapped in their own skins." (6) Like Jessie in night, Mother, their emotional traumas sometimes lead to violent death, in the end. Progress of society is judged by the status women have in the particular society. Presently, these plays have proved to be the best medium of presenting the society which invariably records the changes in the status quo of woman, the proper study of womankind is woman.

Marsha Norman deals with issues of female identity and shows female characters able to assume some measure of autonomy no matter what the cost to their primary relationship with their mothers. Arlene Holtzclaw in Getting Out, DeeDee Johnson in The Third & Oak: Laundromat, and Jessie Cates in night, Mother, all, in some way, confront their relationships with their mothers and move on. In doing so, they come closer to psychic cohesion. Getting Out addresses the female protagonist's specific hopes and the audience's more generalized desire to escape social entrapment; and yet the play's variety of enclosures suggests the ways in which feminine consciousness is constructed, maimed, reconstructed, and finally validated in our society.

Marsha Norman's plays are representations of women working to fill that psychic hunger with the limited options for self-determination present in patriarchal society. Norman's character, Jessie Cates, controls her life even though she chooses death and triumphs. She proves that she is the propagator of her life and she alone has the right to take decision for her life.

Norman, with her own unique contributions to the American theatre, reflects women's struggles to expand the limits of their lives. By doing so, they have "mothered" (7) women through their words and provided important insights into the mother/daughter relationship.



Plays like night, Mother and Getting Out, prove to be powerful plays exploring the psyche of two women, mother and daughter, and displaying a strong bond to each other. This exploration is done with sensitivity, compassion, humour and artistic integrity.

Norman's night, Mother, Getting Out, The Secret Garden, and Trudy Blue also examines the image of loss in modern American drama at three levels: the loss of physical space, loss of psychological space, and loss of moral space. This study analyzes how Norman, modify and transform the image of loss by focusing on the myth of the American dream, illusion versus reality, empowerment, and the complexity of human relationships. From domestic drama to the drama of social and political criticism, Norman along with a medley of American playwrights has taken the genre of American drama from backseat status into the forefront of recognized American literature.

Loneliness, isolation, and loss are transnational themes. Moreover, in night, Mother, Thelma's emotional struggle to prevent her daughter from committing suicide is a plight that certainly has no national boundaries. Moreover, the complexity of the mother-daughter relationship is clearly one that transcends international boundaries.

In Getting Out, an oppressive system of patriarchal beliefs controls and inhibits the female characters. While Arlie asserts her identity and is punished for her strength, Arlene and Ruby submit to the identities constructed for them by society. Through the establishment of a supportive female community with Ruby, however, Arlene is able to redeem part of her former self and come away with a fuller sense of identity. Through Arlene's union of her two selves as well as through her friendship with Ruby, Norman depicts a beginning of female autonomy and suggests the hope for a future and more successful challenge to patriarchy. In 'night, Mother, the female characters are also controlled by a male-centered belief system, and while Thelma has contented herself with her stifled existence, Jessie chooses to defy authority, take control of her life, and kill herself. Through her suicide, however, she not only negates her identity, she also destroys the hope of female solidarity and with that, female autonomy. While a burgeoning female community enables self-assertion in Getting Out, a lack of female community

entails the women's destruction by restrictive patriarchal ideals in 'night Mother'. Ultimately, Norman communicates in both 'night Mother and Getting Out – albeit through opposing methods – the need for female solidarity to successfully confront patriarchy and preserve female autonomy.

In plays like Sarah and Abraham, Traveler in the Dark and Trudy Blue, her approach to life is positive. There is always an affirmation of life amidst suffering. She upholds the policy of compromise between the two opposite ways of life-orthodoxy and modernity, materialism and idealism, spiritualism and industrialism. Norman believes in emotional bonding in any relationship. night, Mother proves to be a powerful play exploring the psyche of two women, mother and daughter, displaying the bond between them, with to others and to existence itself. In short, with Norman the women have more firmly established identities and move toward more fully integrated selves. Whether they may be Mavis, Sarah or Lily they are now answering the unanswerable

Marsha Norman, through the female characters, voiced important truths. Other women playwrights are making their voices heard as well. If the "conversation," (8) keeps going, the theater will have served an all important role as a catalyst for necessary changes in society. One hopes that, perhaps, one day these goals will be accomplished. The play by Marsha Norman thus concentrates on the women's journey to autonomous selfhood, meandering through various obstacles, without limiting itself to pay particular approach.

