

Built for Motherhood or Built for Sex:
Locating the True "Womanhood" in Sarah Treem's *The How and The Why*

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The movement of feminism and women's perceived role in social discourse and the world is in constant flux. Sarah Treem's play, *The How and the Why*, seeks to illuminate not only the fluctuation of the feminist mindset and message, but the changing semiotics of female power and prowess through two scientists, who are also estranged mother and daughter. Julia Kristeva seeks to examine the potential path of this evolution in her article "Women's Time". Kristeva suggests that feminism has moved through three generations and goes on to present her observations of this third generation. "I see arising, under the cover of a relative indifference toward the militance of the first and second generations, an attitude of retreat from sexism (male as well as female) and gradually, from any kind of anthropomorphism." (Kristeva, J. 1981) The rejection of the assignment of gender and gender roles, which Kristeva is identifying, are the central focus of Sarah Treem's *The How and the Why*. Kristeva's work on the development of the feminist movement, as well as her psychoanalytic theories on the relationship of mother and daughter, serve to open up the conflicts within the text. I will also draw on the feminist and bioethical theory of Margrit Shildrick, which serves as a framework for the examination of the female mind and body in *The How and the Why*. The play's focus on the purpose and importance of the female body, and its perception by society, specifically patriarchal society, as well as the role which motherhood plays in the feminine experience, lends itself to analysis through the work of Kristeva and Shildrick. The complex dialogue between the two women in the play challenges the vocabulary which surrounds women's bodies, age defined roles, and expectations. The women also frequently come up against the limitations of language, sometimes the stage directions offer a glimpse into the space under the words,

Rachel stares at her mother. A realization.

RACHEL: You must be so lonely. You've spent your whole life alone, with your face in a microscope.

Zelda sighs

ZELDA: You could look at it that way. I think it's the most thrilling possible way to spend one's time. The chance that every minute of every day you might stumble across even the smallest secret of the universe. And for a moment, this new truth will be known only to you. We are explorers you and I. The luckiest of men.

Silence. Neither knows what to say. They are oceans apart. (Treem, S. 2011, 64)

The stage directions call for a silence between the women fourteen times in the first act and twenty-one times in the second, highlighting the limits of language in bridging the space between Zelda and Rachel. Additional perspective from the writings of Butler and Cixous will illuminate the power of language and the vital nature of reshaping conversation through the shifting of language's meanings, signifiers and subjects. In this paper I hope to prove that the play serves as a testing realm for the merits and short

comings of second and third generation feminism, and the meaning ascribed to womanhood by each, by society, and the by the changing ideals of the movement.

The How and the Why is set in the Boston area of Massachusetts at two separate locations. Both scenes present the interactions of two evolutionary biologists of different generations. These are the only characters in the play. Zelda Kahn is a 56 year old senior professor at Harvard; Rachel Hardeman, a 28 year old graduate student from NYU and Zelda's daughter, given up at birth when Zelda was Rachel's age. The play begins in Zelda's office, an area of controlled comfort for both characters, and moves into a more uncomfortable and unlikely local in the second act, a dive bar. The description of the office and discussion between the two characters suggest that there is a masculinity to this environment; in the stage directions Treem notes,

The office is dark, auspicious, and very masculine. (3)

Zelda does not seem to think of it this way, when Rachel calls attention to the masculinity of the office, Zelda suggests that Rachel is confusing importance with masculinity,

They sit in silence. Staring at each other.

RACHEL: I like your office.

ZELDA: Thank you.

RACHEL: It feels very... masculine.

ZELDA: You mean it feels significant.

RACHEL: No, I don't

More silence. (5-6)

The masculine qualities of the space keep the conversation in the controlled realms of work and men. In moving out of the office into the public space of a bar, it becomes possible to converse on an emotional level. In the bar scene Rachel and Zelda are loosed from the control of academia and thus understand each other as women rather than through the ascribed constructs of professor and student or even mother and daughter. The change of scene reflects the change in the women's lives and their conversation. Since their first meeting in act one a week has passed and much has changed about their mental states and emotional availability.

The first meeting is awkward and the conversation tends toward the clinical; including the presentation of the two biological theories which define the women's work. Zelda made her career at Rachel's age, authoring "The Grandmother Hypothesis", which posits that menopause is evolution's answer to prolonged life for women and therefore development from monkey to human; while Rachel's research is titled "The Toxicity of Sperm", contending that women menstruate to cleanse the system of toxins introduced during intercourse. Though Rachel's theory, stressing the essential nature of menstruation, directly contradicts Zelda's research, neither woman explores the tension around this issue in the first act. The strain this opposition places on the women's relationship is explored in depth in the second act. In the first, Zelda offers Rachel a platform to present her theory professionally at The National Organization of Research Biologists (NOORB). The conflict in act one arises from Rachel's intention to present the theory as belonging to herself and her boyfriend, Dean, and Zelda's criticism of such

a proposal. The second act, which takes place after the conference, explores the ramifications of Rachel's choice, as well as the future of her new relationship with Zelda, who confesses that she is dying of cancer. The discourse touches on many elements of feminism, maternity and women's place in academia, society and the species, but what it comes down to is choice. The conflict of the play is located in both women's internal struggles, Zelda's exploration of the choices in her past, and Rachel's exploration of the options that lie before her.

