

Gender and Grotesque in Marsha Norman Selected Plays: A Psychological study.

Farah Ammar Yassen

The Education General Directorate in Nineveh Governorate

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Abstract:

This study is about Marsha Norman's "Night, Mother", and "Traveler in the Dark" are two of her best-known plays and often criticized. Norman uses grotesque images in the portrayal of the plays' incidents and characters, and the implications of gender roles found therein. Norman's works are well known for her attention to violence committed by men upon women. This study aims to explore Norman's treatment of gender and violence using elements of the grotesque from the psychobiological side. While much criticism of Norman's works suggests that she uses grotesque violence to bemoan the victimization of women. My point of view is that Norman's handling of gender discloses that, irrespective of sex, individuals who fight to adapt to the prescribed roles of gender presented by society to them are grotesque and problematic.

Keywords: grotesque, gender, violence, women, society.

النوع والبشاعة في مسرحيات مختارة لمارشا نورمان : دراسة نفسية

فرح عمار ياسين

المديرية العامة لتربية نينوى

ملخص البحث

هذه الدراسة حول مسرحيات مارشا نورمان عمت مساء، امي ، والمسافر في الظلام هي اثنتين من مسرحياتها المعروفة وغالبا ما يتم انتقدهما. تستخدم نورمان الصورة البشاعة في تصوير الاحداث والشخصيات، والآثار المترتبة على أدوار الجنسين الموجودة فيها. تشتهر أعمال نورمان باهتمامها بالعنف الذي يرتكبه الرجال ضد النساء. الهدف من هذه الدراسة هو استكشاف معالجة نورمان للجنس والعنف باستخدام العناصر البشاعة من الجانب النفسي. في حين أن الكثير من الانتقاد لأعمال نورمان يشير إلى أنها تستخدم العنف البشع للتحسر على الإساءة للنساء. اعتقادي هو أن معاملة نورمان للجنس تكشف أنه، بغض النظر عن الجنس، الأفراد الذين يسعون جاهدين للامتثال لأدوار الجنسين المحددة التي يقدمها لهم المجتمع هي بشاعة وتسبب إشكالية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: البشاعة، النوع، العنف، النساء، المجتمع.

1. Introduction to Gender

Gender is described as an umbrella term which refers to the totality of masculinity/femininity. According to “Oxford Advanced American Dictionary”, gender is defined as “the fact of being male or female, especially when considered with reference to social and cultural differences, not differences in biology” (Hornby et al., 315) Whereas the critic Norem Huisinga defines gender as “roles of women and men include different labour responsibilities, decision-making processes, and knowledge. According to their needs, men and women often use and manage resources in different ways” (21). On the other hand, “the World Health Organization” (WHO) shows that gender refers to:

“Inequality and discrimination faced by women and girls put their health and well-being at risk. Women and girls often face greater barriers than men and boys to accessing health information and services. These barriers include restrictions on mobility; lack of access to decision-making power; lower literacy rates; discriminatory attitudes of communities and healthcare providers; and lack of training and awareness amongst healthcare providers and health systems of the specific health needs and challenges of women and girls.”

In effect, the concept of gender is vital because applied to social examination; it exposes how women’s subordination (or men’s authority) is socially constructed. Here, gender does not suggest that men and women should be equal, but that men’s and women’s rights, responsibilities, and chances will not depend on whether or not they are born male or female. When gender equivalence exists, a society equally can value men’s and women’s similarities and differences.

It is very important to note that the terms “gender” and “sex” are not synonyms. Many people wrongly use these two terms interchangeably. Gender is not something we are born with and not something we have, but something we do (West & Zimmerman, 125) -something we perform (Butler, 136). Whereas sex describes the biological differences between men and women, which are determined at birth (i.e., internal and external reproductive organs, and hormones) (Wylie, 575). Thus, gender is the change that sex makes within a society, guiding how we are to think of ourselves, how we communicate with others, the social chances, occupations, family roles, and prestige allowed to males and females. Individuals are destined to be either males or females, and have no choice other than surrendering to their fate. Thus, there is a critical dissimilarity between “sex” and “gender”: one is biologically specified and the other is socially specified.

