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# Patriarchal Colonization of the Female Body in *Machinal* and *Clit Notes*

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It is no secret that the patriarchy's most aggressive mission is to control our bodies as women. It is not a new concept. It is not a surprise or a conspiracy theory. It is not a hidden message between the lines. It is our reality as females every single day of our lives. Even now after half a century of fights in this country, we women, once again, are fighting to be able to make decisions regarding our bodies. It doesn't just start as adults; it goes beyond that. From dress coding in middle school to the Supreme Court, our bodies are properties for the patriarchy to decide what we can wear or what to do with them. Girls of twelve years of age being sexualized by the administration to not show "too much skin so the boys don't get distracted" is only the beginning. The patriarchy teaches girls to not distract boys rather than teaching boys to respect the girls. Rape mentality, where the victim almost always the female, is shamefully blamed for causing her

trauma, where ownership of the body becomes a patriarchal monopoly game ruled by men.

Colonization of the female body should be the term to describe this injustice. Using this term will bring the severity and absurdity of such a concept to register in society's mind. From using this term comes all the consequences and the trauma that follows oppression, psychological trauma, mimicry, loss of identity, self-hate, etc. Just as countries of power choose to invade a poor country to control its resources and gain access to its land, so does the patriarchy with our bodies. Art, from the beginning of time, has always been a platform to fight oppression, so to find this fight in theater is simply inevitable.

*Machinal* written by Sophie Treadwell in 1928 and *Clit Notes* written by Holly Hughes in 1996 are two plays half a century apart yet bring forth the female body upstage and center. I see *Machinal* bringing attention to the societal machine that takes control of the main character, Helen, from the first act. *Clit Notes* shows how a woman's body could be removed from its first society, her parental home, simply for existing in a body that refuses to fit in a patriarchal box that is designed according to its perception of what that body should be doing. Regarding the patriarchy in both texts and performances, *Clit Notes* and *Machinal* become a lurking evil in the background of both plays. Both have the traditional gender role whip over the female body; one as a wife and a mother and one as a daughter.

I propose a colonial reading of these two plays in a way that exposes the patriarchal control over the female body, even though there is half a century between the two, and each play gives a different outcome to the same oppression that the focal characters suffer

through the works. This reading exposes the results of such colonization and brings forth the consequences suffered by these two focal characters in the plays. Treadwell's *Machinal* offers a nuclear family setting, where the female body is abused and oppressed through the presentation on stage and in the text, resulting in the absolute inability of Helen to survive what has been done to her. As for Hughes' *Clit Notes*, I will focus on her argument of gender representation and oppression of the female body from her unique, lesbian perspective. The solo performance offers a chance for the focal character to separate from the trigger that caused the oppression. She only survived, unlike Helen, because her body is on the outside of the family home. She is no longer subjected to the oppression that she suffered through her childhood and adolescence.

Colonizing the female body through violence and abuse, be it physical, emotional, and/or psychological, is evident in both works. My approach to this reading and analysis will use resources regarding violence against women and colonial theory, which I will apply to the focal female characters in both plays as well as the use of staging. Examples of staging strategies are the use of space and sound in *Machinal* (i.e., the machines and the domestic space) and the use of props in *Clit Notes* (i.e., the kitchen).

Helen's voice in *Machinal* is physically and metaphorically controlled by the patriarchy from the beginning of the play. Even before the play starts, we see the windows from episodes five to nine "masked by electric piano," "disclosed," "curtained," and "masked by Judge's bench" as a foreshadowing of what's to come (Treadwell 174). Helen is never to be looked at from the outside of the patriarchal interior. She is

