



Transformations in Megan Terry's *Calm Down Mother*: A Feminist Study

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Abstract

Calm Down Mother (1966) is one of Megan Terry's most popular feminist plays and addresses the significance of women's autonomy of mind and body in establishing a feminine subject. This research attempts to present Terry's transformation technique in challenging and criticizing the notion of women as mere objects which is established by masculine-oriented theories of different disciplines while echoing the views of various feminist critics from the three main strands of feminist criticism: American, British and French. The current study demonstrates the procedure of Terry subverting traditional images of women in literature: where male writers glorify woman's youthful fertility through natural imagery, Terry emphasizes how these images further support and encourage a passive existence for woman. She refutes the patriarchal notion that there can only be a single subject, which is masculine, by introducing female characters that serve as examples of feminine subjects as opposed to passive objects and provides a real-life example through the fictional portrayal of Margaret Fuller. The paper depends on feminist views regarding the Subject/object binary with reference to the play and addresses the treatment of women as bodies merely valued for their beauty and youth along with women's complicity in perpetuating the patriarchal systems which deny women's autonomy.

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تحليل نسوي للتحويلات في مسرحية "إهدأي يا أمي" (*Calm Down Mother*) للكاتبة مسرحية ميكان

تيري

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المستخلص:

تعد مسرحية "إهدأي يا أمي" (1966) (*Calm Down Mother*) واحدة من أشهر مسرحيات ميكان تيري النسوية وتتناول أهمية استقلالية المرأة في العقل والجسد في تأسيس ذات أنثوية. يحاول هذا البحث تقديم كيفية التحدي تقنية التحول التي اتبعتها تيري وتنتقد فكرة النساء كمجرد أشياء كما حددتها النظريات الموجهة ذكوريا في مختلف الانظمة، بينما تردد آراء مختلف النقاد النسويين من الفروع الثلاثة الرئيسية للنقد النسوي: الأمريكي والبريطاني والفرنسي. توضح الدراسة الحالية كيف تقلب تيري الصور التقليدية للمرأة في الأدب: في حين يمجّد الكتاب الذكور الخصوبة الشبابية للمرأة من خلال الصور الطبيعية، تؤكد تيري كيف تدعم هذه الصور وتشجع الوجود السلبي للمرأة. إنها تندحض الفكرة الأبوية القائلة بأنه لا يمكن أن يكون هناك سوى نفس واحدة، وهي المذكور، وذلك من خلال تقديم شخصيات

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أنثوية تعمل كأمتلة للذوات الأنثوية بدلاً من الأشياء السلبية وتقدم مثالاً واقعيًا من خلال التصوير الخيالي لـ (ماركريت فولر). سيتناول البحث وجهات النظر النسوية فيما يتعلق بثنائية الذات/الموضوع بالإشارة إلى المسرحية وتتناول معاملة النساء كأجسام يتم تقديرها فقط لجمالها وشبابها، فضلاً عن كيفية تواطؤ النساء في إدامة الأنظمة الأبوية التي تحرم النساء من استقلاليتهم.

الكلمات المفتاحية : المسرح النسوي، التحول، ميجان تيري، الأم الهادئة، والنظرية النسوية

1. Introduction

Feminism is a social movement that is concerned with women's struggle for equal rights and began in the late eighteenth century. The movement consisted of roughly three phases known as first-, second- and third-wave feminism. The first wave started around 1848 and lasted until the 1960s; first- wave feminism was mainly concerned with establishing that women are human beings and they deserve the right to vote, its main achievement during this period was the Twentieth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution which granted women the right to vote in 1920. The second wave appeared after World War II and lasted roughly until the 1970s. Women had experienced the freedom to work. The third wave began in the 1990s and started focusing on previously marginalized women such as those of color, lower-class, lesbians, and transgender as well as third-world women (Guerin et al., 2011, pp. 254-257). Feminism entered a fourth wave around 2012 and started making use of social media to fight toxic masculinity, rape culture and misogyny; the current wave is characterized by intersectionality, a focus on individual growth and freedom of choice (Raine, 2024; Rivers, 2017, pp. 22, 24).

From the 60s to the 80s, there was no single critical theory that dominated feminist criticism but three geographical strains appeared based on the interests of the varying feminist critics: American, British and French. American feminism focuses on the repression of literary texts written by women and attempts to free women from the stereotypes created by men and restore and include the works of women writers in the literary canon; British feminism is more political, leans towards Marxism and emphasizes the economic and social oppression of women; French feminism is closely associated with psychoanalysis and focuses on the repression of women in life as well as art (Bressler, 2011, pp. 153-154).