1.1 Historical Development of Gender

According to "The Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms", the modern English "gender" derives from the Middle English "gendre", a word borrowed from Norman-invasion-era Middle French. This, in turn, came from the Latin "genus". Both words refer to "kind," "type," or "sort" (Childs & Roger, 97).

The word "gender" came into common use as a substitute to the word "sex" in the English language in the 1950s that American and British psychologists and other scholars concerned with intersex and transsexual patients began to differentiate between sex and gender. Since then, psychological and physiological specialists have progressively used the term gender (Moi, 120).

In fact, the first official widespread acknowledgment of women's equality and non-discrimination founded because of sex was first raised by "the United Nations Charter of 1945", and "the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948". However, until the late 1960s, the concentration was on women's reproductive tasks, as women were viewed as wives and mothers and their main concerns were presumed to be getting access to food, contraceptives, nourishment, and health care (Bunch, 37). In the 70s and 80s, a new phase is started, characterized by holding the "First World Conference for Women in Mexico 1974", and "the UN decade for women "76-85", in which the debate went beyond women's equality and the usual women's role as wives and mothers onto the worldwide domain where the role played by women was highlighted to have the major share in the economy's development. In the last two decades of the 20th and 21st centuries, the "gender perspective" is still struggling to concentrate on "women's right to development, recognition of women's economic role in national economies", and, most considerably, offered a sound to women in "developing countries" (Scott, 1017).

1.2 Gender in Literature

In the early twenty-first century, ideas and concepts which are belonging to gender have become the most prominent literary themes of the age. The modernist writers were seriously impressed by the changing gender relations and the attitude towards sexuality within society, which is revealed in their literary works. There is an attempt to read literature from a female viewpoint, whether a male writes the text or a female. Literature tries to uncover male strategies, overt or covert, with which a woman's place as secondary to man is naturalized. Playing the role of femininity, female characters confronted the issue of sex restrictions in which their actions and choices are limited. Female characters

suffered the consequences of their conducts and had severer penalties for divergent conducts than male characters.

Further, even Women Writers and readers challenged gender-based restrictions such as limitations of learning and socially acceptable experience, and labour under economic and legal disadvantages. So, it is little surprise to find that related themes would have found their way into the writing of and about women. Gender-based restrictions become one of the most enduring themes of English literary works dealing with women's lives. Such theme runs through works as various as: "Frances Burney's *Cecilia* (1782), Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), Mary Wollstonecraft's *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman* (1798), Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847)", "Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847)" or American writer "Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper' (1891)", "Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925)" and "Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* (1963)."

In fact, female writers of the previous three centuries have been at the front of struggling to remedy the weakness of earlier centuries, when, in the words of the heroine of Jane Austen's *Persuasion* (1817), "the pen has been in the hands of men, that is, literature - as most institutionalised aspects of culture - was under the control of men". However, when the women took "the pen into their own hands, increasing numbers of women writers have been giving voice to women's experiences and concerns" (Bank, 151).

To sum up, the gender strategy is long and ongoing. Specialists are still striving to convey a realisation of gender problems to increase efforts that will alter observations and achieve true equivalence between men and women. Nowadays, the male-controlled society is more and more questioned, particularly by awakening feminist movements. Whereas sexuality became a present issue of social discourse after new theories had been introduced (Goodman, 85).

2. Introduction to Grotesque

The grotesque is defined in "The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms" as "very strange and unpleasant, especially in a ridiculous or slightly frightening way." (Baldick, 146). David Mikics defines it in "A New Handbook of Literary Terms", as "an artistic style that audaciously arouses disgust and astonishment in the viewer or reader. It can become a form of monstrous play, entangled in its own encumbrances" (138). Whereas Anthony Di Renzo defines the "grotesque" as "ugly and evil, monstrous and blasphemous, the product of a sick and depraved mind" (15).

Further, the grotesque presents all reality's imperfections, monstrously exaggerating, physical and moral ugliness, and social problems as incoherencies. The concepts of contradiction and oddness are defined as a belonging of grotesque images contradictory; "they are ugly, monstrous, [and] hideous from the point of view of classic aesthetics, this is, the aesthetics of the ready-made and the completed"(Bakhtin, 25).

