



Sociological Feminist Reading on the Theme of Self-Awareness in Marsha Norman's 'Night, Mother'

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Abstract

In the 1980s, female dramatists, including Marsha Norman who is one of the most influential authors who speak up about women's experiences in America, adopted Self-Awareness as a form of individual and psychological cure. This paper discusses Norman's 'Night, Mother' (1981) in the light of psychoanalysis and feminism theories, showing the characters' search for self-awareness through their journey. By focusing on Marsha's play, this study aims to uncover the neglected experiences of American women. Psychoanalytical theories are crystallized in the characters' lives in "Night, Mother," especially Jessie, whose disorders, behaviours, reactions to the "others," frustration, suicide, and death indicate that many familial, social, and mental issues have affected her psyche. As a result, Jessie wants to prove herself as a free woman who can choose whatever she likes to avoid any restrictions. Thus, she decides to commit suicide as a way to revolt against society and a way to find her self-awareness.

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المخلص

في الثمانينيات، اعتمدت الكاتبات المسرحيات، بما في ذلك مارشا نورمان التي تعد واحدة من أكثر المؤلفات تأثيرًا اللاتي تحدثن عن تجارب المرأة في أمريكا، الوعي الذاتي كشكل من أشكال العلاج الفردي والنفسي. يناقش هذا البحث مسرحية نورمان "عمت مساء، أمي" (1981) في ضوء التحليل النفسي والنظريات النسوية، موضحة بحث الشخصيات عن الوعي الذاتي خلال رحلتهم. ومن خلال التركيز على مسرحية مارشا، تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى الكشف عن التجارب المهملة للمرأة الأمريكية. تتبلور نظريات التحليل النفسي في حياة الشخصيات في "عمت مساء، أمي"، وخاصة جيسي التي تشير اضطرابات وسلوكياتها وردود أفعالها تجاه "الآخرين" والإحباط والانتحار والموت إلى أن العديد من القضايا الأسرية والاجتماعية والعقلية أثرت على سلوكها النفسي. ونتيجة لذلك، تريد جيسي أن تثبت نفسها كامرأة حرة يمكنها اختيار ما تريد لتجنب أي قيود. وهكذا قررت الانتحار كوسيلة للثورة على المجتمع وطريقة للعثور على وعيها الذاتي.

المقدمة

Marsha Norman is widely recognized as one of the most prominent American feminist playwrights due to the success of multiple plays centering on female characters. This is the case, especially in her most famous work, *Night, Mother*. The play was nominated for a Tony Award for Best Play and the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1983. Winning the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, the Elizabeth Hull-Kate Warriner Award from the Dramatists Guild, and the Drama Desk Award, this classic American drama with a psychological underpinning is also widely regarded as a feminist piece (Dawar, 2020).

Night, Mother, written in 1981, was Marsha Norman's fifth play, first staged in 1983. After the first show, it started getting praise and favorable criticism regarding its emotional honesty and realistic dialogues. The play is a mixture of traditional and modern elements for its unique subject matter in the play. The major protagonists are females who struggle with inward loneliness and emptiness. Their unfulfilled American aspirations of obtaining wealth, security, a family, and love drive them into the hellish lives they are currently leading. The high point of the play is the women's lack of emotion. Dealing with a person's frustration and unmet hurts is a defining characteristic of Norman's plays. *'Night, Mother'* is a great illustration of her ability to capture the struggles and failings of every man and woman. The American dream is a significant topic in the works of many American authors. Even though Marsha Norman fits this category, her work is not an exact copy of previous authors'

depictions of the American ideal (Bigsby, 2000).

Marsha Norman's Brief Biography

Marsha Norman is an American dramatist, screenwriter, and novelist born on September 21, 1947. For her play 'Night, Mother,' she won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1983. Marsha penned the book and lyrics for Broadway musicals such as *The Secret Garden* and *The Red Shoes*, for which Norman won a Tony Award and a Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Book of a Musical, as well as the libretto for *The Color Purple* and the book for *The Bridges of Madison County*. She is the co-chair of The Juilliard School's playwriting department (Plotkins, 2005).

A Sociological Feminist Reading on the Theme of Self-Awareness in Marsha Norman's 'Night, Mother'

Marsha Norman is one of the most well-known American feminist playwrights because of the popularity of her plays that mostly feature female protagonists. This is true even more so in her most well-known piece, *Night, Mother*. There were Tony and Pulitzer Prize for Drama considerations for the play in 1983. This psychologically grounded American classic won the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, the Elizabeth Hull-Kate Warriner Award from the Dramatists Guild, and the Drama Desk Award. It is also generally considered as a feminist play (Dawar, 2020).

