

Matrophobic Aspects in Marsha Norman's *Getting Out*

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ABSTRACT

This paper will attempt to prove that the American playwright Marsha Norman uses the American stage to explore the mother-daughter relationship, which is universally meaningful to women. The paper analyzes the nature of the relationship between Mother Holsclaw and her daughter Arlene in Marsha Norman's play *Getting Out*. The maternal relationship between mother and daughter is tinged with matrophobia. Norman, the female playwright, emerged in a time where female writers had to take the extra mile to prove themselves among male theatre patrons, and the fact that she touches on the relationship between mothers and daughters added some difficulties for her to be accepted. However, we all know that Norman is a successful Pulitzer Prize dramatist now. The paper conducts a thorough and detailed analysis of the play and traces the theme of matrophobia through the mother-daughter relationship in the play. The analysis is aided by Elaine Showalter's discussion of feminism and the phases it went through. With the help of few outstanding writers on feminism and motherhood like Adrienne Rich, and D. Lynn O'Brien Hallstein, the paper investigates Norman's own different mother figures who shaped her life experience and the different mother figures who go through Arlene's life too. The question is where Norman stands from this idea of matrophobia and its existence in a daughter's life, and to what extent it affects her character's ability to mother her own son. Despite the awkward relationship that Arlene has with her mother, she actually defies the demon of matrophobia and looks forward to joining her son.

Key words: American Drama, Matrophobia, Feminism, Marsha Norman, Theatre

INTRODUCTION

A dominant male culture has intervened between
Mother and daughter and broken off a loving
And symbolic exchange
-Lucy Irigaray, *I Love to You*

Relationships between mothers and daughters in theatre writings remain largely unexplored in dramatic criticism. Finding elaborate criticism on motherhood or mother-daughter relationships is hard. Motherhood, in general, is neglected as a subject of importance. Yet the American stage is interested in presenting mother and daughter characters.

Unfortunately, even though mother-daughter characters have been presented on stage, this unique relationship has always been trivialized and minimized because it has been looked at through a male-dominated lens. Seeing the work of women playwrights only through the critical hegemony of a male-dominated dramatic establishment can distort our understanding of the work's central concerns.

Following World War II, the American theatre flourished with dramatists like; Arthur Miller, and Tennessee Williams, who became world-renowned. Those significant figures were joined later in the century by others such as Edward Albee, Lorraine Hansberry, Amiri Baraka, Sam Sheppard, Beth Henley, Marsha Norman, and others.

Norman is a playwright, screenwriter, and novelist. She received the 1983 Pulitzer Prize for Drama for her play *night, Mother*. She was raised in a strict fundamentalist home (Stanley); therefore, she had few friends. She tells Carolyn Craig "maybe the people in my plays are all the folks Mother wouldn't let me play with as a kid" (167).

Since the beginning of her playwriting career in 1977 with the production of *Getting Out* by the Actors Theatre of Louisville (ATL), Norman has become one of the most powerful female voices in contemporary American theater. She has been identified as "perhaps the most successful author of serious feminist drama working in the U.S. today" (J. Brown 60).

Jon Jory, who was the artistic director of the ATL, helped Norman in her career as a playwright. In 1977 he commissioned Norman to write a play for ATL, requesting that it be a play about a social issue (Biggsby 212). Norman wrote *Getting Out*, a play that is derived in part from her experiences of teaching disturbed children; she told David Savran in an interview that there was one girl in particular "this kid I had known at Central State Hospital... a kid who terrified everybody" (182). The girl served some years for murder after coming out from the hospital. Norman admits that what happened between her and the girl was an observation from

her side and silent hostility from the girl's side, and this was enough for her to create a whole new idea for her play. This girl inspired Norman's creation of Arlie, the youth who becomes Arlene Holsclaw.

Norman's play *Getting Out* "presents a strong feminist vision, exploring what happens when women are allowed to author their own stories" (Murphy 200). The play revolves around, mainly a two-character interaction: Arlie-Arlene and Holsclaw. The nature of these women's relationship is a mother-daughter one.