2.1 Historical Development of grotesque

It is agreed that the term "grotesque" is a decorative style of painting. At first, it was discovered during the late fifteenth century in Rome, in cavities decorated with painting portraying bizarre mixtures of human and animal forms mixed with eccentric fruits and flowers. Moreover, it includes combination of many mythological figures, comprising "centaurs, fauns, and satyrs" (Cipa, 16). The mixture of human and animal forms in the grotesque style generated another meaning to the "grotesque" in the late fifteenth century, i.e., "monstrous". These monsters were known as chimeras—"were unnatural combinations of natural things, or parts of things" (Gardner, 241). Thus, the Italian word "grottesca" became the name for this distinctive art style, and by 1561, it had modified into the English noun "grotesque." The adjective form of "grotesque" was first used in the early 17th century to refer to the ornamental art, but is now used to describe anything bizarre, odd, or unusual.

In the last two centuries, the widespread interest in the grotesque should not come as a surprise. The grotesque and associated issues such as "the absurd, the alienated, the social satire and the tragi-comic, parody, macabre, irony, and madness" became the appropriate technique of expression of a time characterized by change and uncertainty. It involved the gloomy mood because of the era being recognized by warfare and bloodshed. In the twentieth century, the grotesque, according to Kayser follows "an arbitrary course and it no longer suggests a need for moral or social corrections" (Bloom, 93). It is seen as a response to the arbitrariness of actions, the ridiculousness of violence, and the common absurdity of existence. The ugly reality of the grotesque is measured as a suitable means to present the crimes of the world in such a terrifying way.

2.2 Grotesque in Literature

In fact, the term "grotesque" becomes almost synonymous with modern literature. Many writers, critics and artists see it as a true hallmark of the modernist genre. The grotesque flourished during the Great Depression and World War II (1939-1945). Besides that, the frustration of the American Dream,

the World Wars, and the explosion of values and beliefs led people to live in despair. Moreover, the sense of meaninglessness of life makes its vision fake. Consequently, the writers often adopted the grotesque world, in which man had become the absurdist cipher, in their works to interpret the nature of modern man, his fragmented self (Edmunds, 59). Such themes run through works as, “Jonathan Swift’s Gulliver’s Travels (1726)”, “J. R. R. Tolkien’s The Lord of the Rings (1954)”, “Victor Hugo’s Hunchback of Notre Dame (1831)”, “Lewis Carroll’s Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland (1865)”, “Wilfred Owen’s ‘Spring Offensive’ and ‘Greater Love’(1918)”, “O’Connor’s short story A Good Man Is Hard to Find (1953)”, “Kafka’s The Metamorphosis (1915)”, “Charles Dickens’s Oliver Twist (1839)”, “Toni Morrison’s Beloved (1987)” “Edward Bond ‘s Saved (1965)”.

In addition, it is worth mentioning that there is a great impact at the core of the Theatre of the Absurd, which is almost called the theatre of the grotesque as in Beckett’s Waiting for Godot (2005). Later, Brecht, Genet, Ionesco, and Beckett developed this theatre.

To conclude, the grotesque becomes an adopted technique by artists and literary men. It is a changeable concept. During the Renaissance, it was a decorative style described as beautiful, whereas today it is associated with the ugly and the deformed. We can conclude that “the grotesque is too vast and fluid a subject to be adequately addressed by a single timeless and unbending theory” (Kayser, 181).

3. Introduction to Norman’s Theatre

Marsha Norman (born September 21, 1947) is one of American’s greatest living contemporary dramatists, multi-award-winning screenwriters, and novelists. Norman wants her plays to be a doctrine of the modern drama for presenting messages related to social issues. Her plays restore drama’s role as a voice that calls for change and revolution in a world where the oppression of authority becomes increasingly elusive and unchecked. She intends to present problems of the contemporary world in her description of human life. She presents images of the reality of modern people, to those no one notices their suffering as she once commented:

“I always write about the same thing: people having the nerve to go on. 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”. (Harriott, 150)

Although Marsha Norman has rejected her classification as a feminist, Norman gives a strong voice to those women who have long remained without voice or place in a patriarchal society. She portrays these women in a heroic struggle as each tries to overcome the stereotypes of isolation, marginalization, and iron confinement within the family environment and the traditional roles they represent for the mother, wife, and housewife. While Norman challenges traditional reactionary norms, breaks the masculine view of women, and highlights the lack of communication, cohesion and violence on the stage, the women in society face the extreme conditions of control and oppression that frustrate and reignite the challenge of defining life for better survival (Grantley, 74). Grotesquely, Norman portrays these gloomy images successfully in her plays “Night, Mother”, and “Traveler in the Dark”. In the two plays, Norman refers to persecution as experienced by women and she provides options for their reactions.