Helen Keyssar, who labeled Megan Terry the mother of American feminist drama, considers *Calm Down Mother: A Transformation of Three Women* (1966) "the first truly feminist American Drama" (1985, pp. 62, 70). The one-act play consists of eight action blocks or vignettes and was the first published transformation play and the third to be written in the Open Theatre (Wagner, 1972).^{*} Terry utilizes transformations which are "improvisational techniques and theatre exercises" centered on "collective creation and improvisation" involving "changed age, sex, species, relationships, time and place" (Saddik, 2007, p. 113). Three actresses perform the play through transforming character, place and time without logical transitions; these transformations allow Terry to explore many feminist issues within a single play.

^{*} Action blocks (also described as montage pieces) refer to the choreography and sequences of movement on the stage; the term block here is derived from Victorian dramatists like Sir W. S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan who used a miniature theatre model to practice the staging with wooden blocks in place of actors. Vignettes refer to short scenes or parts of a larger work (Barron, 1983, p. 32; Cuddon, 1998, p. 971; Vignette, 2017; Tdf 2015)

Male theorists of different fields of study have established the existence of a single masculine subject and the feminine has been pushed into an inferior position of object whose value is determined by its relation to the male. As literature is also a male-dominated field, literary works written by men tend to perpetuate this notion of women and glorify her as an object of fleeting beauty and fertility by using natural imagery. The emphasis on a woman's beauty and fertility is not only encouraged by men but also other women who have submitted to the patriarchal system. This study will present through diverse feminist views how Terry subverts these repressive traditional images; the relationships among women are addressed and the importance of an active mind in achieving autonomy is emphasized.

The present research aims at exploring the various feminist concerns the play touches upon by referencing the opinions of several feminist critics from the French, American and British strands of feminism: Simone de Beauvoir, Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Michèle Barrett, Toril Moi as well as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. The paper presents the method of reducing woman to an object merely valued for her appearance and reproductive function due to being denied a subjective existence in addition to the patriarchy's use of women to suppress other women and deny them their rights, particularly in terms of their own bodily autonomy; Terry's characters defy the stereotypical presentation of women in literature created by men and her technique supports the themes of the play.

The study is limited to using the three main strands of feminist literary criticism to analyze the play; previous attempts at feminist analyses of *Calm Down Mother* only focused on personal interpretation and made only sparse reference to feminist issues: Kamini wrote a short article titled "The Theater of Transformation: Megan Terry's *Calm Down Mother* (1966)" (2018) which discusses the play's structure and the use of transformations along with some feminist elements presented in the performance but no reference to notable feminist critics is made neither is the origin of transformations as a technique mentioned. However, this current research serves as an addition to the previous one and adds to the scope of knowledge.

2. Subjectivity and Objectification of Women

Women in real life and literature are denied a subjective existence and are reduced to an inferior position as mere objects. In *The Second Sex* (1949), Simone de Beauvoir establishes that man occupies the position of Subject while woman is relegated to the position of the Other to man. According to the *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, western philosophy often utilizes a subject-object dualism that refers to the relation between the subject of experience and the object of experience. The subject of experience is synonymously referred to as the self or the ego, has self-consciousness and can be expressed through the term 'I'. The main contrast between a subject and an object in philosophical terms lies in the possession of a consciousness; the subject experiences the object and the object is experienced by the subject (Beauvoir, 2011, Introduction, p. 29; Blackburn, 2016, 'subject-object'; Molina, 2017, pp. 77-78). Rettler and Bailey describe objects as "a general ontological category under which all things fall"(2017) which can be referred to as 'it' and often acts as a complement to the subject though in certain cases they exist independently and the roles may be reversed with the subject becoming an object of experience to another subject. In linguistic terms, a subject takes the role of an agent while the object serves as a recipient; the former suggests activity while the latter indicates passivity (Brown and Miller, 2013, p. 198). Definitions of the terms vary based on differing disciplines of study but the subject oftentimes denotes an independent

and autonomous individual who experiences the world self-consciously while the object lacks self-consciousness and derives its value and meaning from its relation to the subject .