never to have a connection to the outside world. The introduction and stage direction by themselves feels controlling of who could and couldn't see her body before the story even begins. The lights "concentrated and intense" show her vision corrupted (Treadwell 174). As for the sound, the offstage and onstage effects drown her mind as to control even her thoughts and take away her privacy. The staging of the play is set to control every aspect of Helen's body and mind. The opening scene starts with machines and workers behaving like robots, controlled and compliant. They all do what is expected of them to show that everything that happens from now on is a life script that needs to be followed. From her arrival on set, Helen is badgered by her co-workers to explain the reason she has been late. She answers with "I had to get out to get 'air' on the subway because 'all those bodies pressing' made her feel that she 'would faint' (Treadwell 181). Her first interaction in the play shows that even before marriage, society represented symbolically by a machine, the subway, is suffocating her existence. The machine is already in control of her breathing and mental health, rendering her "machine's out of order," which is another symbolic fight between the machines (Treadwell 183). The Young Woman gets the last word in the first episode indicating her frazzled mind. Not a single coherent idea came out of her. All the reader/audience sees is panic in her speech and what pops out is "don't touch me – please" and "pressing bodies" (Treadwell 186); her body is already colonized at this point. Throughout the entire play, the play personifies those sounds. In her article, "Sophie Treadwell's *Machinal*: Electrifying the Female Body," Katherine Weiss suggests that "[t]he sound of machines, whether

office machines, the radio, the doorbell, subway riveters, or the ringing of a telephone, arouse anxiety in Helen; they represent the bars imprisoning her. Trapped in the modern mechanical age and its institutions, Helen desperately seeks ‘somebody’ or ‘something’ to set her free” (Weiss 8). To elaborate on that, I would like to go a little further than the literal meaning of the machines and suggest that these bars are the patriarchal prison bars that close in on Helen from the beginning. Right when she expresses concerns to her mother, regarding the marriage proposal, she is met by the financial burden, of taking care of her mother. George, her boss, proposes marriage to Helen not in a way that she had the option to refuse. He gave her an offer she couldn’t refuse because he was clear that if she refuses “she’ll lose her job” (Treadwell 185). Susan Gilmore states in “Poor Little Rich Gal as Femme Fatale: Staging the Female Antagonist in Sophie Treadwell’s *Machinal*” that “for the Young Woman, Jones’s marriage proposal is a lose-lose proposition” (138). No matter what Helen’s answer is, she will lose. Even when it seems that modernity is finally catching up to women in the workforce, it is not a choice but rather an illusion of having a choice or a place in society other than a housewife or a mother. Helen is trapped in that cyclical hell, where the only option she has in front of her is to rely on a man to take care of her mother who makes sure her daughter remembers that “does he know you have a mother to support?” as a socioeconomic burden where Helen has no room to speak her mind (Treadwell 190). Helen is indoctrinated to fit into what the patriarchy and society, including her mother, are expecting of her. According to Weiss, Helen is “caught in the cogs of the patriarchal institutions of work, marriage, motherhood,

and the law” (13). Treadwell wanted the audience to pay attention to those details that drown individuality, and how everything around women works against them after she witnesses the injustices of Ruth Snyder, Elizabeth Mohr, and Leah Alexander, “who found themselves held captive in unhappy and often abusive marriages” (Weiss 13). Helen manifests that frustration, and the noise around her is all the pressure hammering down on women’s mere existence, all while she is silent about what is happening to her. Helen seems paralyzed by what is forced on her.

Throughout the entire play, Helen is the object of all the players around her, especially men, objectified and used, sexually and financially. Her husband continues to silence her and not listen to her needs: insisting on her showering, moving away from the window as she “pull down that blind”, where he continues to explain “you don’t want people looking in” (Treadwell 196, 197). He has complete control over her body, where even the positioning of her body is controlled on the set. Treadwell needs the audience to see that the domestic interior and their relationship are shielded from the outside by the man. That depiction, that the man can do whatever he wants to his wife, even rape, is wrong, and for that reason, it needs to be moved away from the public eye, behind the closed curtains of the window. There is no hiding the colonization aspect of this play. Helen could not be written to survive on her own, where she has no power over her own body and no voice to express her contempt. In her article “Concerning Violence against Women: A Fanonian Analysis of Colonizing the Female Body,” Tracy Nicholls suggests that “ruling others, demanding that they serve your interests to the exclusion of their own, can only be