4. Grotesque and Gender in “Night, Mother, and Traveler in the Dark”.

“Night, Mother”, is the fifth play to Marsha Norman, written in 1981, first produced on stage in 1983, and adapted to film in 1986. With its production by the Hampstead Theatre Club, in America in 1984, Marsha Norman came to public attention. Actually, “Night, Mother” won the “Dramatists Guild's prestigious Hull-Warriner Award”, “four Tony nominations”, “the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize”, and “the Pulitzer Prize in 1983” (Gale, 1).

‘Night, Mother, is a two characters on stage with “one-act play”. The exposition, complication, climax, falling action, and catastrophe are combined in one act when Jessie discloses her intending to kill herself. The play plays out “during the next ninety minutes” (Burkman, 255).

In ‘Night, Mother, Jessie’s bareness and alienation are reinforced not only by her sickness but further by her life which is out of control. Years earlier, Jessie has been the victim to her “epilepsy”, “doctor’s prescriptions”, a failed marriage, her reckless son, and even the passing of her father who has a closeness with her when he is alive and above all to her mother’s unwise and narcissistic love. (Bigsby, 230). Therefore, Jessie elects to commit suicide amid her despair and loneliness. She asks her mother Thelma about her father’s gun. When Thelma asks her daughter why she tries to find her father’ gun , she responses with “protection”(NM 11) by “I’ going to killing myself” (NM 13) because “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 use... It all" (NM 22). Paradoxically, the weird use of the word "protection" by committing suicide reflects the Psychological deterioration of modern man. The critic John Aldridge points out that "the only hope for a successful dramatic effect lies in the depiction of the grotesque and abnormal"(Meyer, 7).

Jessie wishes to keep herself safe from the frustration that she feels surviving through every single day of her life. As a result, she lives in isolation from the outside world and senseless life. Really, Jessie is pathetic and lost. Because of the hiding of her epilepsy, people around her feel shocking and weird to her because:

“ her hands are cold [...] Like a corpse [...] Jessie' shook the hand of death and I can't take the chance it's catching, Thelma, so I' ain't comin' over, and you can understand or not, but I ain't coming'. I'll come up the driveway, but that's as far as I go” (NM 30).

Jessie, as an epileptic, senses she lives in torture and misery. Her life is absurd, hollow, and even desperate. When she suffers from seizures, she loses control of her normal manners and life. Jessie's epilepsy has led to a constrained lifestyle and restricted job chances. She is helpless when her epilepsy forbids her of the possibility to work normally and feels isolated and painful because even if the ambulance comes for her seizures, “all they ever did for me in the emergency room was let me wake” (NM 37), to Jessie, no one helps and comes to her assistance. These, in turn, have created various frustrations for her, which have led to frequent bouts of melancholy and suicidal ideation.

As a result, Jessie grotesquely refers to “protection” just as she wants to protect herself by leaving the world, which has greatly put her into conflict and loss. There is no doubt the reality that Jessie's intention, to kill herself results from the alienation and loneliness of her own life. Actually, Jessie suffers a lot both physically and psychologically. Consequently, she seeks shelter in death as it provides the possibility of people's self-accomplishment and liberty from restraints. Her decision in committing suicide is a “bold act of emancipation” that brings “autonomy” (Fahy, 55).

Ironically, even Christmas which signifies rebirth, she comes up with the idea of killing herself because she realizes death as the way out and escapes from grief and pain. Her thinking reveals a grotesque irony as it is perceived only as "content, a feeling or an attitude expressed through irony, or through philosophic

argument, or through the grotesque itself"(Thomson, 32). Life, to her, is no longer the symbol of hope and future, as she states:

"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 is nothing I want to listen to" (NM 26).

