

Women and Aspects of Self Realization in Sophie Treadwell's Machinal: An Analytical Study

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المرأة وأدراك الذات في مسرحية صوفي تريديول "ألي" دراسة تحليلية

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الجامعة العراقية، كلية الآداب، قسم الترجمة

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Abstract

This research paper centers on the strong female determination displayed in Sophie Treadwell's 1993 novel Machinal. In Sophie Treadwell's Machinal, literary archetypes are used as metaphors for real people. Although natural or man-made, they perpetuate human perceptions of the world. For feminist critics, how women are depicted as suffering and struggling is a crucial question, as is how women may stand strong in patriarchal systems. Sufficiency in women may also lead to new perspectives on the status of female and even its elevation in the workplace. As a result, literary stereotypes provide readers with an accurate and captivating representation of female characters in literature. Thus, a woman's perspective of her unfavorable circumstances would most likely result in possible solutions. Females are capable of supporting themselves and their families, despite the stereotype that they are weaker than males. Consequently, fiction may serve as a medium for emphasizing the intensity of women's aspirations to enhance their societal standing. **Key Words:** Archetype perceptions, Heroic, female, circumstances

الخلاصة

يركز هذا البحث على العزيمة الانثوية القوية المعروضة في رواية صوفي تريديول (ألي) لعام ١٩٩٣. في رواية صوفي تريديول (ألي) تُستخدم النماذج الأدبية القديمة كـمجازات للناس الحقيقيين. وعلى الرغم من أنها طبيعية أو من صنع الإنسان، فإنها تديم التصورات الإنسانية للعالم. وفيما يتعلق بنقد الحركة النسائية، فإن كيفية تصوير المرأة على أنها تعاني وتكافح مسألة حاسمة الأهمية، وكذلك الكيفية التي يمكن بها للمرأة أن تقف قوية في النظم الأبوية. كما أن كفاية المرأة قد تؤدي أيضاً إلى ظهور منظورات جديدة بشأن وضع المرأة بل ورفعها في مكان العمل. ونتيجة لذلك، توفر القوالب النمطية الأدبية للقراء تمثيلاً دقيقاً وملائماً للشخصيات النسائية في الأدبيات. وبالتالي، فإن نظرة المرأة إلى ظروفها غير المواتية من المرجح أن تسفر عن حلول ممكنة. والنساء قادرات على إعالة أنفسهن وأسرهن، على الرغم من القولية النمطية بأنهن أضعف من الذكور. وبالتالي، فإن الخيال يمكن أن يكون وسيلة للتأكيد على شدة تطلعات المرأة إلى تعزيز مكانتها الاجتماعية الكلمات الرئيسية: التصورات القديمة، البطلة، الأنثى، الظروف

1. Introduction

Sophie Treadwell (1885-1970) is well known for Machinal, an expressionist work of art (1928). She was an American journalist and dramatist during the 1920s. The trial of Ruth Snyder, a lady in her 30s who was accused of murdering her husband Albert Snyder in New York in 1927 piqued her attention, and she decided to write about it. Machinal was written by Treadwell a year after the murder trial, and was inspired by the events. When reading the play with knowledge of the Ruth Snyder case, the contrast between the play's