achieved through the application of violence,” hence the end of the hotel scene (4). The spousal rape at the end of the third episode, where Helen cries out for her mother “I want her now – I want somebody” is the ultimate colonization of her body (Treadwell 200). She cries out for anybody to save her from what’s to come, but no one saves her. The audience at this moment represents societal paralysis. This act of violence results in her pregnancy and then her baby, which connects the ending of that episode to the next in the hospital (Treadwell 200). In the next episode, “Maternal,” Helen is physically still bound to the bed unable to take space on set. Nicholls brings a good point to this reading by implying that this episode “illuminates a more nuanced understanding of the way Helen’s lack of reproductive choice signals her lack of voice and spurs her most urgent speech” (140). The heartbreaking control becomes evident in the hospital as, yet another male is telling her what to do with her own body, again implying that the politics of colonizing her body extends to the medical field as well. In those two scenes, the reader/audience witnesses the female body bound to the bed from rape to birth, creating the ultimate colonizing of her body, and again with the closing of the window act: an invasion with no retaliation. All the real-life cases Treadwell covers as a reporter and in the play she wrote include oppressed and abused women who snapped. The only way they all took their power back is by murdering their oppressors, hence the patriarchy by association. Helen’s body at this point colonized by the medical field is the ultimate betrayal. The doctor goes as far as exclaiming that,

Put the baby to 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 ‘em? [YOUNG DOCTOR laughs. NURSE smiles.] Bring the baby! (Treadwell 203).

This interaction with the absent-minded mother, who just gave birth to her rapist’s baby has, once again, no control over her body. She doesn’t even have control over her choice to breastfeed or not. This scene shows how her body is used as just another machine, but this time, she is a breeding and breastfeeding feeding machine.

Up until the last moment of the play, men take away Helen’s voice and silence her last words meant for her daughter. The trial and the ending of the play are heartbreaking, to say the least. Even when Helen feels a little bit of control over her body by taking on a lover, he too betrays her to the biggest machine in the play, the patriarchy, represented by the law in this episode. Gilmore describes it best by saying, “Helen’s hold on freedom and mature womanhood is temporary and tenuous. Her lover will abandon and betray her, and, for the rest of the script, she reverts to ‘Young Woman’” (141). She is not even Helen anymore and she is again belittled and stripped from what makes her an individual, her name. She is dehumanized, stripped of the self by the man she thought is the one decision she made on her own. This shows that there is no winning or taking control over a colonized entity, land, or body, in this case. Nicholls compares the female body here as a classic colonizer/occupied dynamic by how it is “both the logic of colonization as it is practiced by colonizing settlers who use violence as a dehumanizing force to break the community relations – the soli-

darity – of the colonized natives, and the psychology of colonization as it breaks down the confidence and sense of self of the native” (5). Every machine around Helen breaks her sense of the self, where she doesn’t even defend herself anymore. She becomes an unreliable witness in her trial. Just as it happened in real life around her, Treadwell becomes disgusted by the injustice she witnessed through all these women who committed crimes against their husbands that she “threw herself into writing a play that would deal with the unfair treatment of women by patriarchy”. She wanted to analyze how our sexist society exerts a systematic abuse on its female members, what effects this abuse has on women, and what are the consequences both for women and for the rest of society” (Gilmore 76). It is no surprise Treadwell created a play where the noise of everything around Helen is a factor in her outburst, not only on stage by also off stage “in shifting our attention from the crimes their murderess antagonists commit to the crimes that marriage commits against them” (Gilmore 137). All this noise is to show the audience that the external factors that led Helen to kill her husband, which is not in her nature, are triggers brought on by everything and everyone that is connected to the ultimate machine, the patriarchy. Miriam López Rodríguez claims in her article “New Critical Approaches to *Machinal*: Sophie Treadwell’s Response to Structural Violence” that “American patriarchal society exerted such pressure on its female citizens that it came as no surprise that some of these women could not stand it and simply snapped, losing control of the situation and resorting to violence as the only possible answer to the abuse they have endured” (77). After feeling betrayed by everyone around her, Helen has no other reaction

than to return violence to violence.