Adrienne Rich points out that the figure of the mother has always been looked at as a selfless woman, "a person without an identity, one who can find her chief gratification in being all day with small children, living at a pace tuned to theirs" (22). Therefore, young women escaped from going into that suffocating trap called motherhood. Society was beginning to open job opportunities for women, and to have a child would pull them back into that quiet house with crying children. Rich remembers that she and her siblings would spend days at a time with their mother in the house without meeting anyone except their father (24). This picture of the nurturing mother, whose only job is bearing children and doing house chores lead to the theme of "matrophobia" in literature.

MATROPHOBIA

Poet Lynn Sukenick in her work on Doris Lessing's fiction coined and presented the word "Matrophobia." She says that matrophobia "is the fear not of one's mother or of motherhood, but of becoming one's mother" (519). Rich explains that:

Matrophobia can be seen as a womanly splitting of the self, in the desire to become purged once and for all of our own mothers' bondage, to become individuated and free. The mother stands for the victim in ourselves, the unfree woman. Our personalities seem dangerously to blur and overlap with our mothers'; and, in a desperate attempt to know where mother ends and daughter begins, we perform radical surgery. (236)

Rich believes that although daughters sometimes hate their mothers to the point of matrophobia, yet there is a buried tight string that always pulls the daughter back to her mother. Daughters identify with their mothers, yet they do not want to grow up to be like them, there is always something lacking in a mother.

Deborah D. Rogers explains that motherhood is a hot topic. She theorizes about maternity, motherhood and matrophobia. She says that although maternity has been at the center of political discourse, matrophobia which characterizes many mother-daughter bonds has barely been considered. For Rogers matrophobia is something

More than the fear of mothers. fear of becoming a mother as well as fear of identification with and separation from maternal body and the mother line. matrophobia [is] the central metaphor for women's relationships with each other within the context of patriarchal, or male-dominated, cultures. (1)

Matrophobia, is simply, the fear of mothers, and the daughter's fear of becoming a mother and her fear of "the conflicted identifications with and separations from her mother."

However, matrophobia resides in "a daughter's resentment of maternal submission, exclusion, or sacrifice" under patriarchal society. Daughters grow up seeing their mothers' submission to their husbands' whims. Daughters feel an escalating "[a]nger at maternal self-denial" (Rogers 5-6).

Elain Showalter, the American feminist critic, says that literature of the past up till the fifties and sixties dealt with mothers and motherhood in a negative context; because it looks at the mother as the enemy, and motherhood as suffocating, and all that was learned obviously under patriarchy. She says that "Hating one's mother was the feminist enlightenment of the fifties and sixties; but it is only a metaphor for hating oneself" (135).

Feminist movement passed through three waves. The first wave (1830's – early 1900's), the second wave (1960's-1980's), and the third wave (1990s- to the present). The second wave feminism was 'anti-motherhood' (Hallstein 3). Second wave feminism came under fire from within and outside of the academy during the 90s. D. Lynn O'Brien Hallstein's *White Feminists and Contemporary Maternity: Purging Matrophobia* analyzes white second-wave feminism and contemporary feminism with critical eyes; it follows the development and impact of matrophobia in the field. Through a series of complicated yet convincing arguments, Hallstein reveals how matrophobia divides women from one another and themselves. Hallstein's book makes very clear strides for rethinking motherhood and trying to reposition this institution by putting much weight and focus on this empowering relationship.

Hallstein, therefore, contends that silence about mothering prevents feminism from moving beyond matrophobia. The need to divorce one's mother and, metaphorically, discard one's maternal instincts to establish total patriarchal equality leads to a perplexing picture of mothers, by placing the mother; who is a female herself, on the enemy's other side. Therefore, there was a split within the feminist school itself, which lead to weakening their stand.