portrayal of Helen, a defenseless young girl, and the media's portrayal of Ruth Snyder becomes strikingly clear. Helen is a young housewife who murders her husband. They depict her as a vulnerable, forlorn young lady "any woman" (Treadwell, 1993:11), who, in a unique manner, captures the sense of powerlessness women had in married life in the 1920s. Her spouse George Jones is shown as an insensitive predatory guy who focuses his attention on Helen and uses his persistent approaches to convince her of their marriage. Through this originality of the play, the macrocosms depicting the flaws of society are shown whereas the tiniest details are given substantial attention. Constant machine noise, character building and metamorphosis — or lack thereof — all add to a sense of personal engagement and a critique of how society treats its female population as if they were powerless toddlers. *Machinal* illustrates the difficulties of being a woman in a male-dominated environment. Ruth Snyder's genuine murder trial, as Ginger Strand put it. "Thus, the case was constructed along the classic virgin/whore opposition: if Ruth Snyder was guilty, she was an evil temptress; if she was not guilty, she was a tragic victim with no will of her own" (Strand, 1992:166). Therefore, the duality in society toward women and aggression is reflected in the dilemma of feminism. Helen is a feminist depiction of the breakdown of the female population as a consequence of systemic oppression in society. The portrayal of Helen as a shattered woman may be the most significant aspect of the play since it symbolizes the early 20th feminist movement. According to Catherine Nickerson, the types of murders committed for financial gain were a symptom of the thriving times of the early twentieth century (Nickerson, 1997:748-749). Therefore, the Ruth Snyder trial would come to represent the norm for this time period. Because of this, *Machinal* is a deep and multifaceted work with multiple meanings and interpretations of today's industrialized and increasingly globalized society. Helen, who has been left out to the point where she can't take part in important parts of society, is a great example of what happens when people are left out. Elaine Showalter (1993) employs Victorian medical illness hysteria as a social critique weapon for feminism. She claims that feminists recovered the diagnosis in order to utilize it as a rallying cry for female issues and to recycle the concept. Hysteria was first used by feminist authors in the early twentieth century to demonstrate the long-term effects of gender inequality (Showalter, 1993. p. 286). As an American writer, Treadwell has used the family as a metaphor for her own culture. Through *Machinal*'s psychoanalysis, one can see that sadness is often caused by an individual's own imbalanced psyche rather than by the culture in which they live. The plot of *Machinal* is structured into nine episodes. It is written to be performed in the expressionist style. Some of the speech is non-realistic, mechanical chatter, or stream of consciousness. In the first episode "To Business" the young woman who is the central character is working as a secretary in the George H. Jones company. The boss has singled out the young woman as his favorite. The scene closes with an interior monologue by the woman, in which she reveals her intense need to rest, to be taken care of, and also her distaste for the person of George H. Jones. The second episode is entitled "at home" the young woman and her mother are eating at home. The young woman starts a conversation about marriage. "Mother she says, do all women" (Treadwell, 1993p 20) The two women discuss love, they discuss marriage, then the young woman tells her mother she wants to have love in her marriage. The mother scoffs at her and advises her to marry the boss. The third episode is called "Honeymoon". It is enacted in a dreary little hotel room. The woman is frightened and disgusted. When she discovers there is no view of the ocean as she had promised, it is as if her last hope has dissolved. The husband tries to cheer her up by telling her dirty joke. Eventually he persuades her to go into the bathroom and get undressed. She returns wearing a nightgown, and says what she wants her mother "I want her now...I want somebody" the husband replies "you got me, have not you?" the episode ends with her crying, "somebody.somebody" (Treadwell, 1993p 18) Episode forth: is "Maternal". It takes place in a hospital room. She has just had a baby. The nurse asks her if she's glad it's a girl. She shakes her head "no". The young woman does not want to see the baby or feel the baby, or see her husband. The nurse tries to define the woman's behaviour to the doctor, but soon gives in when the doctor says, "I decide what we better and better not here, Nurse" (Treadwell, 1993p 18). He is going to make the woman take her baby and he orders her a change of medicine. The scene ends with a long monologue by the young woman. Episode five: is called "Prohibited". This is a short scene in a bar. The young woman has come there with a girlfriend, obviously for the first time. She meets an attractive man who is well spoken and treats her kindly. He tells her romantic stories of his adventures in Mexico. The young woman likes him and at the end of the scene the couple decide to leave together for his place. Episode six: is "Intimate". The scene is the romantic young man's room. The couple is in bed. She is in love at last