For Jessie, committing suicide represents a scream and an internal voice against everything that has distorted in her life. She is a lost woman who cannot find direction in her world. Therefore, in her mind, she thinks that if she has no right over her birth, then she can handle the right of death by her own. Actually, the power of the grotesque mode occurs in the description of the absurdity of human existence and the misery of life in the twentieth century. In the words of Ihab Hassan, the grotesque is perhaps the truest, ironic symbol of man in this century. According to him, "in the grotesque, the distortion of physical forms corresponds to that perversion of mental states which is the malady of the age"(8).

Another grotesque situation is represented in the interference with Jessie's independence creates an obstacle in her path towards her psychological and spiritual integrity. Jessie's brother, Dawson, invades her privacy as she reveals, "wondering what I do all day [...] but it's my day, so it's mine to wonder about" (NM19). Dawson and his wife even take things that belong to her "Like [...] mail order bra got delivered to their house" (NM 19). She discovers that even this superficial aspect of her womanhood and individuality is made repressively part of the collective concept of the family. Grotesquely, this interference is devastating her fragile sense of the independent self and autonomy. Thus, she feels outsiders invade her when her family becomes in the state of knowing or touching her personal possessions.

Additional evasive aspect of familial entrapment is Cecil, Jessie's husband. Instead of taking care of his wife, grotesquely Cecil abandoned and cheated her because of her epilepsy. His manipulation or distorted love turns out to be an obstacle and prison for Jessie's pursuit of identity. Norman once comments that "women are socialized very differently from men [...] they are socialized to fail" (DiGaetani, 245). Even her son Ricky feels her that she is stuck and powerless in life as he inclines to steal things. Grotesquely he stole her rings in a terrible fit of epilepsy. He is also addicted to drugs. Thus, all Jessie has for life is hate, bitterness, and misery, which likens her life to the trip of a bus because every stop is the same, just as her life where there is no future and hope. Thus, Norman presents grotesque violence to criticize the reality of the poor social structure. Norman declares that society loses its humanity in a modern age.

Whereas countless grotesque images are presented by Mama Thelma. Thelma's grotesque character is reflected in her childlike behaviour to the end. Her life is dedicated to watching television, eating a cupcake, or opening a trinket from the grab bag Jessie has left for her. Essentially, food consumption is a token of grotesque; Bakhtin argues that the food image is "closely interwoven with those of grotesque bodily" (279). Bakhtin adds, "Eating and drinking are one of the most significant manifestations of the grotesque body" (281).

Further, Thelma is a wicked person, as she is the real reason behind Jessie's loveless marriage, as she confesses, "I married you off to the wrong man," (NM 39) Not only that she feels jealous, as her father loved her. She is Jessie's oppression. Norman puts Thelma's consistent ignorance and negligence to everything related to her daughter's spiritual needs. Instead of seeking to understand her daughter better, she denigrates her by pushing off this distinctive trait of her personality and keeps denying Jessie's desire to know things: "Why do you have to know so much about things, Jessie? There's just not much to things that I could ever see" (NM 44). Grotesquely, she even belittled her daughter for her quietness. Selfishly, Thelma is seeing herself to be the core of Jessie's life. She relates Jessie's silence to her rather than acknowledging it as a unique trait of her daughter. She tells her daughter: "I am not like you, Jessie. I hate quiet" (NM 48). So, these kinds of actions are never easily forgotten, and it gets harder for the victim to trust anyone again. Her mother's action is a grotesque reflection of idealized motherhood.

Hence, Thelma's relationship with her daughter Jessie contains ruthless and selfish situations; as a result, Jessie's life turns upside down. The lives of people are never the same again after hurtful incidents. For example, her dealing with her daughter's epilepsy, she acts as a keen adherent to the doctor's "prescriptions" regarding them as the only possible hope. Not only that, she thinks that she has the right in maintaining Jessie's epilepsy a secret from everyone, including Jessie herself. However, Jessie disagrees, saying, "That was mine to know. Mama, not yours"(NM 46). Additionally, Mama deals with Jessie as an object. She thinks that she has the authority to control Jesse's life as she says, "You are my child!" (NM 50).