Marsha Norman's 1981 play, 'Night, Mother', showcases her unique style, blending classical and contemporary elements. The play, first performed in 1983, features women dealing with feelings of isolation and emptiness due to failed American dreams. The play's memorable moment is the women's lack of feelings. Norman's plays highlight the struggles and failings of all individuals, challenging traditional depictions of the American ideal. (Bigsby, 2000).

In *Night, Mother*, a feminine version of the American dream is shown. The play's protagonist, Jessie, has been duped by the American ideal, and she bravely takes her own life. Mother Jessie Cates is portrayed in 'Night' as a forlorn and pitiful victim of the American dream's harshness. The style of Marsha Norman in 'Night, Mother' offers a few stylistic traits. Two characters, Thelma and Jessie, converse in a language used by people whose lives are in danger due to the ravages of frustration and futility. It has been remarked that people whose lives have been on the point of ending in suicide take a conscious interest in unimportant things. A similar scenario occurs in 'Night, Mother', where Jessie Cates decides to take her own life. She also resolves to discuss it openly with her mother. She advised her mother on how to care for the kitchen tools Jessie had organized neatly on a rack. The patina of authenticity in Norman's language is distinctive in *Night, Mother*. Norman is attempting to convey the psychological realism of those ladies

whose lives became synonymous with futility by focusing on the character of the interaction between Jessie and Thelma. Real-world conversations have given Marsha Norman's drama a fresh impetus.

Marsha Norman's play 'Night, Mother' explores issues of isolation and loneliness experienced by women, focusing on the mother-daughter connection and female autonomy. Despite her family's religious fundamentalist beliefs, Norman provides options for women to react. (Simon, 1983: 55).

Due to psychoanalysis theory, there is a crucial element of the Mirror Stage and Lacan's theory of identity called narcissism. Freud differentiates between "primary" and "secondary" narcissism. Primary narcissism occurs when an infant "sees his own person as the object of exclusive love" (Rebate, 29), while secondary narcissism develops when an individual "transfers to the ego investments in objects in the external world" (Rabaté (ed.), 2003: 29). A protective mechanism against aggressive urges, narcissism seems to have a role in both primary and secondary narcissism (Rabaté (ed.), 2003:29). Both a Life Drive (Desire) and a hostile Death Drive are present in narcissists. The infant's intense attraction to his or her own image demonstrates a connection between narcissism and desire, as shown in the myth of Narcissus. Thus, 'Night, Mother' is about how difficult it is for people to have meaningful conversations. As will be seen later, both Thelma and Jessie are narcissists. Narcissism manifests itself in both the Imaginary and the Symbolic, but the Life Drive and the Death Drive of narcissism are exemplified by Thelma and Jessie, respectively. Although Jessie's viewpoint may not necessarily coincide with that of the author, some may interpret Norman's play as suggesting that suicide is a viable option for those who find life unbearable. Without imposing her own viewpoint on the situation, Norman here only provides a forum for the two female characters in her play to express themselves.

Night, Mother is tragic as its characters miss a chance to understand each other, with Thelma's narcissism being more prominent. She wants Jessie to survive for her own sake, not because she cares about Jessie's well-being.. Similarly, Jessie is discontent with her existence, hates her mother, and believes that "she is not enough" (NM, 1983: 13) as justification for taking her own life. In her own words, she explains why she has decided to end her life: "I'm just not having a very good time, and I don't have any reason to think it'll get anything but worse. I'm tired. I'm hurt. I'm sad. I feel used" (NM, 1983: 14).

In 'Night, Mother,' characters Thelma and Jessie are consumed by their dissatisfaction and futility, unable to discuss their future. The playwright Marsha Norman refuses to allow Jessie, a suicide follower, to use suicide-related gestures, highlighting the futility of life. The play takes place in a new house, with the action beginning at 8:15 onstage in the kitchen and on a table in

the living room. (Norman,1983: 6).

The drama revolves around American women Thelma and Jessie, who have epilepsy and a criminal brother, Dawson. Jessie plans to kill herself to replace her father, while Thelma tries to explain her duties to her . Jessie tells her mother, "I am worried about you, but I'm going to do what I can before I go. We're not going to sit around tonight. I made a list of things" (NM, 1983:18). Jessie's resolve to terminate her life has not been lost on Thelma, and she makes an effort to dissuade her. Jessie keeps trying to find her father's pistol while they talk. Thelma, unaware of Jessie's motive, reveals the gun's position to her. While she's away at camp, Jessie has her mom take care of the housework. Jessie states, "The grocery won't deliver on Saturday anymore" (NM, 1983:20). Everyone in the family dislikes chocolate, but Jessie keeps her mother busy making it anyhow(Dawar, 2020: 1).