and she is very happy. The man loves her, too, but honestly tells her that he never stays in one place for very long time. Nevertheless, she is still happy to be there. He has a potted plant in his bedroom, a lily, which he has bought. She likes it so much that he gives it to her. The seventh episode: is called "Domestic". This is a scene at home in the evening between The young woman and her husband. They read the paper and engage in desultory chatter. The husband reads to her from an editorial in the paper, "All men are born free and entitled to the pursuit of happiness". The wife says she cannot sleep and wants to go away, alone. The husband promises her they will go to Europe together.. then he reads about a revolution in Mexico. She asks him if anyone has hurt, if there were any prisoners taken, and if they all got free. "all free", he says. At the close of the scene, music is heard playing "cielito lindo" against a background of different voices. Episode eight: is "The law". In this scene the wife, whose name we heard from the first time, Helen Jones, is on trial for murder of her husband. The weapon was a bottle filled with small stones. She denies her guilt, saying that intruders broke into the house while they were asleep, and they killed him. She saw two men standing by her husband's bed. Since they share a bed, the lawyer asks why she called it her husband's bed. She has no answer for this, merely saying she means her husband's side of bed. The final episode: is entitled "The machine". The scene in prison. A priest is praying, using familiar and repetitive words. A barber comes in to cut off Helen's hair because it's "regulations". She protests to this, "I will not be submitted....this indignity: no: I will not be submitted.. leave me alone". (David.K.(2012)18) However, the barber finishes cutting her hair and says, "you will be submitted". Then follows a short conversation between the woman and the priest. She asks him why she was born, and if she'll be going to hell. The priest replies with some Bible verses that are not particularly relevant: "I will raise him up at the last day". (John 6:22-59) He tells her that her life was unhappy because she never sought God. She declares she was free for one moment down on earth . when she killed her husband.

2.Feminism

Feminism is an ideology and a way of life. Feminist awareness is a spectrum spanning from a "feminine" worldview to an "anti-male" stance on everything. This wide spectrum of awareness extends not only through the ages but even into the modern era. Equally variable is the political stance; however, once the continuum of consciousness reaches the point designated "feminist," a political perspective is implicit, at least if the term "political" is understood in its broadest sense. It is argued that feminism's awareness will become a political issue once it comes into confrontation with society in its current form. It is revolutionary consciousness. Yet, radical feminists are the only ones who are allowed to address other issues, and in this case, it is more accurate to speak about consciousness than politics because these are not things that can be solved through conventional means. First is the issue of rape and other forms of violence against women; second is lesbianism; third is the need for the woman-identified woman; fourth is a radical critique of religion; fifth is a critique of marriage as an institution; sixth is the new history and research on women; and seventh is the demand for influence over one's own body as a logical consequence of personal sovereignty. These radical themes are as central to comprehending *Machinal* as they are to comprehending modern feminist drama. However, some features of this radical consciousness need to be explained in greater detail to provide context for this drama. First, rape is the prototypical example of male dominance in the eyes of feminists. "All men have their power enhanced by rape since this instills in women a need for protection." (Mary D. 1974 p 117). Secondly, for some radical feminists, lesbianism represents the obvious exit from a society where men have all the power. For many, it represents the pinnacle of the feminist ideal. Thirdly, the term "woman-identified woman" (Ann.K.1973 p243) has been used to describe the feminist belief that women must assert their individuality. Women in today's male-dominated world need to stop subconsciously identifying with men and start identifying with other women.

3.Women and Aspects of Self Realization

When Sophie Treadwell's play *Machinal* debuted on Broadway in 1928, the play's protagonist was a young woman whom Treadwell identified as "an ordinary young woman, any woman" (Treadwell.1993.p 173). It's not just in Treadwell's *Machinal* that women are restricted to the roles of caregiver, mother, homemaker, and sexual partner; these are the only recognized roles for women in this era. In a culture where romantic attachment is devalued, young women may be forced into arranged marriages where they feel unfulfilled because of the intimidating array of masculine figures they must face. Helen has claustrophobia, a theme of confinement that appears frequently in the works of her contemporaries. The young woman was economically dependent on her boss, who eventually proposed marriage. Her mother also pushed an affluent

