

The she-tragedies of Marsha Norman: A study of the major plays 'night, mother and getting out'

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Abstract

The American play Wright, Marsha Norman gave woman in her Society much attention for they are frustrated creatures. In the prologue to *The Fair Penitent* (1703), Nicholas Rowe promises "a melancholy tale of private woes: no Princess here lost royalty bemoans, but you shall meet with sorrow like your own." The play is the first of a Rowe's she-tragedies, a term that has come to be associated not only with Rowe's work, but with any 18th century tragedy in which women are the protagonist or prominent in the pathetic situations depicted. While the focus on women changed tragic structure, tempo, and dramatic effect, the term coined to identify those differences also suggests the forms diminished critical reputation. Placing she-tragedies tradition, Arthur Sherbo defines it in opposition to "great" or "true" tragedy.

Keywords: American play, Society, masculinity, patriarchy

Introduction

The protagonist of these tragedies, accept death in a spirit of acquiescent submission that is foreign to great tragedy. And the note of final triumph is conspicuously absent. The protagonist of sentimental or pathetic tragedy are kept from achieving greatness by their recognizably exaggerated humanity, and nowhere is this brought home to us more clearly than in those the protagonists of these tragedies accept death in a spirit of acquiescent submission that is foreign to great tragedy. And the note of final triumph is conspicuously absent..... The protagonists of sentimental or pathetic tragedy are kept from achieving greatness scenes where far too much is made of emotions with which we ourselves are familiar from personal experience. (English Sentimental Drama 139)

To resurrect the term she tragedies for Marsha Norman's women's centered plays is potentially misleading and perhaps unfair. Primarily written by male playwrights, 18 century she tragedies share dramatic and linguistic conventions that are alien to the modern stage: Banks, Southern, Otway, and Rowe have more in common with each other than with any contemporary playwright. And yet, as feminist historiographers have shown us time and again cultural assumptions on which attitudes towards women rest prove far more resistant to change than the literary forms in which they appear.

Without belabouring the comparison, Lynda Hart suggests that her tragedy is an appropriate term for Norman's three most successful plays to date: *Getting Out*, *Third and Oak*: *The Laundromat* and *'night, Mother*. These plays focus on female characters, address a female audience, and foreground issues of female identity. All three consider the problem of surviving in a patriarchal society, find limited hope in the connections between women, and chart the devastating emotional consequences of "self-realization" in a society that still defines and determines the feminine subject position negatively.

'Night, Mother was presented in November 1981 as a Circle Repertory Project- in- Progress and in December 1982 at the American Repertory Theatre in Cambridge, Massachusetts

before on Broadway to win its Second Best Play designation and the Pulitzer Prize for drama. The play stages the space of women's worthless domestic work and its aesthetic invisibility, initially foregrounding the spatial organizational role of architecture in a set representing an isolated middle class or lower middle class house in the United States; it appears to be the homogeneity of much of American life. (New York Times Magazine 40)

The play seems to be about a woman in her thirties for whom life has lost savor and point and who decides to make a quick exit with one bullet: It seems to be a drama of the courage to face nullity, to recognize and reject it. Jessie is a plump, divorced country woman who lives with her widowed mother in the family home. At the moment that the play begins Jessie comes into the parlor- and- kitchen set carrying a beach towel and asks her mother, who is in the kitchen, whether there is a sheet of plastic around. The question is matter- of- fact as in her question about where Daddy's gun is:

Jessie: Where's Daddy's gun?

Mama: In the attic.

Jessie: Where in the attic? I looked your nap and couldn't find it anywhere. ('Night, Mother 7)

Climbing up the attic, she gets the pistol and announces as she cleans it, that she is going to kill herself.

Jessie: I'm going to kill myself, Mama...

Jessie: Shoot myself in a couple of hours. ('Night, Mother 13)

Mama, Thelma Cates is Jessie's mother, in her late fifties or sixties, spends time fighting separation, gathering together memorabilia as registers those moments lost- photos of children, relatives and friends, letters, remembrance's, objects given to her, even when those objects may appear very superficial to others and especially to the audience. After Jessie's announcement of intent, Thelma goes through recurring stages of disbelief, fright, panic, near- petulance, near - acceptance, and dismay.

Jessie just plows ahead through the last ninety minutes of her occasionally pierced by stabs of feeling but mostly making

careful preparations or informing Thelma of preparations already made, including much trivia about deliveries of groceries, milk and candy.