It is no surprise that towards the end of the play, Helen affirms that she is a stenographer, whom I see as a personification on the stage of that modern tool; repeats what is told to type without any personal input or ownership over its brain. Her body is yet another machine in the patriarchal order, with no voice of her own, even as she was about to take her last breath before her execution, screaming out to relay one last word to her daughter through her mom. Treadwell couldn’t even give Helen the last word as she pleads, “Wait! Wait! Tell her! Wait! Just a minute more! There is so much I want to tell her – Wait” (Treadwell 253). Right before she states that her mother never knew her, and she never knew her daughter, Helen needs to stay within that patriarchal box. This exchange of intergenerational trauma shows the cyclical, systemic oppression of women. Even the reporters at the end of the play did not see the truth. In that last scene, the tables turn. Homi Bhabha’s theory on mimicry suggests that “the look of surveillance returns as the displacing gaze of the disciplined, where the observer becomes the observed and ‘partial’ representation rearticulates the whole notion of identity and alienates it from essence” (127). As Helen’s behavior takes on her abuser’s identity by snapping, her identity is no longer hers, and so is her narrative not hers. The reporters did not report what happened in that courtroom; they simply create their imagined narrative of the story the audience has already seen, and each of them reports a different truth. Helen never had a chance in surviving this. Treadwell must kill her at the end to prove that the patriarchy cannot allow a woman to try and take ownership over her body.

In *Clit Notes*, Holly Hughes presents the social

critique and patriarchal oppression of the female body differently. Before any dialogue, the stage instructions begin by telling women what to wear by insisting on: “[UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES SHOULD THIS PIECE BE ATTEMPTED IN ANYTHING OTHER THAN A RED DRESS!],” all in capital letters (Hughes 415). What better way to set the tone for the rest of the monologue?

Hughes telling her audience the story of how her “mother used to drop me off, my sister and me, after school at the Republican headquarters so we could stuff envelopes for Nixon” is a tale of how her young body was being trained at such a young age to work for the political machine (416). Just as Helen worked for George, Hughes must work to serve a man, too. Even knowledge is controlled by the patriarchy as “[t]here were forbidden books in my hometown,” already telling how society and the patriarchy are controlling the mind from the beginning (Hughes 416). They all must fit into the perception of what they should be learning and what information the kids receive. As for her coming of age and her sexuality, Hughes learned at a very young age how society would judge her for it. When she fantasized about kissing Anita, Hughes would pretend she was having a seizure to mask and hide who she is. The patriarchal society has her so ashamed of her feelings that she would “throw myself to the ground and writhe around, hoping people would think I was merely epileptic. A little foaming at the mouth is better than having people think you’re queer” (Hughes 416). She would rather be looked at as sick than queer to emphasize the trauma society causes the female mind and body. Women start questioning every sexual fantasy, even if it is heteronormative. Sex and women are

not to be considered in a patriarchal world because it is corrupt to the mind, hence the restrictions on what to read. Hughes finds herself believing she is sick and in need of medical attention when she “began to think there was something the matter with me,” consulting a book by Dr. David Reuben, only to find out that she doesn’t even exist as a chapter in that book; her sexuality is a “footnote note under ‘Prostitution’” (417). The colonization of the female body in Hughes’ world starts so young and extends as far as the medical field. Hughes goes as far as taking a tape measure and a hand mirror to fit into what Dr. Reuben states is expected of her as a lesbian, by measuring her clitoris just as he suggests that lesbians have “an enlarged clitoris of The Lesbian that can be inserted into The Vagina of her partner, achieving a reasonable facsimile of ‘The Real’” thing (417). After she failed to fit into this mold of what patriarchal medicine makes of her since she does not have “The Real thing,” implying that authenticity is reserved for the penis, Hughes realized that she didn’t measure up to the patriarchal expectation of her body. In his brilliant dissertation “Women’s Bodies in Dramatic Confrontations with Patriarchal Violence,” Ebtel Ahmed discusses Lesley Doyal’s claim that “in most societies, the male is valued more highly than the female,” and he continues by quoting her saying that this inequality represents “women are not just different, but physically, psychologically and socially inferior” (57). This asserts furthermore my reading of this play as a way for Hughes to manifest on stage what the patriarchy and the medical patriarchy see in the woman’s body, nothing but inferiority and a gateway to control.