Psychoanalysis concerns issues like forming masculine and feminine identities at the unconscious level. It provides a framework for arguing that reason and knowledge are always unconsciously gendered, which challenges philosophy's self-declared neutrality and universality—a claim that feminists had grown to view as increasingly dubious (Wolff,2007: 1). Jessie Cates, a character facing various life challenges, is portrayed in a drama that explores societal structures, effects, and consequences, highlighting her struggles with depression, seizures, and memory loss. . *'Night, Mother'* shows how much society affects a person. Jessie is humiliated physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially, and society has warped her family. After several defeats, she feels deceived, abandoned, and sad. She says, "I'm tired, I'm hurt. I'm sad." (NM, 1983, 14).She had never experienced a world where these emotions and circumstances did not dictate her actions. She now has a somewhat hazy perception of time due to this. In a way, Death creates a new life since it represents the release from the shackles of a miserable and futile existence.

Jessie's disease and mother's selfishness impacted her social interactions, affecting her experiences and identities influenced by central psychological motivations like belonging and understanding. (Fiske,2014:5). Jessie's struggle with societal integration, influenced by her disease, marriage, and motherhood, led to the formation of her personality and her ability to overcome weaknesses and assert her rights..Jessie's inner existence, like most suicidal people's, is characterized by helplessness, despair, and overwhelming loneliness, which she conveys less than halfway through the play when she answers to Mama's mounting panic 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 [can stop it. Shut it down,

tum it off like the radio when there's nothing on I want to listen to. It's an 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. (NM, 1983: 36)

The speech makes it very evident, first, that there is a relationship between Jessie's choice and her ambition to build some personal power, some independent sense of self, and, second, that such a goal is unachievable and self-contradictory in nature.

Psychoanalytic feminism examines women's roles as mothers and daughters, focusing on understanding the constant replication of the status quo and potential social change. (Wolff, 2007: 1). Jessie's mother has never acknowledged the gaps in their mother-daughter bond. Now that the daughter has decided to kill herself, her mother tries to intervene and talk her out of it. Jessie continues to be ready to commit suicide with the gun despite her assertion that it is too old to function (Jafari&Kiaei, 2015: 139). Thelma's speeches and actions demonstrate her desire for authority, consistently defeating Jessie and establishing her influence, even despite using pleasant language. She wants Jessie to paint her nails, she orders "hand me that basket hon" (NM, 1983: 55). "Now my glasses, please" (NM, 1983: 11). "Measure this for me" (p. 11). Jessie wants to reclaim her independence by making her personality known uniquely. Thelma, meanwhile, lives the life that was predetermined for her. She has to eat sweets and watch television, although she admits: "I don't know what I'm here for, but then I don't think about it" (NM, 1983: 34). Thelma is acting passively toward her role and identity. She wants to impose this way of life on Jessie since she has chosen the simple path to avoid conflict and upheaval, but Jessie is a strong-willed individual despite her destructive tendencies. She takes charge of her life and decides against living an unfulfilled existence like her mother. She is trying to verify her identity since she will not surrender to the society that pushes its laws on her. Jessie tells her mother that she has found a means to kill herself (Jafari, & Kiaei, 2015: 140).

According to Nancy Chodorow in "The Reproduction of Mothering" (1978), girls and boys go through various developmental journeys due to their unique childhood experiences. Boys find it simple to distance themselves from their moms since they naturally identify with the father's position of social authority. On the other hand, girls find it difficult to resist their mother's powerful influence since they are aware of their resemblance to and unity with their mother. Chodorow states:

Girls' identification processes are more continuously embedded in and mediated by their ongoing

relationship with their mother....A boy's identification processes are not likely to be so embedded in or mediated by a real affective relation to his father (P.176).

Girls emotionally reliant on their moms may occasionally struggle to establish a healthy sense of self, impacting their personality and way of life. Regarding Jessie in '*Night, Mother,*' she has had her sovereignty taken away. Jessie was compelled to move back in with her mother when she divorced her husband. Because of her illness, she is unable to hold a job or cultivate meaningful relationships:

You know I couldn't work, I can't do anything. I've never been around people my whole life except when I went to the hospital. I could have a seizure at anytime. What good a job? The kind of job I could get would make me worse". (NM, 1983: 26)