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## **Annotated Bibliography of Critical Works:**

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Biggsby, C.W.E. "Women's Theatre." In A Critical Introduction to Twentieth Century American Drama: Beyond Broadway Vol. 3. Cambridge, England: Cambridge UP, 1985. 420-440.

In his history of women's theater, set in the context of the American women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s, Biggsby calls attention to night, Mother, the Broadway production of which initiated a debate concerning the status of women's drama within the male theater establishment. Biggsby finds it interesting that a debate of this nature would surface in the 1980s, a debate focusing on the role of the woman dramatist, the problem of "male praise" of plays by women, and feminist suspicion of commercial success and "individual achievement." Yet he recognizes that "women have found it difficult to create sufficient space within the American theatre for their own concerns."



Browder, Sally. 'I Thought You Were Mine': Marsha Norman's 'night, Mother.'"

In *Mother Puzzles: Daughters and Mothers in Contemporary American Literature*. Edited by Mickey Pearlman. New York: Greenwood Press, 1989. 109-113.

Browder's discussion of the mother-daughter conflict in night, Mother is informed by Nancy Chodorow's theory of "early socialization experience of females," a theory suggesting that daughters experience more difficulty than sons in separating themselves from their mothers. Jessie experiences a "tragic realization" of her failure to achieve an identity apart from the role initially provided her by her mother, and her suicide becomes an extreme measure of drawing "the boundaries between mother and daughter." This avenue of analysis excuses Thelma's role in Jessie's suicide: "If Thelma is at fault, it is only in believing she could provide everything for this daughter, that she alone could be enough."

Brown, Janet. "Getting Out/night, Mother." In Taking Center Stage: Feminism in Contemporary U.S. Drama. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1991. 60-77.

Brown discusses Getting Out and night, Mother as feminist plays that emphasize the issues of autonomy and of connection, the ways in which each protagonist must assert her independence and define her boundaries while establishing a caring relationship with significant others. Because Arlene and Jessie "struggle within the patriarchal society to define themselves as autonomous beings," each play "can rightly be termed an example of feminist drama." More specifically, Brown examines the way Arlene learns to assert herself through speech, the relationship of each protagonist to "domestic interior settings redolent of women's material culture," and psychological concepts of self-division and separation from the mother.

Brown, Linda Ginter. "Toward a More Cohesive Self: Women in the Works of Lillian Hellman and Marsha Norman." Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 1991.

Burkman, Katherine H. "The Demeter Myth and Doubling in Marsha Norman's night, Mother." In Modern American Drama: The Female Canon. Edited by June Schlueter. Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1990. 254-263.

Drawing upon Otto Rank's conception of doubling and Jung's and Kerenyi's interpretations of the Demeter-Kore myth, Burkman identifies "rhythms and resonance" of that myth unforeseen by Norman. Burkman views Thelma as a modern Demeter figure "trying to rescue her child from death" and Jessie as part Kore (Persephone), "who feels used or raped," and also part Demeter, who "has lost the zest for life." She demonstrates a unity between mother and daughter prefigured by the mythical oneness of Demeter and Kore in order to show that the play is not only about loss but renewal, Mama's "quickenened sense of life" through Jessie's suicide.

Carlson, Susan L. "Women in Comedy: Problem, Promise, Paradox." In Drama, Sex and Politics: Themes in Drama. Vol. 7. Edited by James Redmond. Cambridge, England: Cambridge UP, 1985. 159-171.

"Is comedy sexist?" Carlson asks, and looks to W. Somerset Maugham's The Constant Wife for her answer. In traditional comedy, women characters are caught in a paradox. Although comedy promises them equality with men, comedy's happy ending returns them to their traditional roles. Carlson looks briefly at Gems' Piaf and Norman's Getting Out as examples of feminist dramas seeking replacement forms that attempt "to relegate to the past the assumptions and structures that stymie the promise of comedies like The Constant Wife." Her analysis of Getting Out is brief but suggests a method of analyzing comic structures and women characters in Norman's plays in terms of a feminist theater.