Of Women born was one of the first feminist texts to "explore motherhood, mothering, and matrophobia and is widely credited by contemporary feminist scholars. as being the field-defining text in contemporary feminist maternal scholarship" (Hallstein 6). Andrea O'Reilly describes Rich's work as a field defining text which contributed a lot to contemporary feminist maternal scholarship, which has made an impact on how a "generation of scholars thinks about motherhood" (1). Rich follows a line of argument in which motherhood is a patriarchal institution, outlined by men, which is oppressive. Therefore, motherhood is avoided by females and eventually leads to matrophobia. While mothering in itself can be empowering to women if they are allowed to define and practice mothering by themselves. Rich is the first scholar to introduce motherhood as an ideological and political institution; she discussed motherhood through rape, prostitution, and childbirth under patriarchal pressure.

Definitions of mother and daughter are widely ranged, both in the roles implied in those words, as well as the relationship between them. Most dictionaries show mothers as givers, allocating to them specific functional traits such

as protection, caring, and loving, while daughters are only recipients of these acts. Therefore, any mother who behaves outside such a definition is looked upon as being harsh, or, to be exact, a failure; she fails her role as a mother. The matter of why she acts out of the norm has never been investigated. Mothers are seen as a contented creature, living a happy life with their children. Nancy Friday says that "We are raised to believe that mother love is different from other kinds of love, it is not open to error, doubt, or to the ambivalence of ordinary affections" (3).

Mothering is an act; your biological mother is not the only mother in your life. We all mother each other; Rich takes the definition away from biological relations: "Women, mothers or not, who feel committed to other women, are increasingly giving each other a quality of caring filled with the diffuse kinds of identification that exist between actual mothers and daughters" (253). Therefore anyone, even men, can perform the act of mothering.

Daughters crave the smell of their biological mothers. They want their mothers' unconditional love, understanding, support. In case their mothers fail, daughters seek the non-biological mothers' attention and love, although it comes after a period of longing for the real love. Rich describes the growing feeling of one's mother:

The first knowledge any woman has of warmth, nourishment, tenderness, security, mutuality, comes from her mother. That earliest enwrapment of one female body with another can sooner or later be denied or rejected, felt as choking possessiveness, as rejection, trap, or taboo; but it is at the beginning, the whole world. (218)

What leads to matrophobia is the feeling of restriction and suffocation mothers feel when they become mothers for the first time; therefore, matrophobia is just a phase sometimes in females' lives. They escape their roles, either in a violent or a cowardly withdrawal from their daughters' lives, leading daughters to have this same feeling; the fear of bearing children and mothering them.

MOTHERS IN NORMAN'S LIFE

The estrangement between Norman and her mother is an apparent instigating factor that accounts for her sympathy for a character like Arlene and her awkward relationship with her mother. Norman confesses to Craig saying:

My own family, my mother in particular, was so confused about who I was that, for years, I would get Christmas presents for another girl. I was convinced that all those dolls that came year after year after year were for somebody else. They were for the girl who did belong there, not me. (166)

Many women have veered to other women in search of motherly love and understanding. Therefore, they are caught half split between two women; the biological mother who represents "the culture of domesticity, of male-centeredness," and who believes that her success is in creating a copy of herself. The other woman is a "counter mother" who is perhaps "a woman artist or teacher... an unmarried professor who represents the choices of a ...life" (248). This split, according to Rich allows the daughter to fantasize alternatively

of living one or the other, yet it does not help the daughter to resolve her choices in life. That is why you reach a point where you wish you would have known your mother better.

Norman managed to veer away from the "stark black and white" world her mother pushed her into, by turning to other women, in her extended family and beyond. Norman, as she puts it, "adopted a matriarchy," and one of these women she recalls:

my great aunt Bubbie, who never married, who worked for the phone company for a hundred years and was always having her pictures taken in bars in strapless red dresses. Bubbie loved me and took me in; I was her little kid. she was my savior early on.

Next came Norman's piano teacher, Olga, who, according to Norman, cured her of any impulse to "get by. just by being clever." Then came Norman's most "enduring mentor. her English teacher. Martha Ellison, who awakened Marsha to her own writing talents and the work of Lillian Hellman" (Craig 167).

Rich wonders what a daughter needs or wishes she has had as a daughter or could give as a mother; "Deeply and primly we need trust and tenderness" (246). Our mothers' patriarchal sphere in which they live is so hostile that they need such profound love to learn how to love and appreciate themselves as women as well as mothers. Rich asserts that daughters need strong mothers who can expand their own limits in life as well as their daughters'.