'*Night, Mother*' poignantly portrays the close relationship between a mother and a daughter. Thelma and Jessie's relationship traumatizes and destroys the daughter to the point where she considers taking her own life. The domination of Thelma was caused by her being affected by patriarchy and restricted by society, which makes her suppose the authority over her daughter. Thelma poured all her depression and deprivation on her daughter. The mother-daughter connection is complex, and Norman's distinctive use of dialogue illuminates the emotional truths that can surface in seemingly uninteresting discourse. As Bigsby observes:

For somewhere beneath the apparent banalities of conversations which seem no more than ways of passing the time, of filling the silence, are emotional truths which bruise the language and expose hidden tensions and anxieties.(p.210)

The difficulties in mother-daughter relationships are another topic that Norman investigates. Bigsby relates how Norman remembers that her mother "had a very serious code about what you could and could not say." You were not allowed to express any anger or contention in your speech (Bigsby, 2000: 212). As a result, in a way, her plays, which deal with wrath and conflict, themselves serve as a release from the silence and denial she felt. Thelma battles to save Jessie's life at Night while Jessie tries to take charge of her destiny. While Thelma fights to keep Jessie alive, Jessie tries to take charge of her destiny. Thelma, Jessie's mother, begs her daughter not to kill herself, but

Jessie insists that her decision has a "choice": "No, I don't. That's what I like about it" (NM, 1983: 27). Some feminist critics have argued that Norman's *Night, Mother* was a statement about the status of women in society. Linda Kintz argues, for instance, that In "*Night, Mother*," Norman creates a setting for the aesthetic invisibility of women's meaningless domestic labor by emphasizing the unique or organizing function of architecture in a set depicting a detached American middle- or lower-middle-class home (p. 15).

Night, Mother, according to some feminist skeptics, is about failure. They assert that the play is about the lady who decided to end her life rather than of trying to change her life and start again. Interestingly Norman's own words contradict this argument: "By my definitions of these words, *Night, Mother* is a play of nearly total triumph. Jessie can get what she needs. The question the play asks is, 'What does it take to survive? What does it take to save your life?' Jessie's answer is 'It takes killing myself' (Betsko & Rachel, 1987: 56). Norman continues by saying that Thelma, the mother, must rely on the minutiae of daily life to survive. This kind of existence has no significance for Jessie. Ironically, the loss that permeates this drama on both a physical and psychological level leads to empowerment. As a result, Jessie's ultimate action is something she can control—something definitive, definite, and her own. Jessie did not believe she had ever experienced this freedom of choice. Likewise, the knowledge that she could take her own life and free herself from her pointless circumstance provided her a reason to live. And the transcendent element of Norman's play is revealed to be the empowerment she experiences (Janardanan, 2007:10-11). We mentioned that self-awareness reflects the idea of one's awareness and able him to take a decision but what happen with Jessie indicates that she decided for the first time. Jesse's suicide is an abnormally extreme act, highlighting the psychology of abnormal behavior. Marsha Norman urges her audience to empathize with the actors on stage, drawing on their inner resources to share their experience.

The lack of community intensifies the subjective nature of the event; neither a social nor political framework offers a wider perspective, and even references to the outside world are startlingly hazy: "I read the paper, " Jessie says, "I don't like how things are. And they are not any better outside than they are in here" here" (NM, 1983:30).

Jessie's emotional life is characterized by a sense of helplessness, hopelessness, and overwhelming loneliness, similar to most suicidal people. She speaks less than halfway through the play in response to her mother's escalating 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. (NM, 1983:28)

In the play, Jessie's decision to take control of her life is exemplified when Thelma offers her hot chocolate and sweet apple, but Jessie realizes it's selfish and doesn't appreciate the milk taste, causing her to view her mother as an extension of herself. (Poster, 1978).

In *Night, Mother*, Jessie, a mid-thirties-early forties woman with epilepsy, decides to end her life as a form of control. Her mother, Thelma, arranged her marriage, and her son Ricky, a drug addict and thief, is unable to work due to her condition. Jessie views her life as meaningless, lacking a future, and beyond her power to change. Her experiences include her father's death, marriage dissolution, and her dog's death. (Spencer, 1987).

Jessie's mental health is influenced by family, societal, and mental concerns, leading to disorders, behaviors, and reactions. Self-awareness, the ability to recognize one's mental processes and influence actions, is crucial in psychology for optimal functioning and mental illness prevention. It allows individuals to understand their preferences and place in the world. (Duval, Silvia, & Lalwan, 2002). Jessie's thoughts and behavior were affected by her disease (epilepsy), which makes her feelings of depression, and anxiety controls her life.