In the next act, Hughes, sitting on a kitchen chair, symbolizes more gender role implications with a

patriarchal assignment to the female body in the kitchen, where they see it belongs. Hughes does not result in actual violence as we see in *Machinal*, but I believe she represents that difference in the form of cancer. What is more violent than a disease that viciously attacks the body to a point of death? Hughes sees her father's disease as a manifestation of her existence. She went as far as personifying her sexuality in the disease. Just as she thought her father could "lose one, it won't kill you," referring to her sister and herself, he felt the same way "when he first found out she was a lesbian" (Hughes 419). She is the kidney lost to cancer, while her heterosexual sister is the healthy kidney as "plenty of people do fine on just one" (Hughes 419). His control over her, while he represents the patriarchy in this monologue, goes as far as "his disease would lie on top of me, sucking my dreams dry" as he seems to control her dreams (Hughes 420). Bryan Williams suggests in his article, "Bhabha and the Bandit: Myth, Stereotype, and Colonial Discourse in Sophie Treadwell's *Machinal* and *Gringo*," a different approach to the colonized body, where he believes that expressionism and modernism in American theater pay attention to the body, voices, and words and, in return, bring attention to females in plays. What this article does with the female body is to show it is treated as a colonized country. Although Williams' scholarship analyzes *Machinal*, I want to apply it to *Clit Notes* in an unconventional way. *Clit Notes* is not represented in the same way as *Machinal*, but it brings attention to the way Hughes is positioned on the outside of her home and, in a way, shunned for her body as a gay woman by the patriarch of the play, represented as her father. Imagine society inverted to the home of the focal character, in this case,

Hughes, herself, since it is a monologue. Her father has been rejecting her as a woman since he knew she was queer.

Nicholls suggests that "to speak of the gender dominance that others theorize as patriarchy using the language of colonization helps me to see the commonalities in how violence is transmuted into power in various contexts that would otherwise be separated into distinct categories of gender relations and geopolitical concerns" (5). Following this logic, Hughes sees herself as a manifestation of her father's rejection, which I see as the personification of the violence I see in *Machinal*, where the same monster is featured yet wearing a different mask. In return, and though not obvious as many might read this as a parody, Hughes positions herself on the outside of that society, the inside of her home. She is outside in her own paternal home as she describes it,

From the outside, it looks oppressively normal. Your average, Middle-American, middle-class, middle-everything split-level. But that's just the outside! In reality, this is the entrance to a cave... cave... cave... cave.... I know if I don't make myself as small as possible, if I'm not willing to pretend I don't even have a body; they never let me in the front door. (Hughes 421)

The ultimate colonization of the female body manifests itself in this passage with Hughes' childhood home and her parents, where she feels out of place and "the floors are always slick with a mixture of prehistoric tears" (Hughes 422). She even ties "a rope around her waist" so she can always find her way back to the life she creates for herself, while making sure she tells her friends



to “come after me” in two weeks; a representation of a fail guard, so she can remove herself once again from the patriarchal control (Hughes 422). The most heart-breaking line Hughes delivers in the monologue is the truth that she is “going back because there are parts of my body I can’t feel. Parts of me still dreaming, back in my father’s web. Waiting for some kind of wake-up call” (422). This confessional passage suggests that no matter how strong she is after freeing her body from the patriarchal oppression that is her father, part of her stayed behind, trapped. The patriarchy still has a hold/control over parts of her that she couldn’t save. Unlike *Machinal*, where Helen is trapped in that domestic space, Hughes is not physically trapped per se, but she couldn’t take all of her with her, emotionally and mentally, and that’s why it seems she had to leave those parts behind to save herself.