This active/passive divide has been noted by Cixous and Clément in *The Newly Born Woman* (1986, pp. 63-64). There is a dual hierarchical organization expressed through couples that follow a Superior/inferior divide and Cixous suggests that Logocentrism has taken inspiration from the Man/woman couple to form these binary oppositions. She states that this “[o]rganization by hierarchy makes all conceptual organization subject to man” (*ibid.*, p.64). This active/passive divide is not only limited to language: Beauvoir notes that Aristotle believed women played only a passive role during conception; Hegel’s differentiation of the sexes was based on male activity and female passivity as well (Beauvoir, 2011, p.48). Irigaray also accuses Western philosophy of being gendered: in *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974), she alludes to patriarchal theories of different disciplines including philosophy, psychoanalysis and linguistics to claim that “any theory of the subject has always been appropriated by the ‘masculine’” (1985, p.133). Schutte states that Irigaray’s *Speculum* offers a “critique of philosophers-including Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, Hegel-as she explores paradigms in which the formal conditions of knowledge privilege male subjectivity as foundational to the epistemic enterprise” (1991, p. 65). It appears that all theories of the ‘subject’ have a masculine-oriented bias and there seems to be no place for a feminine subject. In these discourses, Irigaray notes, women are reduced to objects and when they attempt to escape this position by identifying as masculine subjects, they only further objectivize themselves as they are no different from a mirror reflecting the masculine (1985, p. 133) .

In fashion of the binary oppositions noted by Cixous, Irigaray creates metaphors for men and women which allude to multiple divisions that follow a Superior/inferior pattern where the former represses the latter: the speaking subject/the silent object, he/she, conscious/unconscious, light/dark, and form/matter. The relegation of women to the position of object is necessary for the male subject to retain his superiority “for he can sustain himself only by bouncing back off some objectiveness, some objective” (1985, p. 133).

However, Barrett notes that “[i]t is also worth questioning the implication in such analyses that women are inevitably the passive victims of male power” (1980, Ch. 2). By claiming that women have no part in this division, they are only further objectified through the implication that there is no other possible fate for the female and that their state of passivity is natural rather than enforced and internalized. Furthermore, if women were not complicit in sustaining this hierarchical organization, they should be able to break out of their passive confines in the absence of men. Yet, as will be proven throughout this study, the absence of male authority does not serve as incentive enough for most women to take action and such limited autonomy would only serve as “a solution which exists within a fundamentally gender-divided society, and advances little hope, or even claim, for changes which would affect, let alone liberate, all women” (Barrett, Ch. 2, p.92).

One of the most prominent themes found in Terry’s *Calm Down Mother* (1966) is female subjectivity and the objectification of women. Throughout the play, multiple transformations present the audience with women of different levels of self-awareness; some of these women have gained self-awareness and taken on the role of a feminine subject while others are mere objects reflecting the views of masculine subjects. These transformations refer to both a theme and a technique: technically the actresses shift characters from scene to scene throughout a single performance while also presenting a subtle shift in the

female characters' self-awareness resulting in a thematic transformation from object to subject. The frequent transformations do not allow the audience to get too attached to the characters; instead, the spectators have to focus on the action, dialogue and on recurring patterns and themes in an attempt to find a constant within the quickly changing scenes and non-linear plot to make sense of what is happening on stage. This lack of an emotional investment in the characters permits a more objective and rational view of the problems presented. This approach of emotionally distancing the audience alone is already an example of how the play challenges gender stereotypes: men are perceived as rational and pragmatic while women are considered emotional and idealistic and Terry is already subverting those expectations with her technique.

There is no logical linear plot but the play begins with a scene narrated by a woman's voice which seems to suggest the origin of life with "three one-celled creatures float[ing] . . . under the sea" which are "swept up the beach" and pulled back into the water multiple times before taking root (Terry, 1966, p. 257). Curiously, the three women evolve, or transform (as in act), into a plant and not an animal as would be expected with the theory of evolution proposed by Charles Darwin that man shares a common ancestor with apes but is often misunderstood as man being descended from them. Where Eugene O'Neill named and turned the protagonist of his play into *The Hairy Ape* (1922), Terry makes her characters form a plant: a life form which has no nervous system and thus lacks intelligence as well as consciousness but also the mobility, sexual dimorphism and sex drive associated with mammals, particularly primates like the ape. Apes and other mammals exclusively reproduce sexually whereas plant reproduction may be sexual or asexual. Plants are not as strictly divided into male and female as most mammals; some may have sexual organs of both sexes. There are members of the animal kingdom which do exhibit hermaphroditic characteristics and reproduce asexually (starfish and snails, for example) but plants are also sedentary; their lack of physical activity resonates with the passivity associated with women and thus they make a more fitting metaphor (Camperio Ciani, 2017; Cassini, 2019 ; Miller, 2018). Terry's choice of imagery when having the actresses transform into plant's highlights their objectification given that objects are characterized through passivity as opposed to the subject's active nature.