Chinoy, Helen Krich. "Here Are the Women Playwrights." In Women in American Theatre. 2nd ed. Edited by Helen Krich Chinoy and Linda Walsh Jenkins. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1988. 341-353.

Drawing upon a number of quotations by contemporary American women playwrights, Chinoy discusses a variety of issues that women dramatists in the 1970s and early 1980s have faced; issues such as the usefulness of the label "woman playwright," the negative influence of male critics, and the difficulty of producing work in maledominated mainstream theaters. She also addresses the challenge of beginning a career as a playwright, the importance of women role models in the theater, the problem of a "female aesthetic," and the degree to which plays by women should be feminist or political. She briefly quotes Marsha Norman's view on "the importance of the female character" in women's drama.

Cline, Gretchen Sarah. "The Psychodrama of the 'Dysfunctional' Family: Desire, Subjectivity, and Regression in Twentieth Century American Drama." Ph.D. diss. Ohio State University, 1991.

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As Norman attempts in night, Mother to give voice to the marginally voiceless, she is subject to the criticism that her play is unrealistic because she alters the speech of her protagonists to suit her artistic ends. Yet Norman employs a "modified" or "new realism" to provide access to "under-represented elements of our society." Instead of presenting a naturalistic transcription of middle-class voices, Norman conveys the "dignity" of Thelma and Jessie "by fusing the realistic ... rhythms of common speech with the heightened thought that she wishes to introduce."

Dolan, Jill. "Feminism and the Canon: The Question of Universality." In The Feminist Spectator as Critic. Ann Arbor: UMI, 1988. 19-40.

Using night, Mother as a case study, Dolan assesses the various ways the male-dominated theater establishment, including its male reviewers and critics, shapes the audience's reception of a play by a woman. She questions whether night Mother mainly a "contender for membership in the canon because it so closely follows the male precedent the canon has already set." Whereas Norman's aim was a "transcendent universality," the Broadway production of the play allowed a majority of male critics to categorize it as domestic melodrama. Dolan herself considers night, Mother as "typical of liberal and cultural feminist drama" and demonstrates how the liberal feminist press ironically defused Norman's imposition on the male theatrical sphere by highlighting the woman rather than the play. In essence, Dolan's discussion reveals the gender issues that surface as "women playwrights continue to assert their voices in the traditional male forum."

Erben, Rudolph. "The Western Holdup Play: The Pilgrimage Continues." Western American Literature 23 (1989): 311-322.

Erben uses the title of Norman's play The Holdup to designate a new genre: "The western holdup play presents the American West in dramatic tension" as "the old and the new West meet," usually in an isolated way station of the rural southwest. He argues that The Holdup "combines all the characteristics" of earlier plays constituting the genre, namely, Sherwood's Petrified Forest, Inge's Bus Stop, Medoff's When You Comin' Back, Red Ryder? and Lanford Wilson's Angels Fall. With an old outlaw and a would-be gunslinger symbolizing the dying frontier, and a woman hotel owner and an educated youth representing the dynamic present of the West, Norman's play, like the others, "recalls the West's formative frontier period in a post-frontier setting," dramatizing its transformation.

Forman, Robert J. " Marsha Norman. " Critical Survey of Drama: Supplement.

Edited by Frank N. Magill. Pasadena, CA: Salem, 1987. 288293.

Forte, Jeanie. "Realism, Narrative, and the Feminist Playwright: A Problem of Reception." Modern Drama 32 (1989): 115-127.

Forte questions whether the dramatic form of classic realism, its narrative animated by Oedipal desire toward closure, would be "useful for feminists interested in the subversion of a patriarchal social structure." In comparison with more subversive or plural texts such as Carolyn Meyer's Dos Lesbos and Adrienne Kennedy's The Owl Answers, night, Mother is an example of a "realist text," whose cathartic closure caters to the demands of a patriarchal playwriting practice. Yet in terms of an incipient feminist theory of reception, 'night, Mothers impact on its audience is subversive, challenging "on some material level the reality of male power."