The Purpose of the Body: Misnomers and Mysteries

The scientific theories at the heart of Zelda and Rachel's conflict are based on actual biological theories; Treem came to the idea in reading Natalie Angier's *Woman an Intimate Geography*. The stated purpose of Angier's book is to correct the misperceptions and assumptions made about the female body. In her introduction Angier presents the problems inherent in existing discourse on and understanding of the female body.

The female body has been abominably regarded over the centuries. It has been made too much of or utterly ignored. It has been conceived of as the second sex, the first draft, the faulty sex, the default sex, the consolation prize, the succubus, the male interruptus. We are lewd, prim, bestial, ethereal. We have borne more unwanted metaphors than we have unwanted embryos. (Angier, N. 1999)

Treem's characters, Zelda and Rachel, wade through these misnomers and conflicting metaphors throughout the play. Underlying all of this is an investigation of the "why" of the female body and the female experience. Zelda's "Grandmother Hypothesis" is the more established of the two theories, and Zelda explains what a challenge it has been to convince the scientific community that menopause is an evolutionary tool for shaping the species, and not just a consequence of modern medical technology, keeping us alive past our natural expiration date.

ZELDA: I have been fighting for thirty years, with everything I have, to get people to listen to the claim, by a woman, that Adam never lost a rib. That we are not secondary creatures. We are smaller, yes. We are weaker, yes. Our brains contain less mass, true, true, true. And yet, *we live longer*. And that is not an accident. That is evolution. (41)

Treem gives us a glimpse of the kind of traditionalist thinking that Zelda has had to push so hard against, when Rachel tries to goad Zelda into revealing who her father is,

RACHEL: Charles says you come from a group of women scientists who, in the eighties, thought with their vaginas. Charles says you used some voodoo to conjure a primitive matriarch from beneath the earth and give her powers. But she's been dead since mankind realized that sperm is the catalyst for creation. Everyone but you can clearly see that she is nothing more than a rotting corpse with a crown on her head. (65)

It is implausible for Rachel to agree with this assessment, but easy to believe that it has been part of the scientific discourse to which she has been exposed.

Rachel's theory does have a more male centered worldview. "The Toxicity of Sperm," suggests that menstruation evolved to protect women from the pathogens and other foreign bodies introduced during sex. There is an element of phallocentrism involved, the idea that the female body exists as it does because of the male body. Shildrick focuses on the dominance of this view throughout her book, especially when dealing with the historical medical discourse on reproduction.

Although the recognition of men's biological involvement may be stressed and their social involvement normalized, it is women's bodies which are manipulable. The underlying subtext of such representations is that women themselves are incomplete without men, and that even their identities as mothers cannot stand alone. (Shildrick, M. 1997)

Regardless of aligning in some ways with dominant thought, assigning a dominating, creative role to the male anatomy and its control over the female form, Rachel's theory is met with heavy criticism. Her association of the male with the negative and the female with the positive creates an inverse binary which is a challenge for many to accept,

RACHEL: They dismissed me. They never even engaged my argument. They didn't consider it. I walked up there in my skirt and my heels. I said sperm and pathogen in one sentence. I said menstruation and defense in another and they all stopped listening. I saw them stop. (48)

Rachel's theory is much newer, in the world of the play, as well as in the actual scientific community; it therefore immediately places Rachel in a weaker arguing position throughout. What is vital about this theory, as well as the character of Rachel, is that they open lines of conversation often ignored but integral to making strides toward more complete agency for women, and allow for the exploration of the misconceptions and assumptions made by existing historical discourse.

The role of the body in assigning difference between the male and female form and role is of importance to the organization of the social order. As Kristeva explains, this physical difference is the basis of the social contract.

Sexual difference - which is at once biological, physiological, and relative to reproduction - is translated by and translates a difference in the relationship of subjects to the symbolic contract which *is* the social contract: a difference, then in the relationship to power, language, and meaning. (Kristeva, J. 1981)

The assignment of power to the male form because of its size and strength has resulted in a social contract which places women at a disadvantage. Rachel's theory, as it exists in the play seems to align with more traditional assumptions about the female form as a reaction to the male form. While Zelda's theory is more female centric, it does also have its roots in the idea that the goal of female survival is based on the role of pregnancy and child rearing. Both of these theories have elements which can be interpreted as problematizing the role of woman. Zelda's theory because it may be considered to put

forth a view Woman as an archetypal rather than actual being. "Possessor of some mystical unity - a supreme power, on which its based the terror of power and terrorism as the desire for power." (Kristeva, J. 1981) The problem with Rachel's theory exists on the other side of the spectrum, it again subjugates women to secondary status, which has been the problem with scientific and medical discourse since its inception.