There is a lot of back and forth until the one-celled organisms form one unit and take root as one of the first plants; the ebb and flow of the water is reminiscent of the waves of feminism and how many ups and downs women experienced prior to securing a place in society. Two parts of the plant fall off and the third "stretches toward the sun" seemingly having evolved to an actual human-being who then "walks toward the audience and smiles in joyous wonder" (Terry, 1966, p. 257). The two parts of the plant which fall away are an example of the phrase 'survival of the fittest' (another feature of Darwin's theory of evolution and his notion of natural selection); the less suitable and adaptable parts disappear while the most fit survives and evolves into a superior life form (Kalra, 2023).

In *Speculum*, Irigaray also uses metaphors of the natural world when she compares man to the sun, and thus the center of the universe based on the Copernican heliocentric system with the Earth (woman) revolving around it. The unconscious, to which the feminine is relegated, is further compared to a dark continent (referencing Freud's description of female sexuality) which needs to be explored and brought under the control of the male discourse (1985, p. 139).^{*} Irigaray's natural metaphors show the power relation between man and woman with the former taking a position of superiority and influence over the

^{*} 'Dark continent' was a metaphor used by Henry Morton Stanley to refer to Africa and then quoted by Freud as a metaphor for women's sexuality in psychoanalysis (Khanna, 2003, p. ix).

latter. However, the sun in *CDM* does not explicitly refer to the male subject like Irigaray's metaphor but can still be interpreted to symbolize a source of power for woman to aspire to reach; if given the same meaning as Irigaray's sun, then the remaining plant suggests that women need to be more active and adapt themselves as necessary to their male-governed environment if they want to survive and thrive.

The woman then introduces herself as Margaret Fuller and announces that "from the time [she] could speak and go alone, [her] father addressed [her] not as a plaything, but as a living mind" (Terry, 1966, pp. 257-258). Fuller was among one of the leading feminist writers of first-wave feminism in the United States which began in 1848 with the first Women's Rights Convention organized by Elizabeth Cady Stanton in Seneca Falls; Stanton and fellow women's right activist Susan B. Anthony described Fuller as "having 'possessed more influence upon the thought of American women than any woman previous to her time'" (Guerin *et al.*, 2011, p. 254; Madsen, 2000, p. 4). Fuller's statement clarifies that she is not a "furry animal plaything" but a "living loving blinding mind" (Terry, 1966, p. 258). Fuller was an important figure for American feminism and asserts her autonomy in the play through her possession of a 'living mind'; she is prepared to act and seize the world but is interrupted by the other women who "assume [a] superior posture" and urge Margaret to "better grab that universe [. . .] before [she] melt[s]" while quoting the authority of her male contemporary Thomas Carlyle (*ibid.*). A similar exchange is supposed to have happened between Fuller and Carlyle's real-life counterparts as quoted by James:

'I accept the universe' is reported to have been a favorite utterance of our New England transcendentalist, Margaret Fuller; and when some one [*sic*] reported this phrase to Thomas Carlyle, his sardonic comment is said to have been: "Gad! she'd better!" [*sic*] At bottom the whole concern of both morality and religion is with the manner of our acceptance of the universe. Do we accept it in part and grudgingly, or heartily and altogether? [. . .] If we accept the whole, shall we do so as if stunned into submission,- as Carlyle would have [Fuller]- [. . .] or shall we do so with enthusiastic assent [like Fuller]? (1902, p. 41)

Fuller's "acceptance is not the usual passive endurance of a woman accepting her lot in life, but an active acceptance of life as a human being" (Barron, 1983, p. 33). As Fuller makes an active decision out of her own volition, the prompt by the other women is rather superfluous, particularly their addition of a male voice to back up their statement. They attempt to take away the choice from Fuller by interrupting her speech with their own and making it seem like they influenced her decision. A woman who acts as a subject herself needs no male (or female) authority to guide and prompt her, nor does she have to emulate him or recite his speech.

Margaret differentiates herself from animals or mere playthings through her active mind which Barron considers a reference to Beauvoir's *Second Sex* (1949): Beauvoir notes that female individuality is opposed due to the interest of the species as she can care for the offspring better when remaining in a passive role. Sexual opposition is more prominent in organisms with individuality where the male is aware of his superior position and the female aware of her subjugation. Beauvoir describes woman as "the most individualized of females[;] the one who experiences her destiny the most dramatically and who distinguishes herself the most significantly from her male" (2011, Ch. 1, p. 66). Furthermore, the undeniable physical differences between human males and females do not account for their social difference as humans do not only follow their natural instincts but also submit to social order. Michèle Barrett supports this claim in *Women's Oppression Today* (1980) when she states that "the social construction of gender division massively outweighs any basis in biological differences" as the biological advantages of the male have been made up for through technological means with the invention of

contraceptives serving as one such example (Ch. 6, p. 261). Toril Moi further notes that in order to “avoid biological determinism” it needs to be established that “biological facts [do not] justify social values” (1999, p. 43).