Jessie: I am worried about you, but I'm going to do what I can before I go. We're not just going to sit around tonight. I made a list of things.

Mama: What things?

Jessie: How the washer works. Things like that. (Night, Mother 21)

The play deals primarily about the will daughter's announcement of suicide to the mother who tries to keep her daughter from doing the act. Jessie wants to give up her life and she thinks

Jessie: I am what became of your child.... I'm what was worth waiting for and I didn't make it Me who might have made a difference to me I'm not going to show up, so there's no reason to stay... ('Night, Mother 76)

And Mama holding on to Jessie,

Mama: Jessie, how can I live here without you? I need you I don't want to die, and I don't want you to go, Jessie.

Mama: Stay with me first a little longer, just a few more years. I don't have that many more to go, Jessie.

Mama: I'll pay more attention to you. Tell the truth when you ask me. Let you have your say. ('Night, Mother 73-75)

Jessie is a woman who ultimately says no to life, not at a desperate plea but as a firm resolve. She's a woman in whom all desire is spent, not through satiation but through the clear understanding of her world's false nourishment. She has exhausted all the images that might have sustained her. Jessie explains to her mother her decision to commit suicide is about:

It's somebody I lost alright, it's my own self. Who I never Was. Or who I tried to be and never got there. Somebody I Waited for who never came.... ('Night, Mother 76)

Despite her mother's increasing terror, Jessie is obdurate. And at last, a self-determined last, she tears herself from her mother's grasp, goes into the bedroom, locks the door (so that Thelma can't be suspected of murdering her) and after moment shoots.

The central character of the play Jessie's social interaction is almost nil. Here in the play the worlds narrow to the interactions of a mother- daughter pair who talk about themselves, their family, their relationships, their domestic life, their past; and who reveal through their conversation the Un- worked grief and anger. Marsha Norman's plays are private and domestic because it is not public, its isolation no accident. In the play 'night, Mother Jessie's relationship with her social milieu is almost nil. Norman in the play shows Jessie's relationship with her brother Dawson his wife Loretta, her husband and her son to a very small extent. Jessie decides to kill herself with her father's gun and has tricked her brother into buying the bullets for her. Jessie's reference to the gun she needs for "protection" brings up her son Ricky who, as she says, is the only criminal they know; he has been arrested several times and has even stolen from her; she could have prevented that had she been able to keep him a baby, to stop those minutes. He is like her:

We look at the world and see the same thing: not fair. And the

only difference between us is Ricky's loose boards in the floor, and you know who laid the floor, I did. ('Night Mother 60)

He becomes a jumbled metaphor of her marriage Ricky is the two of us together for all time in too small a space. ('Night, Mother 60) Like the attempt to measure up to what is required of women by a culture that always finds them lacking, she was not enough, either for Ricky or for her husband. Jessie, though divorced still loves her ex-husband Cecil. Jessie suffers from epilepsy although she has not had a seizure for a year and this factor attributes for her divorce from her husband. "I never was what he wanted to see, so it was better when he wasn't looking at me all the time." ('Night, Mother 61).

To her mother's lament that her husband should have taken her when he left, she says, "Mama, you don't pack your garbage when you move." ('Night, Mother 61) Thinking about her life, Jessie feels defeated as if everything in life is beyond control. Indeed, she no longer savors anything in life, as she observes when she tells Mama that she might have decided to live "if there was something I really liked, like maybe if I really liked rice pudding or comfiakes for breakfast or something, that might be enough" ('night, Mother 77), but she does not. Jessie's relationship with her brother Dawson is never shown to us directly; he is never on stage but functions instead, as an absent magnet. In fact we share Jessie's action in part as a joke at Dawson's expense. Dawson who thinks all women share his wife's foot size and who "just calls me Jess like he knows who he is talking to." ('Night, Mother 23) Jessie wants to do something that her brother isn't privy to, won't understand, and whose fatal consequences are a direct result of his ignorant self-absorption.