Hughes desperately wants her father’s approval, after walking in her father’s footsteps, but she is struggling with that as he still holds power over her body. She continues with, “I wanted to live. In my body. In our world. All I wanted to be was my father’s daughter” (Hughes 424). Bhabha believes that after many years of repression and oppression to survive, the colonized start camouflaging their existence to mimic one of the colonizers. They act like them, start believing in what they do and become, in a way, them. He believes that “mimicry repeats rather than re-presents” the colonizer’s behavior, and he also claims that the oppressed start to feel authentic in their behavior (125, 126). Following the same logic, Hughes is taking control over her father’s body, as he took control over hers, even in her dreams, through the symbolism of cancer as she imagines it “gliding through my father’s

body. Starting down deep. Near the place where I used to live inside him. Moving up and swallowing what’s worse than cancer” (424). She, in return, exclaims that cancer is not what is killing her father and asks, “anybody wants to guess what is, the worst thing that ever happened to my father?” and the answer is “[y]ou’re looking at her” (425). As a lesbian in a society that could not accept her - and by society here I mean her family - her confidence in herself within this unit is distorted. Mimicking his control and oppression as she mimics his cancer, Hughes is “all over the place. This is what you wanted! You always wanted to hurt us” (425). This, however, fires back at her oppressed mind when it comes to her family, as she starts to question herself and her ethics, where she “sometimes think[s] that shame is all I’ve got” (Hughes 426). In this passage, the patriarchy finds a weak moment and takes complete control over her body as she tries to tell her father, “That the person he’s seeing everywhere isn’t me, it’s somebody’s idea of me. I’ve become a symbol. I’ve been buried alive under meanings other people have attached to me” (Hughes 426). She wishes she is one of those shameless queers, but she knows “that buried deep in our bodies is the shrapnel of memory dripping a poison called shame” (Hughes 436). Right when she feels she is in control, mimicking what has been done to her, the patriarchy reminds her that she is not in control at all. Yes, she left, but she is never truly out, no matter how long that rope is.

Number Two: “Breaking the Fourth Wall” section was powerful and uncomfortable to read as Hughes starts to tell her audience how to cure “the female condition” as a “chronic medical condition. You couldn’t cure it, but you might be able to learn to live

with it. If you got the right treatment in time” (429). The parallelism she draws throughout the monologue between deadly diseases and her existence as a lesbian and a woman is as powerful as her finding the cure for it. She knows that she needs an “opportunity to strike a blow against the capitalist patriarchy” because she is at war (Hughes 429). Not only does this play challenge the patriarchal representation in the text, it also challenges gender assignment representation, especially with the female body and the way the patriarchy colonizes it. Madan Sarup in her article, “Cixous, Irigaray, Kristeva: French Feminist Theories,” analyzes these French theorists’ views on women’s bodies and the patriarchy. Sarup suggests that “the danger is always that in accepting the terms of the system currently in force, women become ‘men’” (116). Hughes must represent the oppressor to cure her condition and make sense of her relationship with her father by becoming him. Mimicry comes back to light here as Hughes attempts to fix the female condition by reversing the Oedipal complex and adopting more of a male persona, while her father, hypothetically, feels more connected at that moment, and he gives her tips on how to kiss her mother by instructing her “you got to open your mouth. Like this” (Hughes 430). Hughes focuses on her relationship with her mother, but only in juxtaposition to her relationship with her father. In Sarup’s article, “Cixous’ Theory on the ‘Other’”, the “other” is created by the binary between man and woman and the colonized body of the female to a point of repression within the patriarchal control. Sarup states in her article that Cixous claims “theater functions as specular fantasy, where women characters function as mirrors of male heroism. Women in such theater are silenced and re-

pressed, their bodies both negated and elevated to the level of display” (114-115). It is a complex gender for the male obsession with their mothers, so, Hughes decides to make that her point, where she becomes the male energy her father rejects in her as she displays her body on stage in that matter. Dave Gaertner suggests in his article, “The Clit is just a Clit”, that the broken wall in this section is not “simply that which separates actor and audience, but the very frame of the symbolic, that which maintains what can most and cannot be signified or even said” (91). To elaborate on that even further, I believe he is pointing out that Hughes is warning the audience, particularly females, that by her taking the role of the “male” and attempting to cure “the female condition,” everyone else “could be next” (Hughes 430). Unlike *Machinal*, the mother/daughter relationship in *Clit Notes* is a way for Hughes to point out her father’s control over her body, not the other way around. In *Machinal*, the term mother becomes the force behind the oppression: from Helen’s mother’s financial burden that forces Helen to get married, to the shackles her daughter symbolizes in the patriarchal machine. In both cases, Hughes knew exactly what she was doing.