Woman cannot turn into man but remaining herself is not an option either as she would have to submit to being a mere object; Beauvoir suggests that woman has to achieve a state of “transcendence” and consider the options available to her (Beauvoir, 2011, Ch.2, p. 92). In *CDM*, Margaret Fuller makes the choice to not be an animal or a plaything but a woman with an independent mind; in contrast, the women at the end of the play emphasize their bodily autonomy. The differing opening and ending scenes make the audience question whether bodily or intellectual independence is of greater importance for women to establish a feminine subject.

2. Sexism and Gender

Much emphasis is put on women’s bodies throughout the play and Terry presents the psychological as well as social effects unrealistic sexist beauty expectations have on women. Unlike men, the fair sex is held to high beauty standards which are impossible to hold up past a certain age, leaving the women feel depressed and useless. Women are valued for their beauty and fertility but as both are only temporary, so is their worth as human beings.

When Fuller is warned that she had better grab the universe before she melts, it may not be clear to the audience what exactly the warning is referring to but the consequent action blocks reveal that it is her youth as well as the beauty and fertility associated with it. Cautioning Fuller on the transience of her youth by using the word ‘melt’ seems an odd choice of vocabulary given that the women were previously introduced as plants. Poets also often make use of floral imagery, like Robert Herrick’s “To the Virgins to Make Much of Time,” to emphasize women’s fleeting beauty; they are encouraged to seize the day and make use of their youth as their window of opportunity ‘to grab the universe’ is quite brief for they will eventually wither. Flowers and other plants wither; they do not melt. Terry’s unusual wording brings forth an entirely different image: plants may not melt when exposed to the sun’s warmth but wax does. The other women who failed to evolve and continued to follow man’s authority see the ambitious Fuller as a reckless and arrogant Icarus who is flying too close to the sun; her artificial wings (false confidence in her abilities to become a female subject) will soon melt and she will drop to her demise.* There is a sense of urgency in the women’s words due to woman’s temporary beauty when Fuller is addressed; she will soon lose her youthful beauty and her worth along with it. She will be no more than expired goods.

Phoca and Wright note how the preservation of the young and slender body is advertised by consumer culture; “the closer the body is seen to approximate the idealized images of youth, health, fitness and beauty, the higher its exchange value” (1999, p. 74). Signs of aging such as wrinkles, sagging flesh, obesity and hair loss are seen as moral decay and serve as examples of Kristeva’s notion of ‘abjection’. Buchanan describes the abject as “[t]hat which disturbs the self, by provoking either disgust, fear, loathing or repulsion ... [it] is the excessive dimension of either a subject or an object that cannot be

* A character from Greek mythology; Icarus was the son of the inventor Daedalus who built a labyrinth for the King of Crete. Father and son were imprisoned by the King and Daedalus created artificial wings with wax and feathers for them to escape. Icarus is warned by his father not to fly too high but does not heed the warning, the wax melts, his wings fall apart and he falls to his death (Webber and Feinsilber, 1999).

assimilated [and] [a]s such, it is simultaneously outside or beyond the subject and inside and of the subject” (2018, ‘abject’).

Kristeva describes the abject as having nothing in common with an object except its opposition to the self or ‘I’ but where an object creates meaning through the opposition, the abject occurs in a position that causes the ‘collapse’ of meaning. Felluga claims that it is situated prior to the symbolic order and contrasts with Lacan’s notion of the “*objet petit a*” but instead of an object of desire, the abject is closer associated to fear and repression; it exists through *jouissance* (from the French meaning enjoyment; it exceeds pleasure in a destructive manner) in the sense that it results in an unwilling fascination (Buchanan, 2018, ‘*jouissance*’; Felluga, 2011b; Kristeva, 1982, pp. 7, 9).^{*} Kristeva labels “food loathing” as one of the most basic and ancient cases for abjection while death and the sight of the corpse are the prime examples; nothing makes a subject more aware of their materiality than their mortality which eventually reduces them to a lifeless object; this is particularly true when the subject experiences the death of a loved one and is forced to differentiate between death as a concept and as their eventual fate (1982, pp. 2-3). Death, despite being spurned, cannot be avoided like other unsavory examples of the abject as it is inevitable. With the abject being positioned as a middle ground between an object and a subject, women in old age serve as another of its examples; they are neither the desirable and useful objects they once were nor have they developed into autonomous subjects. Beauvoir states that older women who have reached menopause are sometimes believed to form a “third sex” as they develop traits that are neither entirely male nor female with the accompanying loss of fertility, higher sex drive, decrease in the female estrogen hormones and increase in the male androgen hormones (2011, Ch. 1, p.71).