He took it as a compliment. He thought I might be taking an interest in things. He got through telling me about the bullets and then he said we ought to talk like this more often. ('Night, Mother 15)

Jessie feels uncomfortable with Dawson in and his wife Lorreta. When Mama asks Jessie if Dawson bothers her, her reply is "Sure he does." ('Night, Mother 23) "He's always wondering what I do all day. I mean, I wonder that myself, but it's my day, so it's mine to wonder about, not his." ('Night, Mother 23) She finds the members of the family to "know too much" ('night, Mother 23)

They know things about you, and they learnt it before you had a chance to say whether you wanted them to know it or not. They were there when it happened and it don't belong to them, it belongs to you, only they got it. ('Night, Mother 23)

Jessie's 'fits' as her mother calls them have marked her, over and above her femininity, as abject, terrifying, disgusting. Thelma's best friend Agnes, will not visit them anymore because she has witnessed one of Jessie's seizures. One of Jessie's most painful reasons for suicide is that she has been seen in this state of absolute loss of control that horrifies everyone. She doesn't have the courage to face the world around her. She feels lost and lonely in the harsh world. When Thelma gives her various options of keeping her occupied, Thelma refers to her taking up a job but Jessie explains that she could not make enough money at the telephone sales job and when "I tried to work at the gift shop at the hospital and

they said I made people real uncomfortable smiling the way I did.” (‘Night, Mother 35)

Jessie feels she is a social misfit, that people have not accepted her, be it her husband Cecil, her employers, Agnes and her influence over her son has made him a convict. One strong relationship in the play that Norman shows is her relationship with her father. She wants to end her life with “Daddy’s gun” and she has identified with his kind of withdrawal: “I want to hang a big sign around my neck, like Daddy’s on the barn, GONE FISHING” (‘night, Mother 27).

She loves her father who always spoke to her and understood her, but feels sad that her parents shared a very loveless marriage and she as a child, the silent observer of this loveless union had been permanently adversely affected by the parental model. Even the death of her favorite dog King is mentioned in the passing. Though Jessie denies each suggestion as it is proposed individually, their cumulative power would be sufficient according to clinical standards to motivate suicide- a series of personal losses of father, husband, son and dog which intensify the feelings of depression, betrayal and abandonment.

The relationship between mother and daughter is one of the themes probed deeply in the plays by women. Such, for example are Rose Leiman Goldenberg’s *Letters Home*, Honor Moore’s *Mourning Pictures*, Ursula Molinaru’s *Breakfast Past Noon* and also Marsha Norman’s ‘night *Mother* According to Marsha Norman, the mother - daughter relationship is

One of the world’s greatest mysteries, it has confused and confounded men and women for centuries and centuries house and yet it has not been perceived to have critical impact on either the life of their family or the survival of the family. (Interviews with Contemporary Women Playwrights 338)

The characterization of Mama and Jessie is individualized and not stereotypical. This is in keeping with of feminist belief that

As long as women are pictured chiefly as wife, mother, courtesan or what not- defining merely relationship with men, nothing new or strange or interesting is likely to happen. (The New Feminism in Twentieth Century America 33)

Though both Mama and Jessie are mothers and wives, they are not defined primarily in these roles. Neither of them is the sentimentalized or romanticized mother figure nor is Jessie a passive, beautiful damsel in distress.

In ‘night, Mother Norman’s brief opening characterizations include revealing comments on verbal behaviour Thelma “speaks quickly and enjoys talking, is “chatty” and “believes things are what she says they are.” Jessie “generally doesn’t like to talk.” (‘Night, Mother 2) Indeed, Mama believes that if she says the right words, Jessie will change her mind and if that doesn’t work, she can “get you someone to talk to.” (‘Night, Mother 17) Jessie’s response “I’m through talking, Mama. You’re it. No more “(‘night, Mother 17) indicates both strength of her resolve and the finality of the decision itself, the end of the talk alluding to the end of life as well. On this particular night, talking will serve different functions for the two characters. Jessie wants, for once in her life to speak and hear only truth, to establish with certainty the meaning and consequences of her act (a desire in many ways impossible). On the other hand, Mama recognizes that “things don’t have to be true to talk about them.” (‘Night, Mother 41) For Mama Talk prevents loneliness, satisfies emotional needs, and fills

the time. The major difference between Jessie Cates and her mother Thelma Cates seems to be a question of appetite. As Jessie readies herself for suicide and attempts to prepare her mother for her life without her, the focus is on food. Mama opens the play with her assertion of appetite. The question for appetite is at the heart of mama’s choice for life and Jessie’s choice for death. Despite difference in mama and Jessie’s appetite for food and life and their different attitudes towards death, mama fearing that which her daughter seeks to embrace. Norman establishes the similarity between mother and daughter early in the play. When mama thinks Jessie is looking for her father’s gun to protect them from thieves, she says, “we don’t have anything anybody’d want, Jessie. I mean, I don’t even want what we got, Jessie” (‘night, Mother 10) Jessie’s “neither do I” (‘night, Mother 10) of course this has a more ominous meaning because one senses that the “protection” she seeks with the gun is not from the thieves but from life even before she announces her intention to commit suicide. Still, neither woman values what she has.