Greiff, Louis K. "Fathers, Daughters, and Spiritual Sisters: Marsha Norman's night, Mother and Tennessee Williams's The Glass Menagerie." Text and Performance Quarterly 9 (1989): 224-228.

Jessie Cates and Laura Wingfield are viewed as "sisters in disguise." Realizing he is risking a patrocentric reading, Greiff builds his comparison on the influence of the absent father on each daughter in night, Mother and The Glass Menagerie. Each father is represented as an escapist, while both "Laura and Jessie prove to be faithful daughters who keep alive their fathers' memory." Whereas Laura's imaginative escapism, modeled on her father's, leads to a confrontation with reality, Jessie's unhappiness with reality leads to her "artful orchestration of her own death," a creative act allowing Jessie to reunite with her father, "the informing figure of her imagination." What these parallels convey is "a creative kinship between Tennessee Williams and Marsha Norman."

Harriott, Esther. "Marsha Norman: Getting Out." In American Voices. Five Contemporary Playwrights in Essays and Interviews. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1988. 129-147.

Harriott cites as Norman's chief concern characters "on the verge of cutting ties" and suggests what drives Norman's characters is "their passion . . . to escape from situations in which they feel trapped," primarily situations defined by the parent-child relationship. She focuses at length on four plays, praising "the economy of language" and humor of Getting Out, the "pungent and authentic dialogue" of The Laundromat, and the "complex pattern of relationships and emotions, actions and reactions" of night, Mother. In contrast to these plays' strengths of characterization and language is the dramatic weakness of Traveler in the Dark, a play that stresses philosophy over human interaction: "The argument-faith versus reason-comes first, and the characters dramatize it. The result is less a drama than a debate."

Hart, Lynda "Doing Time: Hunger for Power in Marsha Norman's Plays." Southern Quarterly 25, no.3 (1987): 67-79.

Hart extensively analyzes the way hunger operates as a metaphor in Getting Out and night, Mother. She investigates the issue of food as a source of conflict in the mother-daughter relationship and examines how hunger plays an essential role in each protagonist's struggle for autonomy. Arlene's "figurative starvation" represents a "hunger for power, freedom and control" as she strives for "sovereignty over her body." Like Arlene, Jessie "rejects food and yearns for nurturance"; her "hunger for honest dialogue and truth about her past must be satisfied." In addition, Hart relates Arlie/Arlene's split self to the issue of women's eating disorders and connects each protagonist's quest to a feminist paradigm of growth, from "selfnegation," through spiritual "awakening," to an "affirmation through community." Arlie/Arlene moves successfully through each phase, but Jessie is unable to see beyond her "confrontation with nonbeing."

Herman, William. "Marsha Norman." In Understanding Contemporary American Drama. Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 1987. 246-249.

Herman briefly discusses Getting Out and night, Mother in a section devoted to "other voices" of the American theater from 1964 to 1984, including those of Jack Gelber, Amiri Baraka, Arthur Kopit, Adrienne Kennedy, and Jean-Claude Van Itallie. He suggests that night, Mother dramatizes themes "ancillary" to those of Getting Out. He also postulates an affinity of Norman's "blue-collar world" with the "fictional worlds of Bobbie Ann Mason, Jayne Anne Phillips, and Raymond Carver."

Kachur, Barbara. "Women Playwrights on Broadway: Henley, Howe, Norman and Wasserstein." In Contemporary American Theatre. Edited by Bruce King. Basingstoke, England: Macmillan, 1991. 15-39.

Kachur attempts to free critical discussion of the work of commercially successful women playwrights from the double bind of male critics who tend to fault it "for a lack of universal vision" and feminist critics who find that the mainstream "forum precludes deployment of the more preferred subversive modes and themes found in contemporary experimental drama and performance art by women." By highlighting the "dramaturgical and thematic variety" within the work of four contemporary women dramatists, she also encourages a break from "the assumption that women's plays are identical thematically ... and that women playwrights are a segregated group." She focuses on Getting Out, Third and Oak: The Laundromat, night, Mother, and Traveler in the Dark, demonstrating that the first three plays deal both with women's issues and more "global verities."

Kane, Leslie. "The Way Out, The Way In: Paths to Self in the Plays of Marsha Norman." In. Edited by Enoch Brater. New York: Oxford UP, 1989. 255-274.