Aging results in the loss of the most valuable feature of the female objects; with the loss of material beauty, they do not gain subjectivity in the form of wisdom, but are now reduced to being viewed as a repulsive object. Old age makes women more aware of their mortality and inevitable death; even living minds like Fuller’s will deteriorate and become nothing but a lifeless corpse. What makes women valuable to men is their youth and beauty while old age makes them useless and repugnant; turning them from an object of desire to a source of disgust not worth possessing. Irigaray argues:

The “physical vanity” of women, the “fetishization” of her body-a process patterned after that of the model and prototype of all fetishes: the penis-are mandatory if she is to be a desirable “object” and if he is to want to possess her. But no doubt she will in her turn seek to secure an increase in her price. The cosmetics, the disguises of all kinds that women cover themselves with are intended to deceive, to promise more value than can be delivered. Can they thus be seen as of a desire to appropriate the powers of the penis? Or at least to compete in the phallic economy by denying that

^{*} Jaques Lacan divided the human psyche into three parts: the Imaginary order (pre-verbal stage which contains our fantasies, wishes and images through which we interpret the world; is dominated by the mother), the Symbolic order (phase in which we acquire language, learn to differentiate ourselves from others, notice gender differences and cultural norms; dominated by the father) and the Real order (the material world which is full of desires which we cannot fulfill). The real order is full of what Lacan named “*objet petit a*”: objects we yearn for that we discovered during the mirror stage of development (part of the imaginary order; reached around six months of age) and which make us realize they are separate from ourselves (like the mother) and thus leave us with a feeling of lack (Bressler, 2011, pp. 134-136, 313, 319, 324-325, 329).

they function under exploitation? Is there pleasure in this for women? Not much, not simply (1985, p. 114).

And thus, the next action block showcases women's preoccupation with their looks and their apprehension of aging. After a freeze, the women undergo a transformation, the setting changes to a Brooklyn delicatessen; Woman One becomes Sophie, Woman Three transforms to Esther and Woman Two turns into a nineteen-year-old girl. The girl enters the store to buy a six pack of Ballantine Ale but instead of serving her, Sophie is too preoccupied admiring the girl's hair, lamenting the loss of her own and grieving the death of her mother. Sophie says to the girl, "Your hair- it's like hers was. Like mine was, like hers was" (Terry, 1966, p. 260). She has trouble separating her own autonomous existence from the girl's or her mother's; at some point her mother and she enjoyed the same beautiful hair the girl presently has but her mother is no more and Sophie's loss of youth is making her aware of her own mortality. At this point, Sophie is no more than a withered flower.

Women as mere objects of beauty all look alike and blend together while thinking minds like Fuller's stand out but the women in the delicatessen have no other valuable traits. Sophie moves closer and asks the girl to touch her hair and then shows her own; the two women build rapport over their hair with the girl agreeing that "it's important to a girl for God's sake" (*ibid.*). The girl does not show much care or concern for Sophie's well-being after the older woman reveals that her hair loss is due to side effects of anesthesia from surgeries; the young girl's priority was not Sophie's declining health but her appearance.

The remaining sister, Esther, is mostly left out of the conversation or ignored. She considers Sophie "selfish" for her preoccupation with her physical appearance, "always combing and washing herself" while Esther "could never get ready to go out [herself]" (*ibid.*). She holds a grudge against Sophie for her vanity which resulted in both living a passive existence in that Esther never seemed to have the opportunity to do something for herself while Sophie does not have anything else to live for after the loss of her beauty and her mother except reminiscing about the past. Even during the scene, Sophie is too distracted by the young girl's appearance to assist her sister in running their business despite Esther's repeated urging. When Sophie starts to admire the girl's milk-like skin, Esther directs her frustration toward God (as described in the stage directions) questioning "what is wrong with her skin" as "[it] is the same [. . .] only sixty years older" (Terry, 1966, p. 265). Out of the three, Esther is the closest to having a practical mind like Fuller's; she worries about serving their customer and is not as desperate about her mature looks as her sister. Sophie is so devastated about the loss of her hair and her mother that she is in an almost catatonic state and cannot even enjoy the time she has left before she dies; Wagner describes her as "unconscious of her own death in life" and even argues that she could have been a "potential Margaret Fuller" if she had only realized that "she had a mind" (1972, p. 52). Despite not being very tormented by the loss of youth, Esther does join the other women's lament at the end of the scene. The single valuable asset and defining feature these women have is their beauty and the only time they connect with each other is to lament its loss when they gather to stroke and comb each other's hair at the end of the vignette. The loss of their beauty is both a cause of grief and their common ground.