Norman's mother did not allow her to make friends with other children because she had this assumption that other children are a bad influence. Norman confesses to several people who interviewed her that she owes a lot to her mother's strict upbringing.

I was fortunate enough to grow up in a house where television was forbidden... So, I lived in a world of books, which was wonderful. Mother, quite simply, did not know the dangers of books because she didn't read. So inadvertently she put me in touch with the most dangerous things of all. As well as theatre. (Savran 180)

Norman's mother unwittingly pushed her daughter to become a writer. And Norman says that if her "Mother had known she was raising a writer, she couldn't have done it any better" (Beattie 284). Her childhood was stable and full of knowledge, something other children did not have. She tells Betsko that her mother joined a book club that would provide Norman, the child, with a book every week to read: "I did not have any friends, but I knew as long as I was reading or playing the piano I was safe" (Betsko and Koenig 326).

Norman always felt trapped by her mother, but we cannot find a trace of hatred or antagonism when she speaks about her. We cannot say that Arlie, for example, is Norman. The awkward, or sometimes "mismatch" relationship between mother and daughter that "underscored" Norman's *Getting Out* was a reflection of her relationship with her mother, she was highly suspicious of everything that Norman would take great pleasure in like "writing and language and stories and contact with the big world." Her mother hated all her work and thought it was all "vulgar, it was all filthy, it was all doomed- and my collective work was going to send me straight to hell" (Craig 170).

In *Getting Out* there is a struggle between a parent and a child. She brings forward mother/daughter relationship, which is central to her, as she explains: "mother-daughter relationship. is one of the world's great mysteries; it has confused and confounded men and women." However, she notices that such a relationship has never been perceived to have any significant impact on the family frame and experience. On the other hand, "the man's. conflict with his father. [has] been seen as directly influencing the survival of the family (Betsko and Koenig 338-39). She, as well as other dramatists of the time, saw how mother-daughter relationship is trivialized in the theatre.

GETTING OUT: LOST MATERNAL BOND

With time, a woman's experience has been an acceptable subject matter for the American stage. Themes such as a mother-daughter relationship became subject matter. The theme of matrophobia is a central theme to feminists. By discussing such a unique relationship, women writers were able to bring to the fore their own experiences, away from the male-dominated home. Norman always turns towards her own life experiences, and towards all those female relationships she has in her life as a source for her plays' subject matter.

The two-faced character Arlie/Arlene has just been released from prison and is trying to adjust to a new life. This new life includes getting rid of the memory and presence of all the men who have abused her, including her father. But the women have treated her no better. Of the many sisters she has, none have called or visited for years, neither has her mother, and one of her sisters has refused custody of Arlene's son, Joey, putting him in foster homes.

The mother, out of a belated sense of duty, visits Arlene shortly after her release, and brings some presents and tries to help her settle down in her new apartment. Nevertheless, during her visit, she constantly criticizes Arlene's "stringy" hair, and "skinny" body, and makes clear that she does not want Arlene, this "hateful brat" to be a burden to her and a bad example to the kids she has at home. As she leaves, she does not allow Arlene to embrace her, just as she had done when she first entered. When Arlene fails to revive the mother-daughter bond between her and her mother, she turns to her neighbor Ruby, an ex-convict. As a woman who has learned to survive and can support another woman; Ruby becomes a positive model in the play and serves as the mother-surrogate.

We have two biological mother-daughter relationships, Mother-Arlie, and Mother-Arlene. The mother in her refusal, detachment, and somehow detestation of her daughter is the same, yet Arlie's reaction and Arlene's towards the mother are different. Arlene, the grown-up, goes through a transitional phase when she comes out of prison; people from her old life come back into her new life and change something in her. The first person is her mother. The audience expects a reunion, a confrontation where the mother tells her released daughter that she misses her and wants to make it up for her, yet we are shocked to see something totally different.

