

## Social Ecofeminism Versus Cultural Ecofeminism: Marsha Norman's *Getting Out* and *'night, Mother*

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DOI: <https://www.doi.org/10.34785/J014.2021.305>

Article Type: Original Article

Page Numbers: 77-91

Received: 31 January 2021

Accepted: 21 June 2021

### Abstract

The present article analyzes two of Marsha Norman's groundbreaking plays, *Getting Out* (1977) and *'night, Mother* (1983), in the light of ecofeminism. From the viewpoint of ecological feminism, Western patriarchal culture, which is structured in a hierarchical and dualistic manner, is responsible for the domination of women as well as the destruction of the natural environment. Broadly speaking, ecofeminist studies fall into two main categories: social ecofeminism and cultural ecofeminism. Considering the theories and positions of both groups, the researchers analyze how 'nature' and 'women' have been historically, socially, and culturally oppressed by hierarchical and dualistic structures of patriarchal capitalism; and discuss how Norman in her selected plays challenges and destabilizes such structures. Accordingly, it is concluded that Norman's conception of woman-nature connection corresponds more closely to the theories and positions held by social ecofeminists than those of cultural ecofeminists, and that she considers woman-nature affinity as more of a sociocultural product than a biological fact.

### Keywords

Cultural Ecofeminism; Environment; Nature-Culture Dualism; Patriarchy; Social Ecofeminism.

### 1. Introduction

Marsha Norman was born into a Methodist fundamentalist family in which she was deprived of radio, television, and even other children. Not only is Norman a playwright, but she is also a screenwriter, a journalist, and a novelist. Among contemporary American playwrights, she "comes closest to being awarded canonical status" (Porter 200). Norman mostly writes about women's experiences in different situations. She is one of the first female dramatists who make relationships in women's lives into appropriate matter for powerful plays. Hers is primarily a theater of relationships ranging from mother-daughter

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relationship, familial relationship to an accidental relationship between two strangers. Patriarchy and its destructive effects on the lives of women are other major ideas which are analyzed in her dramas. In this view, the female characters in most of her plays stand as the voice of women who have been subject to discrimination and oppression throughout different generations.

Ecofeminism seeks to explore the ways in which the patriarchal culture has been responsible for the domination and the oppression of women as well as the destruction of the natural environment. According to ecofeminist theorists, the hierarchical dualisms of the masculine world are the root cause of both women's and other natural life-forms' oppression. The "anthropocentric dualism humanity/nature" and the "androcentric dualism man/woman" (Garrard 23) are two major such dualisms. In this sense, both women and nonhuman nature have been traditionally regarded as the Other or the inferior by the patriarchal culture. Given this, the researchers demonstrate how the hierarchical dualisms of the masculine world have served as a justification for the domination of women, animals, and nature in Marsha Norman's *Getting Out* and *'night, Mother*. From the vantage point of ecofeminism, the characteristics attributed to women are not biologically determined, but ideologically and sociohistorically conceptualized. In much the same way, the qualities associated with both women and nature take on significance within the framework of culturally defined value systems. In this view, the present paper is devoted to the analysis of society-nature relations as well as gender-environment connections.

As noted above, the present research discusses how Norman challenges and destabilizes nature-culture dualism and gender-environment conceptions. Given this, the researchers investigate how Western patriarchal culture, masculine constructs, and male-identified values have been internalized in the characters' minds, embodied in the most moral institutions portrayed in the plays such as medicine, religion, and education, and played out in the power-based social relations of society. In this regard, in the theoretical framework of the study, it is argued how the traditional sex/gender system is the root cause of many environmental, social, and gender-inequality problems.

Following this section, the researchers expound the two major subdisciplines of ecofeminism and then discuss the idea of interrelatedness of all species and their intrinsic value in contrast to use value. Next, the study demonstrates how human-animal interactions and women-animal relations are negatively affected by hierarchical and dualistic structures of patriarchal capitalism. Then, the section entitled "social ecofeminism versus cultural ecofeminism" discusses woman-nature affinities are a product of the patriarchal systems of subordination rather than certain common features shared by women and nature

such as “reproduction” and “nurturance”. Finally, it is argued that woman-nature connection, which has resulted in the oppression and exploitation of both women and nature, is more of a sociocultural product rather than an essentialist biological entity.