Kane discusses four of Norman's plays -Getting Out, Third and Oak, The Laundromat, night, Mother, and Traveler in the Dark - in relation to the problems of autonomy, "people struggling to have a self," and of "mothering" and "Norman's continuing concern with mother-child relationships." Kane demonstrates that "mothers in Norman's early plays provide neither protection nor guidance; they do not nourish with food or love." With Traveler in the Dark, Norman breaks new ground by creating a psychologically complex male protagonist and presenting "for the first time loving and supportive wives who are warm, affectionate mothers."

Keyssar, Helene. "Success and Its Limits: Mary O'Malley, Wendy Wasserstein, Nell Dunn, Beth Henley, Catherine Hayes, Marsha Norman." In Feminist Theatre: An Introduction to Plays of Contemporary British and American Women. New York: St. Martin's, 1984.148-166.

Despite certain strengths of plays by the women in Keyssar's title, their main weakness is that "no matter how serious the topic, they are all comedies of manners, revelations of the surfaces of sexual identity and sexism." As mainstream plays, they take "fewer theatrical risks" than more feminist dramas. Keyssar praises Getting Out for forcing its audience to "rethink" the nature of the dramatic protagonist as double rather than "singular." On the other hand, she criticizes night, Mother for dwelling on the "sheltered space of the family room" while neglecting "the real constraints outside." In addition, the commercial success of night, Mother suggests that the "most appealing role for the audience continues to be that of the voyeur."



Kintz, Linda. "The Dramaturgy of the Subject(s): Refining the Deconstruction And Construction of the Subject to Include Gender and Materiality."

Ph.D. diss., U of Oregon, 1986.

McDonnell, Lisa J. "Diverse Similitude: Beth Henley and Marsha Norman."

Southern Quarterly 25, no. 3 (1987): 95-104.

Claiming that Henley's plays are "theatrical" whereas Norman's are "literary," McDonnell compares the two playwrights' use of narrative, humor, and the family. She highlights Norman's "narrative gift of a very high order," illustrating how storytelling within her plays provides comic relief, creates horror, propels the plot, and reveals character. Each playwright views "stories as crucial purveyors of truth in an individual's quest for self-determination." Although each playwright relies on southern gothic humor, Henley's is "wild and outrageous" whereas Norman's is "dry and sardonic." Finally, Henley's vision of the family is more optimistic than Norman's, suggesting that self-actualization can occur within the family as a source of support. Norman expresses the opposite view, that personal identity can be obtained only outside the family circle.

McKenna, Suzanne. "Getting Out The Impact of Female Consciousness on Dramaturgy." Ph.D. diss., U of Utah, 1986.

Miner, Madonne. "'What's These B'ars Doin' Here?'-The Impossibility of Getting Out." Theatre Annua140 (1985): 115-134.

In distancing herself from "the theatrics and fictionalizing" of Arlie, Arlene adheres to an ideology of "self-determination," an ideology that the play challenges. Getting Out reveals the ways Arlene is still a prisoner on the "outside," her identity as Arlene assigned to her by an Other, the prison chaplain, and her decision to go "straight" the product of "authority's desires." Ironically, as the audience approves of Arlene's rejection of Arlie, what is revealed is the audience's unconscious preference of the safety of autonomous selfhood rather than the more uncomfortable condition of multiple selves: "We find ourselves cheering for Arlene, because as she kills off Arlie, she checks our own impulses to Arlie-behavior." Thus, Getting Out

"breaks from more mainstream twentieth-century drama, which valorizes and protects tenaciously-held assumptions about the self."

Moore, Honor. "Woman Alone, Women Together." In Women in American Theatre: Careers, Images, Movements. Edited by Helen Krich Chinoy and Linda Walsh Jenkins. New York: Crown, 1981. 184-190. Reprinted in Women in American Theatre. 2nd ed. Edited by Helen Krich Chinoy and Linda Walsh Jenkins. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1988. 186-191.