In the play Thelma spends time fighting separation, gathering together memorabilia, she literally recollects, focusing backwards in the present in order to carry out this archive with her and actively rebelling against being made an object with the symbolic sacrificial contract. This kind of rebellion, however may not express itself as a heroic refusal in terms of masculine behaviour. Jessie’s rebellion is not heroic but rather resistant, the drying on the activity of popular ingenuity which uses whatever little there is at hand to preserve experience to recreate an aura of ‘timelessness’ to insist upon the permanent. From the mothers point of view preserving ordinances would mean saving her daughter’s life, keeping the day’s one just like the last without this hideous description, for which her daughter has recollected old towels, the cushion of a lawn chair, and plastic garbage bags to keep the mess down. When the mother automatically but unwittingly says, “don’t go making a big mess,” (‘night, Mother 6) in the mechanical, banal phrase of the nagging mother, it’s resonance is intensified by her growing despair at what that mess will mean, her inability to say anything else but those automatic words. The resonance is intensified by the contrast between the bloody scenes to come and the endless, childish messes this same daughter once made. These words ensure like a cipher, a particular shared understanding worth of what it is like to have to children, and of what it is like to face their loss, a generalisable uniqueness as a shared experience.

For the daughter, however, preserving ordinariness would prolong her own living death, her stranded position as an aging daughter serving as mother to her mother, a mother who is healthier than she is and who still retains indirect control of her house. Now as the mothering daughter, she will disrupt the temporal sequence and die before her mother. She is a highly dignified woman, and these humiliations have led her to take a certain control over her life: “It’s all I really have that belongs to me and I’m going to say what happens to it.” (‘Night, Mother 36). Norman however, uncomfortably exploits the image of the epileptic and cripple even though the plays power does not require it. The striking difference here is the daughter who is the mother of the mother centers on mastery. Jessie’s accession to a position in which she mothers her mother is just that — mothering and, in a sense it is a complete loss of control, and she is smothered by the mother! Woman image,

the role out the woman. It is more a loss of control than it is the decision to own life. In an interview Marsha Norman says,

Well, Jessie certainly doesn't want to have anything more to do with her life, but she does want mama to be able to go on, and that's a very strong desire on Jessie's part. She wants mama to be able to do the wash and know where everything is. She wants mama to live, and to live free of the guilt that mama might have felt had Jessie just left her a note. Jessie's desires are so strong in the piece. The play exists because Jessie wants something for mama. Then of course, mama wants Jessie to stay. So you have two conflicting goals and at that point it is a real struggle, it might as well be armed warfare. Only very late in the piece they realize that both goals are achievable given some moderation. What mama does understand finally, is that there wasn't anything she could do and so Jessie does win. Mama certainly loses in the battle to keep her alive, but mama does gain other things in the course of the evening. (Interviews with Contemporary Women Playwrights 328)

She continues to say,

They have never been as close as they are on this evening. It is calling the question that produces the closeness. (Interviews with Contemporary Women Playwrights 328)

Norman says

..... Thelma is not weak and sick and old. She has only seemed weak and sick and old so that Jessie would feel useful. Jessie, of course, saw right through that. One of the things I think is new in Thelma's life is the experience of this evening, which will belong only to her forever. Probably for the first time, Thelma has something that is securely hers that she does not need for anybody else to understand and would not dare tell anybody. She has a holy object: this evening that they spent together. And that probably makes for some change in Thelma. But it's probably not a change any of her friends would notice. (Interviews with Contemporary Women Playwrights 328-329)

The playwright further adds

It is the moment of connection between them. Basically, it is a moment when two people are willing to go as far as they can with each other. That doesn't happen very often, and we are lucky if we have two or three moments in our lives when we know that with this person, we have gone as far as it is possible to go. After a lifetime of missing this daughter, of somehow living in the same space, they finally had a moment when they actually lived together, when the issues of their lives were standing there with them, in silent witness of their meeting. (Interviews with Contemporary Women Playwrights 329)