The first time the mother's voice is heard on stage draws two reactions from our Arlie-Arlene; Arlie, the child, jumps on the bed, hugs the teddy bear for safety and pulls the pillow

between her legs. But Arlene, the young woman, goes to the door slowly, and hesitantly, and tries to look as presentable as possible then opens the door. These few lines, even before mother and daughter meet face to face; tell a lot about the strained relationship between the two. The child Arlie does not trust her mother enough to tell her what her father is doing to her, while Arlene, the grown-up and mature girl, wants to make amends but does not know how her mother is going to react.

Arlene's mother does not show any affection; it has been eight years, we would expect at least a handshake, but the mother avoids body contact with her daughter. She comes into the room with one mission, apparently, to see for herself if Arlene has really changed or she is the same. When the mother walks in, "Arlene moves as if to hug her. Mother stands still, Arlene backs off." But there is still hope that the mother would show a sign of affection:

ARLENE. How are you?

MOTHER. Bout the same. (*Walking into the room.*)

ARLENE. I'm glad to see you.

MOTHER. (*Not looking at Arlene.*) You look tired.

ARLENE. It was a long drive.

MOTHER. (*Putting the laundry basket on the trunk.*) Didn't fatten you up none, I see. (14)

The mother comes in with a basket full of cleaning supply; she looks "*strong but badly worn.*" Norman has been asked in an interview if her mother is Arlie's mother she says yes but her mother does not seem to see this:

She didn't recognize herself at all, even when the mother in the play walked in the door. When the mother in *Getting Out* walks in the door with a basket full of cleaning supplies, I was convinced that Mother would know that this was a picture of her, because all she ever did was clean. I mean, it's a religious activity, I think. Sort of trying to get the dirt out, getting rid of the sin and the evil. (Beattie 285)

Arlene's mother does the same; she cleans Arlene's room diligently as if trying to clean Arlene herself. Arlene's mother goes to the trouble of cleaning the apartment yet does not show any affection towards her daughter. This mother, somehow, mirrors Norman's mother.

Arlene's mother is a callous, uncaring woman whose neglect of her children results in their life of crime. She makes it clear to Arlene that she does not want anything to do with her children. Arlene asks about her sister Candy who used to reside in the two-room apartment that she is in now, the mother says: "You got her place so what do you care? I got her outta my house so whatta I care?" (15). Then Arlene's mother tells her about members of her family, and this family is

an almost comic haplessness and depravity; a son in the detention center, a son-in-law in jail, one daughter a thief, another a prostitute, a third a dope dealer, her own wife-beating husband, a grandson (Arlene's son, Joey) in a foster home because Arlene's sister refused to keep him while Arlene was in prison. (Harriott 131)

The picture that the mother draws is not a bright one; especially to Arlene who is hoping to go back to a welcoming family.

After this entire bad mother picture that the audience sees, they would never expect Arlene to look for her son; her idol has not been a good one. Arlene does not have matrophobia; she is not afraid to be a mother. On the contrary, she has been looking forward to making a good living after prison so that she can provide for her son and have him come live with her.

Arlene asks her mother about her son, Joey, who is supposed to be in the care of her sister. The hard-hearted mother tells her that she has seen him 'two years ago.' She tells Arlene how she met her grandson:

ARLENE. You was just tellin' me how you saw Joey.

MOTHER. I'm comin' back in the cab an' I seen him comin' for the bus.

ARLENE. What'd he say?

MOTHER. oh, I didn't stop.

(Arlene looks up quickly, hurt and angry.)

Arlene has hoped that her sister would take care of Joey until she comes out so that it would be easy for her to reunite with her son, but her mother sees differently; she tells Arlene that she does not "have to be worryin' about him. No kids. No worryin'." Her mother speaks about her own view of mothering; she sees her job as a mother as a burden that has troubled her all her life, and Shirley, the daughter who is supposed to care for Joey, has "never [been] crazy about washin' more diapers. She's the only smart kid I got;" she is the only daughter who is an image of her (16).

Arlene's mother's views on motherhood are pronounced now. It is already known that she sees motherhood as a restricting job. It is clear that she is not a good example for her children. She used to take Arlie the child with her, maybe as a cover-up, and leaves her in the car while she goes into bars and stays there for a long time. She judges Arlene on doing things she has been doing herself; prostituting.