Moore divides plays by women playwrights into two categories: "autonomous woman plays," which depict "one female protagonist, a fragment of whose journey toward autonomy we share"; and "choral plays," which dramatize a group of women "seeking integration by attempting community." Norman's *Getting Out* represents a type of autonomous woman play whose protagonist is divided, indicating a "conflict ... between a self acceptable to (male) society and a savage self who cannot conform." Moore suggests that women identify with both Arlie and Arlene, both the breaker of rules and the "other who keeps that rule breaker in line."

Morrow, Laura. "Orality and Identity in 'night, Mother and Crimes of the Heart." Studies in American Drama, 1945-Present 3 (1988): 23-39.

Morrow extensively analyzes food imagery and speech patterns as a key to understanding the respectively tragic and comic outcomes of night, Mother and Beth Henley's Crimes of the Heart, which dramatizes the opposite scenario of three daughters coping with their mother's suicide. She focuses on orality as a common denominator in Norman's and Henley's works. In Thelma's case, her fixation on sweets reveals her emotional immaturity and dependency on Jessie, whereas her "counterfeiting obtuseness" through ceaseless chatter makes her a "figure of tragic intensity" who consciously refuses to "acknowledge unpleasant truth." In contrast, Jessie uses silence to "restrict others' access to her innermost self," and her oral fixation on

cigarettes, the symbolic equivalent of suicide, provides her with a negative means of achieving control of her life.

Murray, Timothy. "Patriarchal Panopticism, or The Seduction of a Bad Joke: Getting Out in Theory." Theatre Journal 35 (1983): 376-388.

Murray examines the ways Getting Out demonstrates a disruption between the panoptic, macho gaze of the institutional world of confinement and the creative, liberating force of Arlie's jokes. He equates the prison and its authority figures with the theater and its patrons: in each case, a voyeurism is at work in which the spectators judge Arlie's transformation into Arlene: "Does the audience experiment vicariously in a visual laboratory of power, control, and sadistic pleasure?" Murray suggests that the audience is caught in a double bind of desiring the promise of renewal affected by the system in its handling of Arlie/Arlene and realizing the need of Arlene "to be free of the macho world of control" as she indulges in mental replays of Arlie's cruel jokes

Natalle, Elizabeth. "Feminist Theatre and the Women's Movement." In Feminist Theatre: A Study in Persuasion. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1985. 113-129.

Natalle briefly mentions Marsha Norman and other mainstream women playwrights with a "feminist vision" in contrast with feminist playwrights working within purely feminist theaters. "The drama, " she says, "written by individual playwrights who have no connections with a particular feminist group is intended as a very different kind of statement than the drama associated with a group of individuals who write, produce, and act in that drama." In this chapter, however, Natalle is chiefly concerned with the messages of feminist theater, along with its transition from radicalism toward a more inclusive humanism.

Nischik, Reingard M. "Look Back in Gender': Beziehungskonstellationen in Dramen von Beth Henley und Marsha Norman - Einige Grundzüge des zeitgenössischen feministischen Theaters in den USA." *Anglistik & Englischunterricht* 35 (1988): 61-89.

If one considers as a goal of feminist writing the abolition of the patriarchal social structure, then night, Mother may barely be considered a feminist play. Nischik conducts a thematic analysis of night Mother and Henley's Crimes of the Heart, an analysis that considers the following questions: What picture of woman is sketched in these two successful plays by American women dramatists in the 1980s? In what constellation of roles do women characters appear? To what extent are they impaired because of these roles? Which characteristics of these works are typical of contemporary feminist theater in the United States? He concludes that Crimes of the Heart may better be defended as a feminist play than night, Mother.

Patraka, Vivian M. "Staging Memory: Contemporary Plays by Women." *Michigan Quarterly Review* 26 (1987): 285-292.

Patraka reviews two groups of contemporary plays by women dramatists, one group "linking women's memory to women's history by its emotional, economic, political, or mythic," the second group focusing on "women's collective memory" or "the history of women's expectations." She considers night, Mother as a member of this second group, seeing that the play presents "in part the struggle of memories between a mother and a daughter concerning their concept of and relationship to the deceased father." She relates Norman's drama to Joanna Glass' Play Memory, which also dramatizes a daughter's memory of her deceased father.

Pevitts, Beverly Byers. "Feminist Thematic Trends in Plays Written by Women for the American Theatre: 1970-1979." Ph.D. diss. Southern Illinois U at Carbondale, 1980.