Another action block shows two women in a nursing home who have been discarded after having served their purpose. This vignette addresses another aspect of a woman's youth: her fertility. The preceding vignette portrayed a sentimental scene between two friends Sally and Nancy; the former had just gone through a divorce while the latter is known as the 'bulwark' of her family but is crumbling at the prospect of her mother dying after being diagnosed with bone cancer. Terry refuses to allow her characters to indulge in melodrama and quickly cuts them off; Wagner argues that she "presents clichéd

and sentimentalized attitudes and situations in order to purge them” (1972, p. 50). The friends embrace and freeze while Woman Three, who had been lying on the floor during the scene, comes up for an interlude and “moves downstage with exuberant motion,” her demeanor a stark contrast to the melancholy of the previous scene; she recites an excerpt from an unnamed earlier transformation script: “Once upon a green time... [m]y girlhood was all flowers” (Terry, 1966, p. 267; Barron, 1983, p. 39). The metaphor of women as plants, particularly flowers, continues; every woman was, at some point, a flower even the elderly ladies at the nursing home: Mrs. Tweed and Mrs. Watermelon.

Mrs. Watermelon suggests the theme of the scene with her mere name: watermelons symbolize fertility in West African culture and had gained significance as part of black culture in America (Vance, 2023). The two elderly ladies were inspired by Terry’s paternal grandmother and her friend but could very well serve as the future selves of Sally and Nancy from the preceding vignette. Mrs. Tweed is the more passive one and merely allows “the days [to] go by” but they are not going by fast enough for Mrs. Watermelon who is “waiting for the sunrise” and claims to know “where it begins”, upon further urging, she “clasp[s] her breast” and reveals that it begins within a woman’s body and “once a month bursts out onto the ground” but for her “all the color’s gone” (Terry, 1966, pp. 267-268). The image of the sun from the first vignette is reintroduced but as a metaphor for women’s fertility: like the sun, woman serves as a source of energy that is essential for the continuation of life. Mrs. Watermelon, despite being named after a fruit full of seeds, has become barren with the cease of her monthly cycle. Despite her infertility, the elderly woman is still eager to see another sunrise. If Terry’s sun is meant to represent fertility and by extension femininity, it is possible to conclude that Mrs. Watermelon expects more women to provide the support needed for potential Margaret Fullers to grow; such expectations are quickly thwarted by Mrs. Tweed who admonishes her; she claims a woman of Mrs. Watermelon’s age “shouldn’t think of such things” (*ibid*, p. 269). The old women start bickering until the nurse enters to feed them cream of wheat at which point the elderly women direct their insults at the younger one. The whole scene is much more light-hearted than the previous ones, and ironically, the old women who are closer to death than their younger counterparts are much fuller of life. Their lively and frivolous dialogue is contrary to the nurse who is described with a smile on the face but with a “flat and mechanical” voice (*ibid*, p. 268). When the nurse attempts to go through the two older women, they transform into a subway door and block the other’s way; her proximity rendered the lively old ladies as mechanical as herself. The scene is described by Barron as an example for the Open Theatre’s use of machines as a metaphor for society (1983, p. 40). The image of humans having become unfeeling machines, when applied to women in particular, further highlights their objectification.

The following action block is not as much occupied with woman’s appearance and the consequences of aging as the above mentioned ones but a symbol of woman’s vanity is still present: the women now transform to three prostitutes with Felicia arguing with Momo over a mirror when both are applying make-up, Inez (the seemingly oldest and most experienced among the three) offers her to move to another mirror but Felicia insists on the one she is sharing with Momo as she “can’t see in that mirror” because “[t]he lights no good” and they “shouldn’t hold it against [her]” that she is “near-sighted” (Terry, 1966, pp. 270, 273). Gilbert and Gubar state that “[l]earning to become a beautiful object, the girl learns anxiety about-perhaps even loathing of-her own flesh” which makes her “[peer] obsessively into the real as well as metaphoric looking glasses that surround her” (1979, p. 54). They also consider all “the pruning and preening, the mirror madness, and concern with odors and aging, with hair which is invariably too curly or too lank, with bodies too thin or too thick” as a testimony to the effort women put into meeting man’s

unfulfillable expectations of them (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979, p. 34). This vignette does not address concerns with beauty verbally but visually: the women are arguing over financial matters without neglecting their preparations; looks matter for their field of work but the characters are too short-sighted (in the sense of lacking foresight) to consider their fate should they grow older and lose their appeal to their customers. These women are not worried about their fertility or even their beauty per se; they take care of their appearance and enhance it through means of make-up as their beauty determines their value as a tool for man's pleasure.