Internal self-awareness, influenced by an individual's understanding of their motivations, values, and environment, is linked to lower stress, anxiety, depression, and increased satisfaction, personal and social control, and contentment. (Goleman, et., 2017). Jessie experiences external conflict and loneliness, leading to suicidal thoughts. She has a mother and a husband, but her isolation fuels her feelings. She chooses to distance herself from her spouse and mother, believing there is only one option to avoid living alone. (Raflis & Amalia, 2018: 15).

External awareness affects a person's internal awareness. That is noticed with the main character, Jessie, because she suffered from the environment surrounding her and the authoritarian society, reflect of this persecution in her internal awareness, which affected her awareness of her actions and led her negatively. When Jessie fails to build a strong community with her mother or a friend, it depicts a tragic, violent separation that leads to her final act of self-destruction. She "Cannot be reduced by her community because she has none" (Whited, 1997: 67). Without the support of a female community, Thelma

would undoubtedly fall into despair since we have no hope for a future female community in this environment of rigid patriarchal ideas. This suicidal theatrical vision sparked a ferocious backlash against 1980s modern American drama, which claimed that such a vision was purely negative and insanely rebellious, especially for women. However, some critics, such as William Demastes, who discussed Norman's plays, supported this option, claiming that Death does not negate the idea that [a woman] exercises her will to the very end by choosing what would happen to her life: "You don't have to [kill yourself]." "No, I don't. That's what I like about it." Mama and Jessie, (NM, 1983: 21).

Psychological illness in epilepsy patients leads to increased psychological and social problems such as discrimination and disability. Depression and anxiety are one of the complications that accompany epilepsy (Gaitatize et al., 2004). Studies found that a third of epilepsy patients suffer from depression and anxiety, and one in every four suffers from suicidal ideas (Tellez-zantono et al., 2007). Jessie Cates, struggling with various life challenges, lacks confidence in finding solutions and decides to end her life by committing suicide. She feels it is her only option and a better one than her current life. Jessie's strength comes from having complete control over her life, not for avenging her mother or hurting someone. Despite her separation, epilepsy, and lack of friends, Jessie intends to commit herself. (Spencer, 1987).

Another instance is where a male-centric belief system controls the female characters. However, by killing herself, Jessie eliminates her identity and lays the way for Thelma's hopeless destiny and kills the dream of female solidarity and liberty. At the same time, Thelma has contented herself with her constrained existence (Mehta, 2010). Jessie states:

Cecil left me because he made me choose between him and smoking."

MAMA. Jessie, I know he wasn't that dumb.

JESSIE. I never understood why he hated it so much when it's so good. Smoking is the only thing I know that's always just what you think it's going to be. Just like it was the last time and right there when you want it and real quiet. MAMA. Your fits made him sick and you know it. (NM, 1983:38)

Simply put, smoking began to symbolize the autonomy Jessie felt she lacked in her life and the freedom of choice she lacked. When given the option to choose between staying with Cecil, whom she married due to her mother's arrangements, or smoking, which she elected to do on her own, she chose to smoke. Jessie chooses one of the few decisions she made independently (Browder, 1989). In this situation, Jessie regarded the choice between her

husband and the smoke as a decision she made for the first time, although her marriage was without her decision. Jessie wants to improve her status in this society by choice.

According to Freud, "Suicide represents unconscious hostility directed toward an interjected, ambivalently viewed love object and is the very symptom of an underdeveloped ego" (Moore & Kenneth, 2002: 166). However, Jessie's conscious self perceives the play's final suicide as a purposeful, thoroughly thought-out action. She characterizes it as being personal, private, her own, sensible, and voluntarily chosen. Jessie's suicide, however, raises more questions than it answers. Jessie has a strong will and a stable mental state from the beginning; she does not want to be saved, and, as Thelma occasionally acknowledges, she is "already gone" (Hart & Arnold, 1989). Some prominent motifs are:

the relationship between parent and child, usually mother and daughter; the inescapable encroachment of the past the present; and, perhaps most tellingly, the struggle between rationalism and faith. The plays encourage the possibility of religious faith but with choice as an essential ingredient: Faith like feminism demands autonomy. (Coen, 1992: 22)

All of these motifs can be seen at work in *Night Mother*. Additionally, there are allusions to Christianity and Jesus Christ, but the author places these in the background of the main story:

MAMA. You don't know what dead is like. It might not be quiet at all. What if it's like an alarm clock and you can't wake up so you can't shut it off. Ever. JESSIE. Dead is everybody and everything I ever knew, gone. Dead is dead quiet.

MAMA. It's a sin. You'll go to hell.

JESSIE. Uh-huh.