Piazza, Roberta. "A Conversational Analysis of Theatrical Discourse: Repair

Procedures as the Expression of Dramatic Interaction." Ph.D. diss.  
Columbia Teachers College, 1987.

Porter, Laurin R. "Women Re-Conceived: Changing Perceptions of Women in Contemporary American Drama." Conference of College Teachers of English Studies 54 (1989): 53-59.

Porter focuses on Henley's *Crimes of the Heart*, John Pielmeier's *Agnes of God*, and *'night, Mother* as indicators of the ways contemporary dramas depicting women reflect cultural concerns. She identifies two primary characteristics of these plays: the presentation of all-female families and the concentration on the mother-daughter relationship. These plays represent a positive change in the culture inasmuch as they dramatize women who "do not need to define themselves in terms of men" and insist upon "the importance and value of the mother-daughter nexus and its centrality in our lives."

Scharine, Richard G. "Caste Iron Bars: Marsha Norman's Getting Out as Political Theatre." In Women in Theatre: Themes in Drama. Vol. 11. Edited by James Redmond. Cambridge, England: Cambridge UP, 1989. 185-198.

Describing women as "the true invisible caste," Scharine draws on studies of the oppression of women in America to illuminate the political content of Getting Out. The play is an example of "political theatre," a genre that "shows public policy, laws, or unquestioned social codes impinging unfairly and destructively upon private lives," for example, the life of Arlene Holsclaw. As a political drama, Getting Out blames the "system": "The factors that mitigate against Arlene taking charge of her life must be seen as flaws in the social system and not as purely personal problems." In Arlie/Arlene's case, these factors include child abuse and "a sexually discriminating legal system." Scharine labels Getting Out "an economic primer for American women," who may see their concerns as lower-caste U.S. citizens reflected in the condition of Arlie/Arlene.

----- . "Getting Out." From Class to Caste in American Drama: Political and Social Themes Since the 1930s. New York: Greenwood Press, 1991. 219-227.

The above argument is couched in a chapter concerning issues of gender in American drama, including African-American feminism and gay civil rights.

Schroeder, Patricia R. "Locked Behind the Proscenium: Feminist Strategies in Getting Out and My Sister in This House." *Modern Drama* 32 (1989): 104-114.

When a feminist theater, in opposition to male-dominated theater, restricts itself to nonlinear, nontraditional forms, the result is selfdefeating: "an undeviating separatism of dramatic forms can only mean that fewer feminist concerns will be dramatised, fewer audiences will be reached, and feminist playwrights ... will be left unheard." Norman's Getting Out and Wendy Kesselman's My Sister in This House provide Schroeder with examples of "flexible realism" by women playwrights, dramas that address feminist concerns while appealing to mainstream audiences. Although Getting Out follows a "chronological plot" and contains "conventional dialogue," the play addresses the feminist problem of a woman's "imprisonment in limited and limiting social roles." The device of the split character illustrates a "fragmentation of personality that is the result of [Arlie/ Arlene's] oppression," and the play promotes women's experience as Arlene discovers "the importance of female bonding."

Simon, John. "Theatre Chronicle: Kopit, Norman, and Shepard." *Hudson Review* 32 (1979): 77-88.

Simon provides a scene analysis of the initial New York production of Getting Out, which along with Kopit's Wings and Shepard's Buried Child he considers as one of "the three best plays of the season so far." He calls attention to the dramatic effectiveness of Norman's language, her use of "evasions,

understatements, and silences. Miss Norman has that essential dramatist's gift of letting the unsaid speak for itself." He also describes Norman's humor as "not a writer's wit that is superimposed on the characters; it is an earthy humor that stays very much in character." Assessing all three plays, Simon sees that "language is the least important element," that each play is meant to be performed rather than read. In addition, all three deal with "split personalities," prompting Simon to ask: "has the recession of the word caused the loss of a sense of full, unified selfhood? Or is it the other way round?"

Smith, Raynette Halvorsen. "night, Mother and True West Mirror Images of Violence and Gender." In Violence in Drama: Themes in Drama. Vol. 13. Edited by James Redmond. Cambridge, England: Cambridge UP, 1991. 277-289.