In fact, there is no sign that Mama senses any remorse for Jessie's death until the end. After Jessie shoots herself, Thelma realizes her unfair treatment of her daughter. She learns this too late. Thelma remains incapable of compassion, and her final regret serves only to bring herself the focus of pain and self-pity. Mama speaks through her cries, "Jessie, Jessie, child.... Forgive me. (Pause.) I thought

you were mine.” (NM58). Turning to a plea for forgiveness, Thelma realizes how she knows nothing about how Jessie has been emotionally dealing with her life. Hence, the lack of communication and grotesque violence breed ignorance and frustration.

“Night, Mother's” end displays a tragic violent departure when Jessie fails to make a supportive company with her mother or a friend; this conducts to her eventual act of self-destruction. She "Cannot be reduced by her community, because she has none". (Brown, 67). Grotesquely, the shooting accident gives us a direct portrait of cruelty and brutality, which is imposed upon the individual. Norman uses grotesque violence as a power to establish a reign of terror, where the destruction of human life reaches grotesque proportions. Employing grotesque in her plays, Norman is known for presenting shocking events which contain violence on the stage to instigate the audience and awaken them to recognize the social defects in their life.

In her drama, Norman frequently concentrates on women and topics which one gender-specific. Many critics assumed that Night, Mother is registered as an "animated-male play", since all the important actions and truths revealed in this play directly relate to Thelma and Jessie's relationship with those male characters; as “All the intimacies shared by Jessie and Thelma, somehow relate to the father, son, and brother, whose impact on the narrative is integral to every relation and action the two women undertake” (Dolan, 336). Therefore, in addition to the limitation of women's choices in the patriarchal society, the notion of women’s passivity is emphasized.

In her play, Marsha depicts the oppression and subordination of women in the patriarchal societies they live in. In the patriarchal culture, men are the basic elements in the victimization of women. Hence, by committing suicide, Jessie is breaking out of the passive role the male-controlled society has given to her. She creates the first and last free choice for her self-redemption. Norman dramatizes suicide as a cry for her female protagonists' humanity and individuality. Throughout all her life, Jessie cannot infer a worthy meaning that makes her value her life. She tried to cultivate hope in her life to assert her humanity, but chances are so rare in her case because of her epilepsy and because of the role imposed on her by the social view as a woman.

Whereas *Traveler in the Dark* (1984) is another play by Norman about ordinary people in a crisis. It is written in 1984 and first performed at the “Mark Taper Forum”, in the stage of the same year (Norman, 116).

Traveler in the Dark comprises two acts, with a cast of four characters in an ensemble to tell a story of conflicting ideologies. It presents Sam's (doctor) misperception and agony which are interpreted into hostile attacks on God, his mother's death, his father (preacher) who pursues Sam's job in the newspapers but does not prefer to see him, Glory (wife), whom he threatens to leave; and Stephen (child) whom he vows he will take with him.

Sam is a grotesque character in his nature because of the psychological impact of losing his mother. The grotesque implies psychological effects, which are reflected in Sam's behaviour as an arrogant and narcissistic person. Sam's grotesque spiritual emptiness, utter alienation, and hopelessness are all reflected in his behavior with his family. His behaviour reveals how man's awareness of loss can turn him into a heartless monster, eager to harm those around him in an attempt to diffuse or escape the unbearable torment of living in the absurd world, Kayser sees the grotesque as "a play with the absurd" (187). The absurdity in Norman's play engages the audience not just through wordplay, but also for the understanding of how absurd life can be, especially life under pressure. Norman affirms that people under the great duress of living may find themselves surviving in a meaningless pattern of life.

As a modern play, Traveler in the Dark signifies the dilemma of faith in a debate between a skeptic and a believer. Losing his mother, as a child, makes him lose his Christian faith. Grotesquely, he feels God has disappointed him, so he turned to science, medicine, and unflagging faith in his "mind" to prop him in the world (TD 118). Also, Sam projects his vanity and malevolence onto God when he depicts him as "bored" and "lonely" (TD 127). In fact, it is Sam who is bored and isolated, Sam whose excessive sadness screams for attention. He reflects his bitterness of losing his mother in attacking God, especially when his father says that she belonged to God, "God didn't kill her." (TD 127). As a narcissist, Sam grotesquely sees himself as omnipotent and believes that he can have the potential to create or ruin 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". (TD 138) Glory replies with, "I don't need you to save me! [...] I've already got a God, Sam" (TD 139). The awareness that Sam is not omnipotent, that the powers of death can overcome him, attacks a crushing blow to his ego.