MAMA. You will

JESSIE. Jesus was a suicide, if you ask me. MAMA. You'll go to hell just for saying that. Jessie". (NM, 1983: 16-17)

Similarly, monologues are used to convey the personality and character of the speaker. In *Night Mother*, monologues are important tools for enhancing the play's dramatic impact. This tool shows how Jessie attempts to take control of her life despite her severe decision to end it. This illustrates how forces outside her influence have infringed upon her autonomy, dignity, and will. Since it facilitated a national conversation on taboo subjects, it is reasonable to conclude that 'Night Mother is sincerely concerned with the human condition. Suicide

and, to a lesser degree, epilepsy are two such major problems (The Christian Science Monitor, 2004: 15).

Due to feminism, a woman should have free will to become a woman, not a thing. Thus, Marsha enables Jessie to recognize that achieving self-awareness through having free will. She can overcome determinism, the conventions, and the duties set by society and make decisions based on her own free will and her deepest desires. By ignoring her responsibilities to her mom, she can exercise her independence. Jessie's mother's pleading with her to reconsider her suicide plans was a decisive influence against her free will, but she chose to disregard her mother's pleas and end her own life instead. Her free will parallels her existential crisis. The term "existential condition" describes a person's whole state of being, including their current living environment, expectations, thoughts, and actions. According to Kierkegaard, one's predicament due to being born into this world is unique. They worry about the discrepancy between their ideal world and the one they live in (Stumpf, 1999). In the play, Jessie's suicide might symbolize the act of will and dedication to a true self. Jessie's uneasiness, alienation, and attempts at self-destruction (suicide) stem from the gap between her expectations and reality, an existential situation she gradually learns to recognize. Jessie's action, suicide, is a deliberate and unnatural means of ending her life. The activity relies heavily on the participation of a single person. Discovering one's true self is a deliberate, self-directed endeavor. Because making decisions is fundamental to being human, such actions are inevitable. By making this decision, Jessie is developing her sense of self. She finds her self-awareness by doing the ultimate, defining action: killing herself.

Jessie's choice to take charge of her life by exercising her right to die would be evaluated in the light of the "how to" suicide handbook if the play were written today (Coen, 1992: 22). Dr. Jack Kevorkian, a retired pathologist from Michigan who has helped people commit suicide if they are terminally sick or experiencing chronic, unbearable pain, gained notoriety in the 1990s. People who advocate for the right to die frequently claim that it is their option to end their own life if they believe it to be worthless. Jessie isn't brain dead or terminally ill, but how she perceives her condition through a veil of depression is comparable to those who want euthanasia, which means "merciful death" because she feels that her quality of life is extremely low. Jessie decides to end her life because she has the freedom to do so, not because she is ill or mentally ill in some way. Norman clarifies in her essay that any motive did not drive Jessie's decision. There is no cause for Jessie to die other than the fact that she chooses to do so; nonetheless, that is what she does offer: a woman who chooses to act rather than to be acted upon. Norman creates a woman that may

be anyone by neutrally describing Jessie. She also makes her audience consider who is eligible for the death penalty (Ameen, 2011).

The play's main themes are the identity crisis and self-awareness of Jessie, who is transitioning. Jessie looks after her mother and takes care of her requirements while she lives with Thelma in their house. Jessie strives to fight the harm her mother's caregiver duty poses to her sense of self. Jessie cannot live independently due to a health condition, so she can only care for her mother, who is oblivious to Jessie's longing for happiness. Jessie thinks that no one cares about her and that her family has ignored her since childhood. She states, "It was somebody pink and fat who never heard of sick or lonely, somebody who cried and got fed, and reached up and got held and kicked but didn't hurt anybody, and slept whenever she wanted to, just by closing her eyes" (NM, 1983:50).

Jessie struggles to maintain employment and establish a family after her cheating husband, Cecil, had an affair with a neighbor's daughter, leading to Ricky becoming a burglar and drug addict. People may see her rant in her words below:

JESSIE: He wasn't the wrong man, Mama. I loved Cecil so much. And I tried to get more exercise and I tried to stay awake. I tried to learn to ride a horse. And I tried to stay outside with him, but he always knew I was trying, so it didn't work (NORMAN, 1983: 59).

Jessie, feeling betrayed and abandoned by her family, experiences estrangement, identity loss, hopelessness, and desperation. She wants to leave her mother's house to restore her independence and authority. Jessie believes suicide is the only way to regain control over her life, hoping her mother will understand her decision, despite not wanting her to feel guilty. Jessie states, "Now, somebody's bound to ask you why I did it, and you just say you don't know" (NM, 1983:53). She wants to share her mother's last moments with her. Jessie says she and her mother need to be alone and do not want any visitors. It shows that Jessie still values her time with her mother even if they will be physically apart. How Jessie manages to stay alive depends on who Thelma really is. Despite seeing a vision of Jessie's death, Thelma continues to try to rescue him. Thelma is aware of how much Jessie has helped her out after the death of her husband. Jessie, though, is aware of her place in Thelma's life and states, "I'm not going to show up, so there's no reason to stay, except to keep you company, and that's. . . not reason enough because I'm not . . . very good company" (NM, 1983:50).