suitor on her daughter. After Helen tells her mother that she hates George, she gets this response: "Love! What does it even mean? Is it going to cover you? Can you eat it? Does it cover the bills? (Treadwell 1993, p. 17). She eventually tied the knot with her manager, despite her distaste for him in that capacity. The importance of marriage and the wife's financial dependence on her husband take center stage. Raised in a patriarchal society, her rights as a woman are limited. "has been described as a general structure in which men dominate women in general"(Molly.2015.p 198).Throughout the course of the theatrical production, the character is depicted as experiencing feelings of revulsion and anguish in response to the inflexibility of the societal norms that govern her existence. The protagonist's emotional turmoil is depicted throughout the play, highlighting the challenging relationships she shares with her mother, husband, and newborn child. Additionally, her sense of alienation from a cold and mechanized society is emphasized. This is seen when she becomes overwhelmed with emotion and sheds tears upon her husband's plea for intimacy. The husband comes to a halt, directing his gaze towards her. The room is predominantly cast in darkness, with the exception of a solitary faint illumination emanating from a light source positioned near the bed. The auditory manifestation of a female individual expressing deep sorrow through the act of shedding tears. Are you experiencing tears? The auditory manifestation of emotional distress is observed. For what reason are you shedding tears? Young Woman (wailing) Ma! Ma! I'm looking for my mother! HUSBAND. I assumed you were relieved to be free of her. YOUNG Woman. I need her now; I need someone. HUSBAND. You've got me, don't you? YOUNG Woman. Someone - someone - husband. There is nothing to be sad about. There is nothing to be sad about. (Treadwell.1993p 26)The presence of neurosis becomes evident in her interactions with the doctor and nurse during her hospitalization. A female infant has been born to her. The current predicament in which she finds herself, assuming the roles of both a wife and a mother, has caused her to experience feelings of surprise and discontent. She perceives this scenario as a result of societal pressures imposed upon her. DOCTOR (at chart). Milk hasn't come yet, yey? NURSE. No, Doctor. DOCTOR. Put the child on the breast. (YOUNG WOMAN: No, no'! – Riveting machine.) No) Don't You want to nurse your baby. (YOUNG WOMAN signs 'No'.) Why not? (No response.) These modern neurotic women, eh, Doctor? What are we going to do with them? (YOUNG DOCTOR laughs NURSEsmiles. Bring the baby! YOUNG WOMAN. No! DOCTOR. Well, that's strong enough. I thought you were too weak to talk; that's better. You don't want your baby? YOUNG WOMAN. No. DOCTOR. What do you want? YOUNG WOMAN. Let alone, let alone. DOCTOR. Bring the baby. (Treadwell, 1993, p 29 It looks like a huge wire cage has been built around the stage and Helen is stuck inside. Anna Waston's lighting design used spot lighting to create a protected space for the young ladies. This added to the feeling that they were alone (Billig.1999.p 23). She considers her options exhausted after seeing how her husband and the constraints of society combine to leave her feeling like she has no agency over her own life. One of Machinal's central themes is industrialized society and the increasing displacement of physical work by machines in that civilization. An issue with equipment causes our attention to be brought to the reality that her existence as planned by society is also a machine. Because of her inability to fit within the system, she is being dismantled. As an illustration of the industrialization of women, Helen's mother continually does household activities. It's impossible for her to have an interesting discussion with her daughter over dinner since she's too busy tending to her needs: YOUNG WOMAN. Ma – I want to talk to you . MOTHER. Aren't you eating a potato? YOUNG WOMAN. No. MOTHER. Why not? YOUNG WOMAN. I don't want one. MOTHER. That's no reason. Here! Take one. YOUNG WOMAN. I don't want it. MOTHER. Potatoes goes with stew – here!

YOUNG WOMAN. Ma, I don't want it!

MOTHER. Want it! Take it! (Treadwell, 1993.p13).