## 2. Literature Review

Since its emergence in the 1970s, ecocriticism in general and ecofeminism in particular have increasingly developed theoretically. However, there are few practical models of ecocritical approach. Indeed, most of the ecocritical studies undertaken in literature concern works of fiction and there is a paucity of ecocritical research in theater studies. In this regard, the researchers have found no research conducted in the light of ecofeminism on Marsha Norman’s dramas. Theresa J. May is one of the few scholars who have conducted rigorous studies on the application of ecocriticism to theater. In her article entitled “Beyond Bambi: Toward a Dangerous Ecocriticism in Theatre Studies” (May 2007), she asserts that inclusion of theatre and performance within ecocritical discourse brings new and important issues to light.

Expounding on ecocriticism and its related methodologies in theater, May renders an eco-reading of some distinguished American plays such as Edward Albee’s *The Goat, or Who Is Sylvia?*, Lorraine Hansberry’s *Raisin in the Sun*, and Tony Kushner’s *Caroline, or Change*. As an example, the researchers provide a summary of May’s eco-reading of *The Goat, or Who Is Sylvia?*. The play presents an urban-dwelling and successful architect named Martin who falls in love with a goat. Believing himself in love, but performing master–slave, he has sex with her. May discusses that the goat is a stand-in (albeit on four legs) for men, women, and children who have become—through skin color, gender, national origin, or simple dependence—at once the objects of desire and the consumables of a heterosexual patriarchy. In sum, May maintains that Albee’s *The Goat, or Who Is Sylvia?* wrestles with species identity and species privilege, and confronts the ethics implicit in our reciprocal relationship with ‘the others’. In this view, Martin, who fails to appreciate the ecological reciprocity, fails to save his marriage as well. The present article also demonstrates how women and the physical environment, as a result of the dualistic and hierarchical structures of the Western culture, are reduced to a resource reservoir for providing the material needs of men.

Linda Ginter Brown is one of the few scholars who has focused upon women in the works of Marsha Norman and Lillian Hellman. In her doctoral dissertation

entitled "Toward a More Cohesive Self: Women in the Works of Lillian Hellman and Marsha Norman" (Brown 1991), she examines the struggles that women characters' experience during their quest for psychological wholeness. She claims in the works of both playwrights the women suffer because a sense of power is denied them by their lack of choices regarding the way in which they can define themselves. Similarly, the present study, with regard to ecofeminist concepts and notions, shows how women characters in Norman's *Getting Out* and *'night, Mother* are denied a sense of power and identity due to their sex, and how environmental determinism can have a devastating effect on the destiny of women who cannot escape the ideological force-fields in which they are trapped.

### **3. Critical Approach and Concepts**

#### **3.1. Traditional Sex/Gender System**

As a value system, ecofeminism blames the patriarchal Western system for the oppression of women and the despoliation of nature. In this respect, ecofeminism is not simply a feminist movement in the light of environmentalism; rather it is a political movement which calls for an end to all the oppressive systems. "Ecofeminism is, then, a movement that seeks to show how the issues of sexism are tightly woven with those of classism, racism, and environmental destruction, as all are dependent on the continued hegemony of male decision making in the world" (Strzalkowski 175). According to ecofeminists, all the oppressive systems are interrelated and a consequence of the patriarchal system of domination. In other words, they believe all forms of exploitation and oppression such as racism, capitalism, imperialism, etc. are extensions of male supremacy. Thus, they seek to break up the traditional masculine hierarchies and claim the liberation of one oppressed group depends on the liberation of all the other subordinated groups.