Although their marriages and parental roles are perceived as failing for

Thelma and Jessie, they have both been wives and mothers. After getting divorced, Jessie moved in with her mother and held Thelma accountable for losing her identity. Jessie doesn't want to live a life completely dependent on others. If Jessie's early years are closely examined, it will become abundantly evident that her loss of self-identity began then. The mother and daughter are united by their same identity. Jessie understands that since she would never be able to live independently of her mother, it will be via her Death that she will be able to do so. Thelma is the one who cannot resolve her issue because Jessie ends up committing herself despite all of her attempts. Because of Both Thelma and Jessie's expectations for one another, there is a conflict between them (Dawar,2020).

In "Night, Mother," Jessie's suicide triggers her mother to communicate, suggesting suicide as a logical choice for unbearable life. Norman's play, without authorial stance, allows the characters to express their thoughts, leading to a tragedy as they miss out on understanding each other. (Marsha Norman's Plays "Night Mother" Analysis 2020). Jessie has a lot of issues in her personal life that make her consider killing herself. First, Jessie knows that her seizure is a temporary condition that makes her feel inadequate. Her mother, Thelma, who treats her like a servant and has misled about crucial aspects of Jessie's life, is another person who disappoints her. She also understands that she can no longer rely on them since her ex-husband Cecil and her son Ricky leave her alone in Thelma's home. Dawson, her brother, and Loretta, her sister-in-law, provide her with no assistance in overcoming her issues. Agnes, Thelma's closest friend, is aware of Jessie's seizure. She even makes an effort to avoid her. Jessie Cates has had a variety of personal issues throughout her life. She encounters numerous difficulties with herself, her family, and those around her (Dawar,2020).

Jessie, who lives with her mother after divorce, struggles with self-doubt and dissatisfaction. She seeks help from her mother but is uninterested, especially due to her epileptic illness. Her mother, Thelma, treats her like a servant and a liar. (Silva, 2022). Regarding two crucial aspects of Jessie's life, she has lied. Her mother is lying regarding the seizure and her relationship with Jessie's father. In reality, the seizure began earlier than Jessie believes, and her mother has no love at all for her father. Jessie is extremely wounded and disappointed by it. Jessie's additional issues are those with her kid, her brother and sister-in-law, her ex-husband, and her mother's friend. First, Cecil, Jessie's ex-husband, does not truly love her and deserts her when she needs help handling her seizure. Cecil also deceives her with a different young woman. As a result of running away from home and becoming a criminal, Ricky, Jessie's son, adds to the misery and disappointment (Ameen, 2011).

The other issues revolve around Dawson, her brother, and his wife. Jessie despises them since they love to meddle in her life and have access to too much information. Last, Jessie also has issues with Agnes, a friend of her mother's. Because Agnes is scared of Jessie, especially when she gets a seizure, she never returns home. She said Jessie's illness always reminds her of the Death she fears. Unfortunately, Jessie lacks confidence in finding solutions as other people typically do. She decides to end her life and her difficulties by committing suicide after giving up. She feels that suicide is her only option and will provide a better option than her life (Effendy,2006).

Jessie's suicide may lead to a recurrence of ingrained loneliness, affecting modern women like Thelma. The instability of relationships in the postmodern world has made individuals weak, especially women, and reduced their desire to be aggressive. Thelma's epilepsy complicates her life, and both have lost significant people. However, Jessie finally discovers a permanent answer to her loneliness, highlighting the transcendent element in life. (Effendy, 2006).

As a last-ditch effort to exercise complete control—something Jessie had never done before, she carefully plans her suicide. Her acts are not motivated by desperation; rather, they are the controlled, purposeful execution of a well-thought-out strategy to release herself from an empty life(Janardanan,2007: 11).Both Thelma and Jessie's mothers were denied agency in the scene from *'Night, Mother*. Jessie's relocation to live with her mother due to her divorce from her husband forced Thelma to suffer a loveless marriage. Her illness makes it impossible for her to work or develop relationships.