If, as naturalism argues, all human beings are products of their genes and their environment, then Thelma would be right in continually demanding reasons for Jessie's choice. In that linear perspective of existence, there must be a reason, or else Jessie is just insane. The list of possible causes is indeed lengthy. Jessie is an epileptic, though the attacks haven't occurred for some time now and many of her personal feelings stem from this often debilitating ailment. However, Jessie denies that epilepsy is a cause of her decision. She infact insists that she's planned on this night exactly because she's

been afflicted, for a good marriage has failed, and her son is a delinquent, but she says she's made private peace with these demons. Her life with mom is unproductive, a tedious routine, but she refuses to blame her mother or this entrapped lifestyle. She is tired of her brother and sister-in-laws invasion of her privacy, but that's no cause enough to die. She's even tired of the events in Red China, yet one more level over which she has no control, but it's not enough to end her life over. Jessie blames no event and no agent in her choice, insisting it is her free decision simply to stop the bus that is her life and get off. The chief characters individual crisis is that she is sick of it all. She has not made anything worthwhile of her life. She finds herself trapped in this world where she exists without any respite from any of the sources that are linked or have been linked in her life. She finds herself a total fiasco, "I'm what was worth waiting for and I didn't make it... I'm not going to show up, so there's no reason to stay." ('Night, Mother 76) Jessie regards herself up to this point as wholly defined by the decisions of others who keep intruding on her life and using her, instead of allowing her to belong to herself, beginning with Thelma's misconceived decision not to tell Jessie that her epileptic seizures (from which, significantly, now her father also suffered) began long ago and not recently as the result of an accident.

Importantly, Jessie's physical and psychological maladies are now under control, for her choice must spring from strength not weakness, from full knowledge not deprived whim. Jessie's methodical way of getting through a press last night of her life might at first seem too emotionally distant, almost somnambulistic, yet her outer control is no mass but a reflection of her inner assurance. Although the audience hear of Jessie's failed marriage to a man she still loves and of her wayward teenage son who, like Jessie herself, "looks out at the World and sees the same thing: not fair." ('Night, Mother 60) Norman downplays Jessie's self-pity. Her suicide is not a cop-out; she insists that she is "not giving up." ('Night, Mother 75) Neither is the play itself a track about an individual's right to choose suicide over an intolerable life or what is ethically more problematic, one that is tolerable. Rather, Jessie's suicide becomes an ultimate act of existential definition of self it is something she does not have to do, but what she chooses to do just the same. Here, poet Robert Lowell's lines,

The lovely,
Peculiar power to choose life and die,

Are applicable for Jessie whose life finally belongs only to herself and creates whatever meaning she might have by committing suicide, a more authentic act than any other in her life. That she dies using her daddy's gun indicates this continuing grip over her and the way that no other man in Jessie's life could measure up to him, as well as how he failed her by dying. In the same way, Jessie will desert her mother by dying and thereby perhaps retaliate against Thelma for never having loved her husband. Jessie's activities on this last night of her life cannot quell Thelma's essential fear, even though Jessie reassures her mother that this night will be like any other night: she will kiss her and say

Mother" and then go into the bedroom. Significantly however, because will not allow Jessie to go gently into that good night, the kiss never Even if Norman did not have Dylan Thomas's famous poem in mind when titled her play, the comparison

proves instructive. Jessie sees the a good that is death as 'good' not only in the sense of its being final, but as an good as well: by dying, she will have defined herself as an adult women.

Bedroom into which he retreats might be seen as a variation on the inner an appropriate place for that most solipsistic of all actions. The aftermath, what will be found on the other side of the door must remain ambiguous, unseen. That 'night. Mother moves its audience without the least trace maudlin is a tribute to Norman's spare, understated style, sparkled unexpected humour and the unblinking way she's follows these two into their separate, yet linked destinies.

An eminent critic, Frank Rich says:

['Night, Mother J is a shattering evening, but it looks like simplicity itself. A totally realistic play, set in real time counted by onstage clocks, it shows us what happens after Jessie makes her announcement. What happens, and surprisingly, is that the first skeptical and then terrified mother tries to cajole and talk her child out of suicide. (New York Times)

"People don't really kill themselves," argues Thelma, "unless they are retarded or deranged." ('Night, Mother 7) But Jessie isn't deranged- she's never felt better in her life, and that's why 'night, Mother is more complex than it looks, more harrowing than even its plot suggests. Miss Norman's play is simple only in the way that Edward Hooper's painting is simple. And she perfectly captures the intimate details of two individuals, ordinary women. This playwright locates the emptiness that fills too many ordinary homes on too many faceless streets in the vast country that people live in now.