Responding to feminist critics who see no feminism in Shepard's work and only "stereotypical feminine masochism" in Norman's, Smith concentrates on the issue of gender definition in each play as a feminist concern: "violence is seen as the agent for the transformation out of .... [Mama's or Mom's] domesticity to freedom, autonomy, and individualism." Drawing upon Freudian theories of gender in relation to the mother, Smith considers how separation from the mother for the female is psychologically "more complicated" than for the male. Jessie's suicide becomes a tragedy representative of women in American culture who suffer anorexia and agoraphobia as extreme means of gaining control over the self.

Spencer, Jenny S. "Marsha Norman's She-tragedies." In Making a Spectacle: Feminist Essays on Contemporary Women's Theatre. Edited by Lynda Hart. Ann Arbor: Michigan UP, 1989. 147-165.

Resurrecting the eighteenth-century generic term "she-tragedy," Spencer applies it to three of Norman's plays that "focus on female characters, address a female audience, and foreground issues of female identity": Getting Out, Third and Oak: The Laundromat, and night, Mother. She considers the ways Norman develops a modern form of "she-tragedy," focusing on the importance

of conversation as action in Norman's work, the dialogue between women underscoring the "problem of female autonomy." Just as in eighteenth-century "she-tragedies," which dramatize "the character's potentially pathetic situation," Norman's dramas indicate the extent to which women in society are still manipulated and controlled within a patriarchal system: "We are asked to consider the ways in which male misrecognition itself shapes and determines female subjectivity."

-----: "Norman's night, Mother Psycho-drama of the Female Identity."  
Modern Drama 30 (1987): 364-375.

Spencer assesses audience response to night, Mother along gender lines, determining that males may view the play in a detached manner as "relatively predictable," whereas female viewers will be caught up in the "representation of repressed infantile complexes" peculiar to the mother-daughter relationship, with its issues of "feminine identity and female autonomy." Exploring the Freudian psychodynamics of Jessie's relationship to Mama, she concludes that these dynamics make the play "aesthetically over-distanced for men (producing indifference) and aesthetically under-distanced for women (producing pain)."

Steadman, Susan M. "Marsha Norman." In Notable Women in the American Theatre: A Biographical Dictionary. Edited by Vera Mowry Roberts, Milly S. Barranger, and Alice M. Robinson.  
Fredericksburg, VA: U Publications of America, 1988. 691-695.

Wattenberg, Richard. "Feminizing the Frontier Myth: Marsha Norman's The Holdup." Modern Drama 33 (1990): 507-517.

In The Holdup, Norman creates a feminist version of the traditional American myth of the frontier, a version that promotes maturation over adolescent violence. Her play avoids the "synthesis" of "Eastern Civilization and Western savagery" typical of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century dramas set in the West. Instead, "Norman presents Western savage violence as a self-destructive delusion that can and must be transcended." She resolves a



tension that Shepard leaves open-ended at the end of *True West*, whose two brothers, one representing the civilized east and the other the primitive West, anticipate Norman's structural use of two similar brothers in *The Holdup*.

Wertheim, Albert. "Eugene O'Neill's *Days without End* and the Tradition of the Split Character in Modern American and British Drama " *Eugene O'Neill Newsletter* 6 (Winter 1982): 5-9.

O'Neill's *Days without End* is a progenitor of contemporary American and British dramas, including *Getting Out*, dramatizing the "inner voice" through use of a second actor. Whereas the doubling device in *Days without End* was unjustly criticized in its day as "a gimmick," the same device has been praised by critics of Adrienne Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, Hugh Leonard's *Da and A Life*, and Peter Nichols' *Forget -Me-Not-Lane*. Wertheim suggests that *Getting Out* "marries the psychological, spiritual and philosophical divisions explored by ... O'Neill and Kennedy with the chronological divisions presented by Leonard and Nichols." *Getting Out* is unusual because the Arlene/Arlie split is both one of time (with a current self engaging a former self) and one of dialectic (as each self represents a conflicting impulse). Although Wertheim identifies echoes of *Days without End* within *Getting Out*, a claim for direct influence would require further evidence. Marsha Norman rightfully deserves a palce at the forfront of contemporary American drama.