She tells Arlene that her sister, June is just having another baby "Don't know when to quit, that girl. Course, I ain't one to talk," (21) and it is true. Mother herself has quite a few children of her own. Bigsby says that Mother's:

maternal instincts survive only in the form of sporadic gestures. She now arrives at the apartment to welcome Arlene but her attempts to brighten that apartment have the air of pathos. She is acting out a role she no longer understands. Indeed, when Arlene suggests that she might visit her she is rebuffed by a woman who, ironically, explains that she cannot afford to have negative influence in the family home. (214)

She is afraid that Arlene would have a bad influence on a home that is damaged beyond repair. The presence of such a mother in the house is a bad influence in itself. She is a mother who is abused by the same man who obviously rapes her own daughter, a mother who drives her husband's cab and visits brothels at night with her own child waiting in the car.

The Mother's lost maternal instinct is evident from the beginning. Through flashbacks, we draw a gloomy picture of a mother who, strangely, does not perceive the cause of her daughter's discomfort: "Nobody done this to me Mama (*Protesting, in pain*)," "Was... (*quickly*) my bike. My bike hurt me. The seat bumped me." "No, Mama, don't touch it. It'll git well. It git well before" (14- 15). There were signs of

sexual abuse that Arlie's mother failed to see. She does not show any sign that she has seen anything out of the ordinary. The pending question will be whether she knew about the father's abuse and chose to ignore it for fear of the father, or not. If so, then her maternal instincts must have been dead, and she lacked sympathy for her daughter's agony.

Arlie's relationship with her mother is awkward. She fearfully denies being raped by her father, probably because the same father beats her mother sometimes. Despite the mother's several transgressions, she defends her against a playmate who says that her mother is a 'prostitute.'

ARLIE. She drives at night 'casue people needs rides at night. People goin' to see their friends that are sick, or people's cars broken down and they gotta get to work at. nobody calls my mama a whore!" (20)

In a flashback, we see Arlie's admiration of her mother: "She drives the cab to buy us stuff, 'cause we don't take no charity from nobody, 'cause we got money 'cause she earned it" (19). She sees her mother as a great woman.

Arlie, the child and Arlene the young woman, do not seem to be able to talk to her mother openly about what bothers her, she is always timid, afraid maybe to say the wrong thing. Norman says that her mother "had a very serious code about what you could and what you could not say. You particularly could not say anything that was in the least angry or that had any conflict in it at all" (Brater 256).

Before the mother comes in, Arlene tries to hide Bennie's hat under the bed, which shows clearly that Arlene wants her mother to see that she has changed; and a man's hat in her room is an indication that she still has inappropriate relations with men. Arlene's relationship with her mother is not built on trust. She knows that even if she tells her mother that Bennie has forgotten his hat and there is nothing between them, she will not believe her. The mother has judged her daughter and deems her lost beyond repair. The hat is a sign the mother has been looking for to escape, again, the responsibility of her daughter. The emotional conflict that has been building up between herself and her mother erupts with the hat. Stripping her gift, the bedspread, she stuffs it into her basket and moves to the door.

Both mother and daughter are shaped by the oppressive patriarchal force in their lives, which is the husband/father figure. He has destroyed his daughter's childhood, treated his wife with violence and negligence, therefore destroying the natural bonding that usually exists between mother and daughter. With time Arlene's mother becomes so bitter that she neglects her children, which leads them to delinquency. In the three plays, the female-male relationship is off-stage, while the female-female one is actually on stage.

From the beginning of Arlene's meeting with her mother until her mother storms out, Arlene seems so anxious to reconnect with her mother. Despite the obvious fact that Arlene is determined to separate herself from all the people from her past, yet she is still looking forward to the only person who could have made a difference in her troubled childhood; her mother: "indeed the play consists of her slow shedding of those who had tried to shape and control her, along with the self they had shaped" (Bigsby 216).