Ecofeminists hold that the traditional sex/gender system has led to the surfacing of numerous environmental, social, and psychological problems. They argue this system promotes a new ideal of womanhood; one who is "chaste, desexualized, and harmless dependent" (Li 283). They further claim "within this patriarchal framework, the very metaphors for gender have expressed the male as norm and the female as deviant, while 'man' is used to subsume 'woman'. Consequently, the exclusion of women from naming leads to the marginalization and even omission of women's experiences in human culture formation" (Li 282). They also rebuke the splitting of humanity into femininity and masculinity and maintain such separation "deprives human beings of personality traits, behavioral patterns, and value systems that could be common to both men and women. The polarization of maleness and femaleness is in line with the

establishment of the male-dominated and female-subordinated sexual hierarchy” (Li 288).

### **3.2. Principal Subfields of Ecofeminism**

Broadly speaking, ecofeminist studies fall into two major categories: cultural ecofeminism and social ecofeminism. Cultural ecofeminists claim that women are closer to nature than men because both women and nature share certain similar qualities such as reproduction and nurturance. Social ecofeminists, on the other hand, maintain that women and nature are connected with one another as a result of the roles which have been imposed on them in a male-dominated society. Although cultural ecofeminism and social ecofeminism posit different views about woman-nature affinities, they both hold the patriarchal system of dominance responsible for the oppression of women as well as the despoliation of the natural environment. Indeed, as various disciplines of ecofeminism, “both cultural and social eco-feminism are responses to the dualistic forms of thinking that have underpinned traditional Western thought” (Buckingham-Hatfield 35). Thus, both groups seek to reverse the hierarchical dualisms of the masculine world.

As already noted, social ecofeminists believe that all of “today’s interrelated ecological problems” are a consequence of the “sexual polarization” (Li 286) and the traits which are ideologically and culturally attributed to men and women. However, cultural ecofeminists blame the hierarchical system of patriarchy for the oppression of both women and the physical environment. The first group of ecofeminists claim the qualities associated with men such as aggression, militarism, competitiveness, powerfulness, and autonomy account for the ecological degradation and the oppression of women; whereas, the second group of ecofeminists believe the patriarchal system of domination is to blame for the oppression of both women and nature. At first glance, the arguments raised by these two groups seem to be the same. However, what distinguishes the two is that the ideas of the former group are mostly based on the philosophy of sociocultural determinism while the latter group holds the hierarchical structures of power and domination responsible for the domination of women and the physical environment.

### **3.3. The Interconnectedness of all Living Beings**

Ecofeminists, in line with other environmentalist theorists, believe human beings and nature are interrelated and that they both form a huge web of life. Therefore, any “brokenness and disharmony” in nature can endanger the integrity of this web. In this respect, “war, class exploitation, poverty...animal experimentation” (Li 290), and genderization should be regarded as worrying as “other urgent

ecological issues, such as air and water pollution, oil spills, and the extinction of wilderness and wildlife” (Li 290-91). Indeed, from the vantage point of ecofeminism, human species have approached the capacity to destroy all sentient life on the planet Earth; therefore, it is “imperative that we challenge both the ideological assumptions and the hierarchical structures of power and domination that together serve to hold the majority of earth’s inhabitants in thrall to the privileged minority” (Gaard 10). As such, ecofeminist theorists claim the ‘conceptual hierarchy of being’ is androcentrically constructed and that it should be subverted and reconstructed.

With regard to the “Interconnectedness of all Living Beings”, the present study examines the way animals, as a symbol of natural environment, are treated under patriarchal capitalism. In this regard, it is expounded how both women and animals are treated as commodities which are supposed to satisfy the material needs of men. Furthermore, it is argued how in a society where the exploitation of the physical environment is the norm, “struggling to free the environment from those constraints, as well as the woman from her political binds, is to struggle against the economic system itself” (Strzalkowski 178). As such, the researchers claim how Norman calls attention to the issues of environment by foregrounding the way both women and nature are mistreated and abused by the anti-ecological system of patriarchy.

#### **4. An Ecofeminist Reading of *Getting Out* and *'night, Mother***

##### **4.1. Society-Environment Relations**

Human-animal interactions in general and women-animal relations in particular reveal in many ways how hierarchical and dualistic structures of patriarchal capitalism operate. In this view, ‘animals’ act as an important symbol of the natural world and the way they are treated in Norman’s selected dramas expresses the anti-ecological attitudes of the western patriarchal culture towards the physical environment. In her first play, *Getting Out* (1977), there are several situations in which nature and animals are exploited and mistreated. As an example, Arlie, in her monologue at the beginning of the play, narrates how she would take her anger and frustrations out on frogs. She recalls how the next door boy would keep the frogs which his father would bring him whenever he went fishing. She recollects how he would make a fence around them and took care of them as if they were his pets.