Although it is likely to kindle many debates about the subject, 'night Mother is not a message play about the choice to commit suicide. It's about contemporary life and what gives it, or fails to give it value The more loneliness that is exposed the more we realize the most horrifying aspect of 'night, Mother is not Jessie's decision to end her life but her mother's gradual awakening, and ours to the inexorable logic of that decision.

Getting Out, deals with a young woman named Arlene who has just been released from an eight – year prison term for murder. Arlene's memory of herself, called up by her fears and needs, is represented by Arlene various visual cues call up memories which are re-enacted by Arlene as the action develops. It is a "brilliant dramatic stratagem". [Simon, 1983, 55] With the play's progress, Arlene's character begins to unfold, showing how suspicious, tensely guarded, and withdrawn she is. Various events after her release, including confrontation with the prison guard who accompanies her home, her former pimp, her mother, and her upstairs neighbor, all bring about memories which are played out simultaneously by Arlene. In this manner, the audience can see beyond the violence that the young Arlie uses to mask trouble and abuse at home, and learn the sordid events leading up to her prison sentence. We also see now Arlene has changed, striving to eke out a new existence for herself, even to the point of calling herself "Arlene" and not "Arlie" now that she has left prison. Arlene is determined to start again, hoping to regain a son who never knew her and who now lives in foster home and perhaps be happy in new, straight life. But there are so many obstacles form her past which come to haunt her and lead her a stray. It is these obstacles which create the amazing interplay of emotions between Arlie and Arlene and provide the audience

with a richly detailed background of her life. While night, mother takes place in a small house on an isolated country road, shred by Jessie and her mother, Thelma. Jessie suffers from epilepsy; her father is dead; her loveless marriage ended in divorce, her absent son is petty thief; her last job did not work out and, in general, her life is stale and unprofitable.

As the play being Jessie asks for her father's gun and calmly announces that she intends to kill herself. At first her mother refuses to take her seriously, but as Jessie sets about tidying the house and making lists of things to be looked after, Thelma's sense of desperate helplessness begins to build. In the end, with the exorability of genuine tragedy, she can only stand by, stunned and unbelieving, as Jessie quietly closes and looks her bedroom door and ends her profound unhappiness in one fatal, stunning and deeply disturbing moment.

In Getting Out, Ruby submits to her dead-end cooking job, she calls herself "Queen of Grease" and she boasts, saying that she can " make the finest French fries you ever did see " [GO:49]

Although Arlene is able to free herself from the restrictive and objectifying grasps of Carl and Benny, she cannot escape the life destined for a lower-class ex-convict. She rejects her other career choice-prostitution- and finally chooses to follow Ruby's way of living.

Meanwhile, we see Thelma, in night, Mother follows the life determined to her. She has to eat sweets and watch television though she admits:

"Do you think I've had a good time?"....." I don't know what I'm here for, but then I don't think about it". [NM: 34]

We see these two female characters acting passively towards their role and identify in life; they have chosen the easy way to avoid struggle and disturbance. But the extreme passiveness is seen in mother Holes claw's attitude forsakes her own daughter for her assumingly contempt life:

Outside? Honey I'll either be inside this apartment or inside some kitchen sweat in over the sink. Outside's where you get to do what you want, not where "you glottal do some shit job jus' so's you can eat worse than you did in prison"[GO: 60]

This group of women accepted willingly the identity determined to them by their society, their sole role in life is to cook, clean, play cards and watch television. Otherwise they will be condemned and abandoned by their society.

Women suffering and their struggle for identity in a society controlled by an oppressive system of patriarchal beliefs is the main idea for the two proceeded plays. According to Marsha Norman women have two a alternatives for life; either to submit to patriarchal system and live in a lower state than man to accept the role of the servant and entertainer like Thelma, Ruby and Arlene. Or to revolt against this unfair system attempting to prove her own identity, and to have an autonomy over her own life. It is a hard task woman should undergo, for in this case she has to challenge the world around her and risk even her own life to win the state she desires. Arlene and Jessie represent the revolting women. Jessie defies authority and takes control over her life and kills herself, the sole thing she can do.

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