As daughters we need mothers who want their own freedom and ours. We need not to be the vessels of another woman's self-denial and frustration. The quality of the mother's life—however embattled and empowered—is her primary bequest to her daughter, because a woman who can believe in herself, who is a fighter, and who continues to struggle to create livable space around her, is demonstration to her daughter that these possibilities exist. (Rich 247)

Norman herself has said "there comes a moment... when we have to release our parents from our expectations" (Brater256). Arlene has expectations of her mother, even if they seem impossible as we come to know the nature of their relationship. However, she tries as if for the last time, to resurrect the dead maternal instincts in her mother.

Arlene is labeled as a prostitute by her mother. When Arlene's mother discovers Bennie's hat in Arlene's house, she automatically assumes that Arlene has returned to her old lifestyle of prostitution. Arlene explains that Bennie is a prison guard and he had offered to drive her to Kentucky, but her mother does not believe that any man would "drive a girl 500 miles for nuthin." Arlene's plea that she "ain't like that no more" fails to convince her mother. Her mother says, "Oh you ain't. I'm your mother. I know what you'll do" (34-36). These harsh words arouse feelings of hostility and pain in Arlene. The very fact that her mother has no faith in her contributes significantly to the difficulty in the progress of Arlene's reform.

Norman asserts on several occasions that she turned to her great-aunt, Bertha Toole, for maternal support, that unconditional acceptance of who you are. She tells Beattie that her aunt 'Bubbie' was "kind of [her] patron saint and protector. Much more a person of [her] ilk than Mother was," she remembers spending more time in her company than she did with her mother: "she really just knew how to have a good time, and she didn't have children of her own. I was her kid, and that was the best thing in the world for me" (283). Her response supports the suggestion that mothering is an act that can be performed by anyone who is willing.

Norman, in *Getting Out*, is "writing as a therapy, as a release from the stifling silence" that she lived in during her childhood (Showalter 136). She turns to her aunt Bubbie for a listening ear, and acceptance. Arlene, also, finds solace in another woman when her mother rejects her. Arlene's relation to Ruby mirrors Norman's relation to her great-aunt.

In the concluding moments of *Getting Out*, Norman offers the possibility of hope to a struggling Arlene in the character of Ruby, a benevolent mother surrogate who is sharply contrasted with Arlene's own mother. The play, which started with severing a maternal relationship between Mother and Arlene, ends with a promising one between Ruby and Arlene. Arlene meets with the two people who are supposed to accept her and welcome her back into their lives; her mother, and Carl, her ex-boyfriend, who somehow are the cause of her delinquency, yet shockingly neither try to make amends for what they did to her. In the end, however, she meets Ruby, her new neighbor. Ruby is a former convict who has adjusted already to her new life outside prison. In the beginning, Arlene resists any offer of friendship from Ruby.

In flashbacks, we see how Arlie was trying to avoid sexual relations with female inmates. But gradually she realizes that Ruby accepts her as she is.

As an experienced emotional "survivor," Ruby offers varying degrees of comfort, help, and advice to her younger counterpart. Although Arlene is not yet ready to relinquish her illusions about freedom, Ruby gives her the advice that may pull her through this crisis: the sooner Arlene accepts how difficult it will be to be "outside," the better off she will be. When Arlene breaks down at the realization that life outside is as intolerable as life in prison, Ruby, an ex-con herself, can only agree: "[You thought] it was gonna be different. Well, it ain't. And the sooner you believe it, the better off you'll be" (53)

A simple comparison between Arlene's mother's reaction to Bennie's hat and Ruby's reaction to seeing Carl with Arlene shows how badly her mother has failed her supporting role. Seeing the hat drives the mother out of her daughter's life. On the other hand, when Ruby comes into Arlene's apartment and sees how Carl is holding her hand:

RUBY'S VOICE. Arlene?

CARL. (*yelling*) she ain't here!

RUBY'S VOICE. (*alarmed*) Arlene! You all right?

ARLENE. That's Ruby I was tellin' you about.

CARL. (*Catches Arlene's arm again, very rough*) We ain't through!