The next door boy’s father, by bringing him frogs as playthings, enculturates him into some of the common attitudes and behaviors of the society. Indeed, he induces his son to believe that nature and its creatures are supposed to serve human beings. That the next door boy builds a fence around his frogs implies the enculturation process has been done successfully. In other words, he sees the

frogs as one of his possessions and does not let Arlie approach them. The boy's treatment of frogs represents the dominant attitude of the society towards nature and its inhabitants. Tragically, they are kept in captivity or killed so some people can have fun. Evidently, the boy is disinclined to share his so-called toys with anybody and this, in its own turn, is another proof of his being enculturated. Arlie recalls, "we'd try to go over an see 'em but he'd start screamin' to his mother to come out an git rid of us. Real snotty like" (*Getting Out* 7).

Symbolically speaking, the frogs stand for nature and that they are run over and squashed by cars indicates how technology has contributed to the destruction of the physical environment. Additionally, frogs are popular subjects of experimentation in scientific laboratories. For example, frog dissection is one of the common experiments conducted at school. Undoubtedly, the depiction of 'frogs' in *Getting Out* has various possible implications. As an example, conducting experiments on frogs refers to animal cruelty and suffering under patriarchal capitalism. On another level, the amphibious nature of frogs and the fact that they live both on land and in water indicate that unhindered technological advances as well as anti-ecological policies of capitalism have either taken or endangered the lives of many living creatures inhabiting both in water and on land.

Norman's masterpiece, *'night, Mother* (1983), is a powerful play about a woman's decision to commit suicide. The play's protagonist, Jessie, feels she is living a life without meaning and purpose; therefore, she decides to take her own life. The play begins as Jessie informs her mother Thelma that she is going to kill herself, and then she tries to convince her mother that her decision is rational. Therefore, the play turns out to be an intermissionless ninety-minute dialogue between Thelma and Jessie. Certainly, the animal imagery in the play indicates the extent to which the ethics and principles of patriarchal capitalism have been internalized in the society. 'Dogs' and 'birds' are two major animals which represent the stereotypical animal-human relationship in the play. For instance, when Jessie loses her dog in an accident, she mourns over his death and misses him a lot. Mama, however, cannot understand why Jessie is so sad about the death of her dog named 'King'. Symbolically speaking, the name of Jessie's dog indicates the significance of animal kingdom in natural ecosystems. Besides, that her dog is killed by a 'tractor' suggests how technological advances have led to the destruction of physical environment and its living creatures.

Jessie, who is upset with Mama's reply, asks her if humans are never run over by vehicles. Upon realizing she has hurt Jessie's feelings, Mama tries to console Jessie by saying that she can "get a new dog and keep him in the house. Dogs are cheap!" (*'night, Mother* 24). Mama's ill-considered reply suggests how she

thinks about animals and other life-forms. Evidently, Mama cannot understand “since all life is interconnected, one group of persons cannot be closer to nature”, and that “the assertion of ‘difference’ is based on the historical socialization and oppression of women, not biologism” (Birkeland 22). To Mama, animals and nature have no intrinsic value and they are simply supposed to serve human beings. In this view, they can be easily bought or sold.

Having been raised under patriarchal capitalism, she appraises people and objects solely on the basis of their monetary worth. In other words, she cannot understand how much Jessie was emotionally attached to her dog. Ironically, a parallel is drawn between Jessie and her dog. When Mama tells her how she reacts when she is having an epileptic seizure, Jessie says she feels as if she has been run over. Mama continues telling her how her mouth bites down and that she has to get her tongue out of the way fast so she does not bite herself. In this view, Jessie’s involuntary biting reaction resembles that of a rabid dog. Jessie herself tells Mama how she keeps “foaming like a mad dog the whole time” (*‘night, Mother* 43).