To Helen's mother, life has become an assembly line where each person has a specific job to do and no one is left out. After learning that the guy at issue is her Mr. Jones, Vice President, all she wants to know is when they're going to tie the knot together. Helen's mother just has to know that this guy is wealthy to realize that he is the perfect match for her daughter. Ginger Strand claims in her piece "Treadwell's Neologism: 'Machinal' " that Helen's estrangement from each role that is placed on her by patriarchal society provides the play's structural pattern (Strand, 1992:164), as a mother, a wife, or a daughter. Marginalization may be understood as the cultural formation of a patriarchal society when women are compelled to play restrictive roles and become confined. When the protagonist is marginalized, Helen acts as a role model for women who are robbed of their own independence, as is the case in this novel. Throughout the play, there is a recurring theme. There are no tasks Helen can accomplish that are considered vital to human growth, such as transmitting meaning via language. Not being heard or understood seems to deplete her continually, as if she is perpetually out of breath and spent. Throughout the play, every communication is one-way and forced on Helen. Another aspect of the play's title, the loss of human language in a society dominated by robots, is echoed in the play itself. It is Machinal's message that women's growing discontent with their culturally-created imprisonment is incompatible with a patriarchal society's notion of femininity. Thus, in Machinal, the harrowing tale of "every woman" is presented via Helen, a gear stuck in the wheel of civilization. Paralysis in Machinal is partly shown in Helen's incapacity to speak or act on her own behalf, as well as her constant fear and nervousness. Helen kills her husband in the most horrible and violent way possible: she fills a glass bottle with tiny stones and smashes it on his head while he sleeps. This shows the tension between being paralyzed and being able to act. Helen is finally able to break free of her passive status during the act of murdering. As a result of Helen's gender discrimination, her vulnerabilities are exposed. As George W. Davis explains: "Shadow is what we don't see because it's too dangerous, too painful, too embarrassing, or too unstable. Personal and group experiences of the shadow are both possible. ... Too often in Western thought, the shadow is separated from the rest of the self, and we all know that whatever is separated from the self eventually returns in behavioral outbursts or projections upon other" (Davis 2006.p143). Helen's struggle for liberation is driven by her position as a marginalized individual within a patriarchal societal framework. Helen seeks a form of feminism that is characterized by progressiveness and contemporaneity, which regrettably eludes her within her personal sphere and immediate surroundings. The individual expresses a strong desire for autonomy. Achieving autonomy and entering into matrimony with her chosen partner. Despite her failure to achieve her goals, she ultimately attains liberation. The play "Machinal" portrays a society that appears to have embraced modernity on the surface, but its underlying framework remains entrenched in misogynistic traditions and values. The play Machinal serves as a testament to the exclusion of women from societal roles, which occurs when men establish and enforce the standards of femininity. Helen's lack of mobility and apprehension manifest as indicators of her frustration stemming from her inability to conform to societal expectations. Additionally, her observation of other women resorting to mental illness as an escape further exacerbates her distress. According to Showalter, Helen decides to kill as a last choice in order to be free.

Conclusion

This study has concentrated on the female will in Treadwell's Machinal (1993). The poor social conditions that have been highlighted in this study have been well-documented. The protagonist of this work is socially and emotionally marginalized. As long as she lives in a patriarchal society, she will be unable to live up to her full potential. In order to establish his or her masculinity, the heroine performs the same actions as the male equivalent. To put it another way, the hero may work to support her family and perform housework to make ends meet. As a whole, the hero is a representation of the female inferiority complex that pervades much of popular culture. However, the focus of my analysis has been on the powerful female character in Treadwell's Machinal (1993). I wanted to emphasize the hero's determination to work hard and prove herself to be as strong as a male. Even though heroine is described as being in a lower social station, I have examined her perseverance and courage in the face of adversity. For this reason, I've focused on her determination to overcome the bias she faces from her peers and society at large by working hard and living alone.

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