RUBY. (*Opening the door*) Hey! (*Seeing the rough treatment.*) Goin' to the store. (*Very firm*) thought maybe you forgot somethin'. (57)

She jumps to Arlene's help. She instinctively feels that Arlene is being harassed, detecting violence and manhandling in his way of gripping her hand. Lauren Porter says that the "only hope in this otherwise grim play comes from Arlene's association with Ruby, the ex-con who lives upstairs" (202).

Strangely Arlene opens up to Ruby and tells her things she has never told her own mother like her suicidal attempt at prison. Ruby plays a crucial role in Arlene's acceptance of Arlie, her former self, which she has, metaphorically tried to kill in jail by stabbing herself with a fork: "there's all this blood all over my shirt an' I got this fork I'm holdin' real tight in my hand... I been stabbin' myself an I'm sayin' Arlie is dead for what she done to me." Ruby reminds Arlene that it is acceptable to love Arlie because "You can still love people that's gone." (54). The primary message Ruby tries to convey to Arlene is that she has to accept her old self to become a new person; for part of the "getting out" process for women who did time in prison necessitates an integration of multiple selves, past and present. Ruby's comforting wisdom motivates Arlene to ignore the bleak picture she has of her old self and forgive herself for the past.

Arlene must reconcile herself to Arlie, and she needs female nourishment and nurture to do so. Her most important rehabilitation occurs through her contact with Ruby. Ruby allows Arlene to mourn the death of Arlie. While Arlene weeps for her lost self, Ruby rocks her like a baby, and rubs her back, giving Arlene the warmth, she so desperately needs. Norman maintains that Arlene can only survive if she accepts the delinquent Arlie, accepts her past, and builds a future on that acceptance (Stone 58). As the play concludes, the two women make plans to play cards together later that evening.

Arlene does not hate her mother; she can identify with her on some level, yet not the maternal level. The mother does not want to mother her children and sees them as a burden. Arlene, on the other hand, despite being young, single, and ex-convict, and badly hurt by her parent, wants and looks forward to taking care of her own son. She is not afraid of the institution of motherhood. On the contrary, she misses her son and wants to be joined with him, to give him all the things she has been deprived of as a daughter.

Through the display of mother-daughter relationship in *Getting Out*, even if it is a very dark picture of the natural relationship we know that exists, Norman plays an integral part in placing female characters and their experiences in center stage. It is clear to everyone that Norman was not selective in this play, she is not trying to paint a beautiful world where mothers cuddle their perfect daughters; she is realistic. Arlene and her mother are not having a healthy relationship. Mother Holsclaw destroyed her daughter, together with her husband. Norman managed to show a unique relationship peculiar to women, a special bond that only exists between women and does not tolerate the interference of men. Norman tackled the whole subject from a gynocentric view.

CONCLUSION

The paper focuses on Norman's *Getting Out*. It pursues the idea of matrophobia, as a theme, through the mother-daughter relationship displayed in the play. Arlene in *Getting Out* is one of Norman's voiceless subjects. The young woman's story is important because it represents a community. It is as Norman says: "writing for the theatre is like nominating people for the archives of human history... As a playwright, I select a person to nominate for memory by the race" (Betsko and Koenig 329). Approaching Norman's play *Getting Out*, from a feminist perspective proves the fact that women's voices and talents are not hidden anymore.

Norman reflects women's struggles to expand the limits of their lives through their maternal position, a topic that could not be approached before. By doing so, they have become mothers who have provided essential insights into the mother/daughter relationship. Norman's *Getting Out* proves to be a great play that explores the psyche of two types of women, mother, and daughter, and displays the bond that exists between them.

Arlene is not afraid to mother her son. She looks forward to providing him with all the things that her mother has failed to give her. Arlene believes that motherhood is part of her; it is a unique relationship that can define her, not deter her quest for autonomy.

Mothering is not only the physical act of bearing children. It goes beyond that. Mothering is a sacred bond between two females where one of them provides the other with emotional support. The paper points out the different social forces that shape a woman's life. Such forces can be read through the dramatization of the conflicts of women who have made commitments of being wives and mothers even though they are still in the process of defining their role and ordering their priorities. This paper should open a new path for other women playwrights to be approached from within their own unique experience.

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