As already noted, birds include other animals which are referred to in *‘night, Mother*. When Mama asks Jessie why their neighbor, Agnes, has a house full of birds, Jessie says, “I didn’t know she had a house full of birds!”. To Jessie’s surprise, Mama confirms Agnes does have a house full of birds and that she is still paying for the last parrot she has bought. Mama believes Agnes is stupid as she spends her money on birds and she finds her reason for buying them more stupid. According to Agnes, one has to keep one’s house filled up. Surely, Mama cannot understand how much people can become attached to animals, or for that matter, the extent to which animals can fill up people’s loneliness. Agnes tells Mama how her birds follow her home and how she can talk and communicate with them. Ironically, when Mama is faced with Jessie’s coldness and silence, she realizes Agnes is right and tells her daughter, “Agnes gets more talk out of her birds than I got from the two of you” (*‘night, Mother* 28, 32).

A close examination of human-animal interactions in Norman’s selected plays indicates that some characters normally hold a disaffectionate and utilitarian attitude towards animals. For this reason, they can neither identify with nor relate to animals. Typical instances of animal abuse committed by male characters are fishing and hunting. Indeed, under patriarchal capitalism, both women and animals are supposed to be hunted by men. Evidently, the way the prison guards seek to abuse Arlie is very much similar to that of a group of hunters competing for an animal. Surely, fishing is promoted as a popular sport having a lot of health benefits. In this view, the father of the next door boy goes fishing and brings his son frogs as playthings. Mama also tells Jessie one of her

father's favorite pastimes was fishing. Tragically, women, like Mama, who have internalized patriarchal values cannot identify with animals. Significantly, Jessie's sense of attachment to her dog and Agnes's close relationship with her birds demonstrate the extent to which Norman destabilizes and subverts the dominant sociocultural attitudes held towards animal-human relationship under patriarchal capitalism.

#### **4.2. Social Ecofeminism versus Cultural Ecofeminism**

Since cultural and social ecofeminists posit different views about woman-nature affinity, the researchers seek to find out to what extent the woman-nature relations depicted in the plays fit into the category of cultural ecofeminism and to what extent into that of social ecofeminism. According to cultural ecofeminists, women are closer to nature than men as both women and nature share certain common features such as 'reproduction' and 'nurturance'. In this respect, that Arlie does not let them abort her baby indicates her sense of attachment and responsibility for her child. Arlie even claims she went crazy after they took her baby away from her. From the viewpoint of cultural ecofeminism, Arlie's desperate attempts to keep her baby demonstrate her sense of innate motherhood.

As noted above, Arlene's desperate appeals to seek custody of her son is conclusive evidence of her motherly passions. However, the culture does not consider her qualified enough to raise Joey. Thus, once her child is born, they take him away from her. Indeed, the culture does not regard Arlie an appropriate mother since she has rebelled against the patriarchal system of domination which seeks to make her submissive, economically impotent, and sexually corrupt. Not surprisingly, she can have custody of her son once she undergoes a transformation and acquires the characteristics of a woman/mother whom the chaplain idealizes for her. As the representative of patriarchal capitalism, the chaplain tells her those who are 'meek' are entitled to 'inherit' the earth. Evidently, the chaplain's words verify the fact that the earth or nature in particular can be exploited in order to serve human purposes.

One of the major problems that Arlene is faced with is that she lives in a society where she is easily labeled, stigmatized, and judged. For instance, Bennie, who has both sexual and romantic feelings for her, tries to destroy her sense of dignity and self-worth hoping she would surrender. Therefore, "he continually reminds her that she was wild, that she needs his help. He refers to her as a girl, a helpless child, who when left to her own devices, will end up in trouble" (Cline 15). Arlene's tactfulness in the face of Bennie's sexual advances demonstrates the extent to which she has changed. In other words, she has learned how to deal with macho and wild men. That Bennie dares to sexually assault Arlene indicates

his idea of her has not changed. In fact, Bennie still assumes Arlene is the corrupt girl she used to be. In this respect, *Getting Out* portrays the struggles of Arlene to escape the social stigmas which are associated with her past life. In Spencer's words:

As the play's title indicates, *Getting Out* addresses the female protagonist's specific hopes and the audience's more generalized desire to escape social entrapment; and yet the play's variety of enclosures suggest the ways in which feminine consciousness is constructed, maimed, reconstructed, and finally validated in our society. (365)

From the vantage point of social ecofeminism, Arlene is a victim of her family and the environment in which she has been raised. Being an ex-con, Arlene either has to sell her body or to use it in dirty and soulless places like a small restaurant near her dingy apartment. Certainly, Arlie's violent behaviors result from the abuses that have been inflicted upon her. Having been raped by her father, used by her so-called partner, and abused and mistreated by the prison guards, Arlie has become law-breaking and authority-defying. However, she is transformed into a mature, self-reliant, and independent woman through the help of her friend, Ruby. Indeed, "the only hope in this otherwise grim play comes from Arlene's association with Ruby, the ex-con who lives upstairs. Of all the characters in the play, only Ruby listens to Arlene, respects her pain, and tells her the truth" (Porter 202). Evidently, the solidarity and unity between the rehabilitated Arlie and Ruby suggests how women can stand up to powerful systems of domination by joining and helping one another.

According to social ecofeminists, the hierarchal dualisms of Western culture are responsible for the subjugation of both women and nature. "In this interpretation, women's closeness to nature is seen as socially constructed, that is, a product of the role women have been socialized into through generations" (Buckingham-Hatfield 36). In *'night, Mother*, there are several instances when these culturally-defined roles are reversed and invalidated. For example, Mama, who is a product of the patriarchal system, believes only people who are retarded and deranged do commit suicide while Jessie claims she is completely fine. Mythologically speaking, suicide is regarded as preferable to disability and men's suicide such as that of Oedipus is admired. However, the same culture does not accord such stature to Jessie's troubles. Significantly, the way Jessie has decided to kill herself is not typically a feminine act; rather it is primarily a masculine one. In this view, it suggests Jessie wishes to escape the social role which has been defined and determined for her.

From the viewpoint of social ecofeminism, "femininity and meaning are culturally constructed as antithetical" (Begley 350). Therefore, the "culture" does not believe Jessie has a right to think and decide for herself as these qualities are

in contrast to femininity. However, Jessie defies the roles which have been imposed on her. As an example, when Mama asks Jessie what her brother named Dawson does that bothers her so much, Jessie says, "he just calls me Jess like he knows who he's talking to. 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* 19). In this view, Jessie rejects "the feminine, passive position to which she has been assigned" (Spencer 368). Undoubtedly, Jessie finds Dawson's treatment of her offensive and claims he constantly intrudes into her private life. However, Mama believes Dawson does not mean to hurt her feelings and that he cares about her. Yet, Jessie finds Dawson's intruding questions unbearable. For this reason, she does not want to share the last hours of her life with a man who has always treated her like an idiot and exerted his power and authority over her.

Mama constantly asks Jessie to see the glass as half-full and reassures her that her son named Ricky, who is a delinquent, will change soon: "he'll get back in school or get a job or one day you'll get a call and he'll say he's sorry for all the trouble he's caused and invite you out for supper someplace dressup". However, Jessie is quite sure Ricky will not change and she even confesses if she knew where he were, she would turn him in: "those two rings he took were the last valuable things I had so now he's started in on other people, door to door. I hope they put him away sometime. I'd turn him in, myself, if I knew where he was" (*night, Mother* 12-13). Nevertheless, at the end of the play, Jessie asks Mama to give Ricky her watch. She tells Mama how she wishes she could buy a good meal for him before her suicide and when Mama says he will buy drugs with it, she does not change her mind. Obviously, Jessie knows her son will not change, yet she cannot deny her sense of motherhood and compassion for him.

Thelma is a kind of person who prefers to take all the pressures and burdens on her own so her beloved ones would not suffer as much as her. From the viewpoint of social ecofeminism, Mama's behavior demonstrates what women have been taught to do by the patriarchal system. Surely, Jessie knows Thelma did not live a happy life with her husband; however, she is unaware of all the details about their married life. Indeed, "we pity Mama because as a woman she mirrors Jessie's own problems: of rejection and abandonment, of shame and self-doubt, of failure and lack of autonomy, of buried resentment and hostility" (Spencer 371).