Although the patriarchy has a hold on her body throughout the play, Hughes survives it, unlike Helen. Her positioning on the outside of the home gives her the advantage to be able to fight back against this machine. Hughes delivers the most powerful lines in the play at its end. She says,

I’m not in the closet! I’m so far out of the closet that I’ve fallen out of the frame entirely. They don’t have any words for us, so they can’t see us, so we’re safe, right? I get confused. I forget

that invisibility does not ensure safety. We're not safe. We're never safe, we're just... You tell me. (439)

Well, as females, are we ever truly safe in all our orientations? The mere idea of questioning our safety is an obvious answer all by itself.

Undoubtedly, the patriarchal machine is still very well alive in our society right now. The fight is not over, and art will remain the best way to fight it because it gives a platform to express those concerns. In return, it gives people a pathway for another platform to follow suit. Lizbeth Goodman said in her article, "Feminisms and Theatres: Canon Fodder and Cultural Change", that,

The role of the audience in any performance, whether it be a theater production, a political demonstration, or an academic lecture, is inevitably influenced by gender. Gender is a particularly important consideration in terms of theatre audiences, due to the majority of female theatergoers. Yet the gender of the audience in feminist theatre is most significant, for, in feminist theatre, it is not only the number of women which influences the stage-audience dynamic, but also the level of identification between performers and spectators, or what can be called the 'extra scenic gendered gaze. (27)

This is where the seed is planted through this connection between the performers, the play, and the audience. Both plays, *Machinal* and *Clit Notes*, give the audience a different kind of colonization over the female body. *Machinal* starts physically, where the impact becomes psychological to a point where the damage becomes irreversible. As for *Clit Notes*, it is psychological, where

the father's rejection is the patriarchal machine that takes a hold of Hughes's positioning outside her home, which manifests itself in her comparing her existence to cancer. Both plays open the eyes of the audience and society, even though they are both worlds apart.

Hughes ousted misogyny and the patriarchy and took it as far as pointing the finger at the absurdity in society, the medical field and politics, of course. Hughes needs to fight back, using what she knows best, theater. According to Gilmore,

Feminist theatre is not only received and interpreted, but also influenced by its audience. It does not merely "preach to the converted," but also challenges traditional images and ideas, and may thereby "convert" some members of its audience by redirecting their views on (or ways of viewing) representations of women in a particular culture. (28)

To elaborate on that a little further, I believe this is how the woman fights back. In *Machinal*, Treadwell can only fight back after witnessing many injustices as a reporter by showing how toxic the patriarchy is to women. By killing Helen at the end, the audience sees the final act of violence and the oppression of the female voice. In *Clit Notes*, Hughes fights back more aggressively by speaking to real-life society, not just on stage. It feels as if it is a conversion campaign to speak directly to an audience a character on stage through a monologue. The relationship is more intimate, resulting in redirecting the audience's perception of women's bodies.

The colonial reading of these plays is not a new concept; it does, however, take many forms in society. From rape to victim blaming, it all threatens and attacks the female body (straight, lesbian, transgender, and

non-binary). It doesn't always have to result in death row, but it does end with awareness. The gig is up! Females know what the patriarchal machine is trying to do, and we will continue to rage against it, be it through art, activism, or by law. The fear of a strong woman shows how weak the patriarchy is, and that same fear brings against women armies of misogynistic laws that oppress women even more. Art sees that and fights back. The social movements society has witnessed over time – “Hands off our Bodies,” “Free the Nipple,” and “MeToo.” – are movements the patriarchy fears.

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**About the Author**

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