In the play, the tension of Sam has echoed the modern crisis of faith: his existential loss of confidence in God, Science, and his intellectual powers. Since, even though his fame as a miracle-working surgeon, he cannot rescue his long-

time nurse and childhood sweetheart Mavis. Her death devastates Sam's belief 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!” (TD 137)

Sam's speech reflects an influential message about ordinary people confronting unusual circumstances. Losing Mavis, the nurse, and childhood sweetheart, to whom Sam traveled home to be present at her funeral, provokes a devastating and bitter existential emptiness in Sam. Her death makes him suffer from existential crisis. Even faith is unable to protect him. Existence, according to Sam, is “absolute submission to accident, to the arbitrary assignment of unbearable pain, and the everyday occurrence of meaningless death.” (TD 136)

Sam, also, thinks his mother, in her death, betrays him by depriving him of her affection. Moreover, he rejects the fairy stories and magic he has shared with his mother. His explanation of Humpty Dumpty shows Sam's anger to his mother. When Stephen inquires how Humpty Dumpty got on the wall, Sam replies, “His... mother... laid him there. She told him he was a man. See? [...]. He didn't know he could break. He didn't know he was an egg.” (TD 118). Norman understands the power of the grotesque and uses it to suggest existence and mind. Furthermore, she uses it as a mood to reflect Sam's character, taking ugliness as an aesthetic element. Peter Fingesten suggests the grotesque is “a symbolic category of art that expresses psychic currents from below the surface of life, such as nameless fears, complexes, nightmares and Angst” (419).

In another grotesque situation, Sam refuses to see his father “There's no reason for him to come home; we can just meet him at the church” (TD 117). He held his father responsible for his mother's death and treated him with disrespect, as he addresses, “You are a hopeless old fool!”(TD128). Further, he shows his jealousy and hostility toward his father for not loving his mother the way he, Sam, would have. He informs him that he “didn't deserve her” or love her (TD 132). Sam even accused his father, Everett, of the betrayal of his mother's memory. As Everett shares a special relationship with Mavis. He hates his father for his close relationship with Mavis since she got his father's attention and love. When Glory declares Mavis loves Josie Barnett, Sam jealously replies, “Mavis loved dad, [...]

you didn't love me, you loved Mavis. Yes! You even loved Mavis more than Mother". (TD 133). He also insulted his father by trying to kick his father out of the house, "I don't want you to say anything to me. I want you to leave me alone; [...] this is Mother's house. Yours is the one with the steeple on the top (TD 133). In her grotesque description of Sam's rude attitude, Norman offers a critique of society's abstract values. Her use of the grotesque is satirical and corrective. She wants to shock the audience into realizing the shortcomings of their lives so that they can recognize and correct their mistakes.

Sam also is a bizarre character. He shows sadistic desire in psychologically torturing his wife, Glory, and his son, Stephen. Sam's lack of awareness and unconscious grief suggest verbal violence. He is an oppressive character; he wants to leave Glory, his wife, alone "I do want a divorce. I want to leave here in the morning and take Stephen with me" (TD 120). Sam humiliated Glory by telling her, "I married you to spite my father". (TD 125). At this point, he is truly grotesque, as his action is full of resentment, bitterness, guilt, and shame. He insults her in a way that he does not love her. Sam suffers painful depression, abrogation of awareness in the outside world, and loss of the power to love. He wants to leave Glory, escaping from the pain before she has a possibility to leave him as his mother and Mavis have. He thinks, "it just doesn't make sense, this marriage. It never has. Ask your mother" (TD 120). Grotesquely, also, he asserts on handling his twelve-year-old son, as an adult, nevertheless of the harm it might do to him. He transmits his vanity onto his child, Stephen, and what seems to be his care and selfless feeling and attachment to Stephen is, in fact, Sam's arrogance, as in:

“STEPHEN: I don't want to move, Dad.