In a sincere tête-à-tête with Jessie, Mama had confessed she did not know exactly what she was living for; however, for a period of one hour and a half, she had an important reason to continue living and that was to save her only daughter. Even though Mama has failed to save Jessie, she has gained new

insights into life. In this respect, “if the play is about the redemption through suicide of one woman, it is about the survival of another. Both show heroism” (Bigsby 235). Obviously, Mama has undergone a dramatic transformation and become more insightful, self-reliant, and independent. As an example, when Jessie asks Mama to keep washing a pan until Dawson and the police arrive, she says, “I’ll make my calls and then I’ll just sit. I won’t need something to do” (*‘night, Mother* 54). Mama’s answer shows that she has learned to be in control of distressing and difficult conditions. In another situation, when Jessie tries to help Mama with people’s intrusive questions regarding her suicide, Mama tells Jessie she will say, “it was something personal” (53). Mama’s reply demonstrates she no longer cares much about what people think of her or her family. In this view, it is obvious that Mama has matured and learned how to handle her personal problems as well as her social predicaments much more successfully.

According to socialist ecofeminists, the qualities assigned to women by culture such as passivity, domesticity, sensuality, irrationality, and dependence place them in a position closer to nature than men. In this view, they posit “women’s character or position in the social world may not be innate or natural, but their distance from the center of patriarchal culture conditions a critical distance from the ideologies, social practices, and interests lying at the root of ecological destruction” (Sandilands 18). As such, Norman’s characters challenge the traditional roles and positions imposed on them by patriarchal capitalism.

Evidently, Jessie’s suicide is an extreme sample of her confrontation of patriarchal values and ideals. In other words, Western culture valorizes male heroes’ suicides such as those of Oedipus and Willy Loman. However, the same culture does not accord such stature to Jessie’s plight. In this regard, Jessie’s suicide destabilizes heroic values promoted by culture. In Begley’s words, “*‘night, Mother* bristles against its self-imposed banality, suggesting the transcendence of social circumstances through the existentialism of Jessie’s suicide” (347). In *Getting Out*, Arlene through the help of Ruby finds a job and becomes economically independent. Thus, she manages to cut loose of those who have abused her in her former life. Symbolically speaking, there is a parallel to the natural cycle of life in both plays. Indeed, although Jessie commits suicide at the end of play, yet it contributes to Mama’s rebirth. Surely, the newly born Mama has become more mature as well as self-reliant, insightful, and assertive. Similarly, in *Getting out*, Ruby and Arlene start a new relationship following the death of Arlie.

## **5. Conclusion**

The present study shows Norman’s view on woman-nature connection agrees more closely with the ideas of social ecofeminists than those of cultural

ecofeminists. The female characters are depicted as being victimized and exploited as a result of the social and cultural roles which are imposed on them rather than their essentialist qualities such as nurturance and reproduction. As such, it is demonstrated the qualities which are traditionally ascribed to women and nature, including passivity, irrationality, and sensuality, lead to their being abused and oppressed under patriarchal capitalism. In this respect, the female protagonists in Norman's *Getting Out* and *'night, Mother* subvert and destabilize the hierarchical dualisms of the masculine world. Significantly, Arlie's transformation into the mature Arlene and Jessie's suicide serve as two instances when the plays' heroines manage to challenge and discredit the male-identified ethics and standards of Western culture.

Evidently, Norman depicts women as being much more caring and nurturing towards their children, animals, and nature than men are. Indeed, she does not reject the qualities which are unique to women such 'motherhood'. To name but a few examples, Arlie's desperate attempts to have the custody of her son and Jessie's desire to buy her son a meal indicate their motherly and nurturing qualities. However, throughout both dramas, women are portrayed as being traditionally and socioculturally oppressed and exploited by the hierarchical dualisms of the Western civilization. In this view, Norman undermines and invalidates the dualistic and patriarchal structures of domination by depicting them as being sociohistorically and culturally conceptualized rather than being biologically determined.

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