You know I couldn't work, I can't do anything. I've never been around people my whole life except when I went to the hospital. I could have a seizure at anytime. What good a job? The kind of job I could get would make me worse". (NM, 1983:26)

Both of them are subject to the criticism of friends and family. The lack of husbands and sons shows that their male relatives have disapproved of them. Jessie notices her brother (Dawson) and his wife's disdain for her. Jessie has to deal with the disdain of her neighbors as well. Agnes is very explicit about how she feels about Jessie:

Jessie's shook the hand of the Death and I can't take the chance it's Catching, Thelma, so I ain't cumin over and you can understand or not, but I ain't cumin. I'll come the driveway, but that's as for as I go. (NM, 1983:30)

It is clear that Jessie and Thelma live in isolation in Thelma's home, are judged, and are left out. Their home was transformed into a prison where both ladies were held captive metaphorically. As a result, women in such a patriarchal society are denied their identities. Women in both plays are forced to embrace the identities that patriarchy has created for them (Ameen,2011: 8-9).

The picture of loss is changed and adjusted in Marsha Norman's *'Night, Mother,* to depict the life-or-death fight that occurs on stage in real-time as Thelma tries to stop Jessie from killing herself and Jessie seeks to take control of her own life by doing so. Truths can be revealed and expressed for the first time due to the conflict between the mother and daughter. Ironically, Thelma and Jessie develop a true, loving bond throughout their conflict—one they could not establish before this tragic event. The first few lines of discussion make it clear that Jessie wants to commit suicide (Greiff, 1989). As a result, after making her choice, she actively participates in shaping her future. Over the past ten years, Jessie has thought about taking her own life. Jessie's final act is self-validation despite the setbacks she has experienced, and the chaos epilepsy has caused in her life. Marsha Norman examines the ability of dialogue—the ability of the seemingly innocuous exchange to reveal emotional truths—in her story *'Night, Mother.* Because loneliness, isolation, and loss are universal themes, Thelma and Jessie's plight transcends national and cultural boundaries and has drawn the attention of numerous international audiences. Furthermore, Thelma's emotional struggle to stop her daughter from killing herself is a situation that undoubtedly knows no geographic boundaries. Similar to how Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* both expose emotional truths that cut over social, political, and cultural borders through text and performance, Norman, as Leslie Kane observes, "dramatizes the personal crises of ordinary people struggling to have a self and be a self" (Janardanan,2007: 177-178).

Pyszczynski& Greenberg (1987), states that:

Depression occurs after the loss of an important source of self-worth when an individual becomes stuck in a self-regulatory cycle in which no responses to reduce the discrepancy between actual and desired states are available. Consequently, the individual falls into a pattern of virtually constant self-focus, resulting in intensified negative affect, self-derogation, further negative outcomes, and a depressive self-focusing style. Eventually, these factors lead to a negative self-image, which may take on value by providing an explanation for the individual's plight and by helping

the individual avoid further disappointments. The depressive self-focusing style then maintains and exacerbates the depressive disorder. (n. p)

Accordingly, the main point is that Jessie realized her self-awareness, focused on her life and behavior and her position in this world. She finds her life desperate, and there is no hope, as she realizes that she did not survive and does not wait for her except by choosing a new life represented by her Death. For the first time in her life, she can feel independent and decide by herself and control her life. The main character took self-awareness, a negative trend that led her to destroy her life more than she was. Thelma is the other character that has self-awareness of her relationship with her daughter. In the final hour, she realized she made a mistake and could not persuade her daughter to remain alive. Thelma's awareness was late. Her selfishness made her destroy her family and lose Jessie. She prevents her daughter from living as an independent woman. According to this interpretation, it is clear that Norman's play tackles the thematic relation between psychoanalytic feminism and their status under the patriarchal pressure system.

Conclusion

Based on what has been said above, it is safe to say that self-awareness has a special place in the hearts of individuals who have misplaced their sense of self-worth. In the play 'Night, Mother, Jessie is faced with a group of individuals who are different from her and her previous version, and she grapples with finding the appropriate reactions to both. 'Night, Mother demonstrates that an individual's life is shaped by societal influences and the constraints put upon them within the Symbolic order. Jessie experiences several forms of degradation, including physical, mental, emotional, and social humiliation. Additionally, her family history, influenced by societal norms and the symbolic father figure, contributes to her suffering. Due to a succession of personal setbacks, she experiences profound sadness and isolation. Paradoxically, she derives a sense of satisfaction from being proven correct about her misfortunes, which aligns with Lacan's concept of 'Jouissance' for her. Jessie is subordinate to several individuals considered 'masters,' referred to as 'others,' who have subjected her to various forms of cruelty. The issue of Jessie's suicide revolves around her quest for self-determination and self-reliance.

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