SAM: You want to stay with your mother, you mean.

STEPHEN: I don't want you to leave us.

SAM: We'll go some place wonderful. Northern California, maybe, with the ocean out the front door, and the redwoods out the back. And we could get a horse if you want. I always wanted a horse.

STEPHEN: I can't leave, Dad. Mom needs me. She doesn't have anybody".
(TD 131)

This dramatic image reflects a sort of psychological disorder since the audience expects the father to be respectful, supportive, tolerant, and not to be cruel. Actually, this incident arouses another image of grotesque, which is grotesque

distortion. It is characterized as undignified communication. George Gibian, a scholar who studied grotesque, mentions, “Grotesque distortion” is “an antidote to the antithetical distortion because of oversimplification of human experience through sorting out its various elements and compartmentalizing them neatly and precisely” Further, he adds the grotesque is a means of avoiding “the facile harmony and stability and classical separation of various emotions” (Gibian, 268). Grotesquely, this accident gives us a direct portrait of cruelty and brutality, which is imposed upon the individual. Norman uses grotesque violence as a power to establish a reign of terror, where the destruction of human life reaches grotesque proportions.

In “Night, Mother”, and “Traveler in the Dark”, for Marsha Norman, women have two choices for life; to either submit to the patriarchal system and live in an inferior state than the man to admit the role of the servant and entertainer like Thelma. Or to rebel against this oppressive system struggling to prove her own self, and to have independence over her own life, like Jessie and Glory’s case. It is a hard task woman should endure, for, in this case, she has to defy the world around her and risk even her own life to win the state she desires.

Jessie and Glory symbolize the revolting women. Jessie resists authority and takes control over her life by killing herself, the sole thing she can do. Whereas, Glory struggles with all her husband’s threatens of divorce. With strength and self-determination, Glory, as a modern woman, acts as a guide through the darkest parts of our lives and points us toward the light of hope at the other end. Finally, she succeeds to make Sam confesses that he is the real reason for her pain and asks for her remission.

Jessie in” Night, Mother” tries to reassert autonomy through suicide and rejecting her solitary, passive existence, she finally realizes that her life is not defined on her terms, nor can she do anything in the future to make it better. All show that she is a self-assertive and determined character, though she is destructive. She refuses to submit to society that forces its rules on her and her attempt to commit suicide is a desire to prove her identity. Through this action, "she takes active control of her promised inheritance by attempting to kill the cubed-self"(Gale, 3). Whereas Glory, in “Traveler in the Dark”, shows an image of a loving, caring and supportive mother. She struggles alone against the most difficult situation and finds the solutions. She fights with the outside world to make her family united.

In these two plays, Norman displays all the female characters as victims of the restricted system norms, beliefs, and standards of a male-controlled society

which are the cause of entrapment. The patriarchal societies in the background of both plays "impose a limited way of thinking and living"(Betsko & Rachel, 120). Norman focused on the problem of the misery of modern women. The problems confronted by the modern woman are isolation, loneliness, estrangement, unstable family structure, crisis in emotionality, and the futile nature of human existence. Moreover, the sense of emptiness of life makes its vision fake. Consequently, the writers often adopted the grotesque in their works to interpret "the nature of modern man, his fragmented self" (Edmunds, 5).

Conclusion

In an age of pessimism, Norman's greatness lies in showing the ability to find solutions for people's suffering. In fact, Norman's works reflect a unique combination of terror, fear, inhumanity, and absurdity. Norman is frustrated with the absurdity twentieth-century world that was full of exploitation, despair, and loss of faith in everything. This grotesque world requires Norman to alert the people to the dangers they are facing. In her work on social significance, Norman presents a sharp social commentary, and she argues her plays are not merely a literary exercise but an actual practice that reveals the community's faults. She reflects the miseries people are undergoing.

In these two plays, Norman offers a didactic intention in her plays to reform society from corrupt values and cruelty. She uses grotesque imageries to present such characters who defy the strict standard of the society who during crisis either endure life with an indomitable spirit or subjugate without a fight. Norman's plays inflame our curiosity as they probe into the psychological and social factors that directly affect life.

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