The penultimate action block introduces a woman who is closest to Fuller's active decision-making and acting like an autonomous subject more than any of the woman introduced so far: Sue is furious at having men, be it in the form of priests or the press, mandate her body. The interlude preceding this vignette has the three women form a triangle while "throwing sentences at each other", saying, "Have confidence. You have been found" (Terry, 1966, p. 274). What has been found is another feminine subject; she may not be a philosopher like Fuller and lacks her eloquence but she does not allow anyone to make choices regarding her body on her behalf and like Fuller, she does not receive support from her kinswomen. The vignette ends with Ma throwing Sue out and the latter's final dialogue which reveals the discrepancy between the women:

Ma! I been born out of my time. Or you never left yours. That's right- three hundred years old- that's what you are. You two escapes from Shangri-la. You wrinkle brains, you vegetables, you empty bottles of holy water. I'll go, all right! I don't need any bags. I got everything I need right here in my belly. I got everything I need for the next thirty years, and how! (*ibid*, p. 279).

The women who lack enough self-awareness and independent thought to think for themselves are becoming an obstacle for the potential Fullers. Autonomous women are too ahead of their time or the submissive ones are too behind; in any case, there is no understanding between the two sides. Sue is frustrated and the insults she throws at the other women are summed up as old and ignorant; she calls them "vegetables" and continues the image of women as mere plants without a mind. Sue is convinced that she already has everything she needs; whether she is overestimating herself and about to fall to her demise like Icarus is not clear as the play does not reveal what happened after she left home. Kamini also emphasizes the importance of this scene: birth control is a significant step in retaking control from men with regards to women's bodies (2018, p. 3).

The women "stand together" before speaking "slowly, sweetly like [the] amused gentlewom[a]n" from the first action block (Terry, 1966, p. 267). The play seems to have come full circle with that familiar speech, the women put their hands on different parts of their bodies (bellies, sides, breasts) and say that their "eggies in their bellies ... are enough" before turning their backs on the audience and asking, "ARE THEY?" (*ibid*, p. 281). The answer to that question is for the audience to decide. Terry is not a commercial playwright writing for the audience's entertainment; "[s]he is seeking revolt, not only artistic revolt, but a human revolt" which cannot be achieved by "following 'well-made' and comfortable patterns as she "views the theatre as means of enlightening the public" (Coppage, 1968, p. 2). Sue may lack Fuller's brilliant mind but refused to let men take control over her body. An autonomous body without a proper mind cannot thrive and a mind within an imprisoned body cannot be free and reach its full potential. Terry demonstrates how women need autonomy of the mind *and* body to become feminine subjects.

Conclusion

Western thinkers of multiple disciplines have relegated woman to the position of object due to the male-centric, dual hierarchical tendency of binary oppositions: man is given the superior position and woman is left to fill the role of the inferior other to man; man retains his status as the sole subject by reducing woman to a passive object whose value lies in her youthful beauty and reproductive ability alone. Terry presents in her play that women can escape their objectification through an active mind as exemplified through Margaret Fuller. The play makes use of natural imagery and uses the common flower metaphor utilized by male authors to emphasize woman's fleeting beauty but the image is subverted by Terry to suggest woman's passive state and transient value. *Calm Down Mother* showcases a woman's loss of worth and life purpose after the loss of her youth and fertility; once that happens, she is eventually discarded. The various transformations throughout the play offer glimpses of many different women and their fate: most of them are empty shells but there are examples of women with enough spirit to question their lot in life and challenge patriarchal expectations. The diversity of the characters inevitably will prompt the audience to relate to the circumstances of at least one of the introduced women. Furthermore, Terry presents how despite men looking down on emancipated women as represented through Carlyle, it is, nevertheless, the women who abide by and even perpetuate the patriarchal system who pose an obstacle to the liberation of their kinswomen. Through Fuller, a real-life feminist, Terry also demonstrates that women's aspirations for freedom are achievable and not just the product of imagination. *Calm Down Mother* ends by leaving the audience questioning the priority of intellectual or bodily autonomy for the emancipation of women as Terry wants her audience to think for themselves and come to their own conclusions instead of telling them what to think; this in itself may be answer enough.

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