The How and the Why's focus on these important modern biological theories and the role and significance of women's bodies and their functions, works to illustrate the historical shifts in the perception of modern womanhood. This examination is interwoven with the implication of biological truths for women's place in society and their relationships within society. In her book *Leaky Bodies and Boundaries*, Margrit Shildrick ventures to expose accepted biological treatment of the body as lacking in impartiality and therefore in truth. "An array of discontinuous and discrete 'truths', associated one with the other only by a logic of phallogentrism." (Shildrick, M. 1997) In her play Sarah Treem invites an appraisal of this topic throughout, the most performative of which is Zelda's defense of her theory against the work of Rachel's biological father on hormone replacement therapy (HRT).

ZELDA: Doesn't it bother you that the very existence of HRT implies that a woman's body doesn't know what it's doing? That it needs to be supplemented with hormones it has naturally elected to stop producing? Just look at the word he chose to name it. Therapy. As if menopause was some sort of disease. It's all marketing. Our bodies are not sick. Estrogen is not a drug. Given in excess, it's been proven toxic. (67)

The idea of women's bodies as flawed, broken, or sick, goes back a long way, it has been woven into the discourse so deeply that the assertion and its implications are rarely questioned. Zelda belongs to a generation which changed the dialogue around what a woman could do as well as assertions about the feminine ability to control their bodies and by extension their minds. She exemplifies a rejection of the signification assigned to women and their bodies by men. Rachel walks a different line, she is in a complex state of duality, both raised in a post-feminist world, and reaching for the structures and institutions her forerunners rejected.

Schildrick argues that historical biological theory places women's bodies out of their own control.

The concept of the wandering womb has been superseded by new constructions of female disorder, sophisticated medical references to hormones, pre-menstrual tension, menopausal irritability and the like are no less rooted in an essentialist view of women's bodies and women's nature. (Shildrick, M. 1997)

The assignment of an uncontrolled or ill evolved quality to the functions of the female body are rooted in a rejection or suspicion of anything which does not match up with the male anatomy or experience. We see Rachel lose control in the form of a panic attack, her first reaction is to call for an ambulance; traditional medicine stands in as a form of institutional and male authority. Zelda does not go this route, but instead instructs Rachel on embracing and coping with the panic reaction through lamaze, a powerfully feminine reference, conjuring more the midwife experience of childbirth than the

clinical. This speaks to the desired acceptance of and trust in the functions of the body which Shildrick espouses. “The especial immanence of the female body, as it is frequently represented in ontological theory, such that it enmeshes women themselves; and its punitive leakiness, the outflow of the body which breaches the boundaries of the proper” (Schildrick, M. 1997). Zelda is attempting to lead Rachel on a path of self-reliance, free from the need for approval by men, or a male driven society.

Throughout the play Zelda presses Rachel to let go of the bonds of male control, from arguing that Rachel should not share the podium with her boyfriend Dean, to understanding love as Stockholm Syndrome.

ZELDA: Sex is an act of aggression. It triggers a stress response, which makes the woman being penetrated attach to the man on top of her. Basically love is the Stockholm Syndrome gussied up. It may sound laughable but it's biological. I don't like it but I respect it. I have succumbed to it in the past, but I refuse to let something so *ordinary* define me. (64)

Zelda is making a comparison between women as captives and men as kidnapers, robbing a woman of agency. As in the restrictive conditions which result in Stockholm Syndrome, the man creates a situation where the woman comes to believe she needs him and becomes emotionally attached and empathetic to his needs regardless of the reality of her situation. Rachel does not see it this way; she believes in the magic of love and invokes an ideal of true partnership and sacrifice. When Zelda challenges the strength of the love that existed between Rachel and Dean, Rachel explains the tenuous nature of love,

RACHEL: Because love is fucking magic. And like magic, you have to believe in it. You make an agreement - both of you - it's unspoken, but it's there - to put the other person first. In every decision you make. Because you know, somewhere in the deepest part of your soul, that is what will make your life worth living! (63)

Rachel holds to this view of love, and cannot yet process the fact that it is not she who broke this unspoken contract, but Dean. This inability on Rachel's part may seem to suggest that Zelda's understanding of love is more accurate, but Sarah Treem does not seek to present either view as correct. Zelda is using a system of empirical logic, which is generated by a male dominated system rejecting the "uncontrolled" emotional. Rachel is speaking from a personal, deeply held truth of her own. The exchange does not argue for or against either, but instead for another language or categorizing system which allows for both.

The Clashing of Two Generations

Sarah Treem's motivations for writing the play are linked with this desire for expression of natural duality, the rational and emotional, the personal and the professional, the masculine and the feminine; as well as the search for a place of trust and understanding with an older generation of women. In an interview with Kittson O'Neill, Artistic Associate for Interact Theater in Philadelphia, prior to the theater's production of *The How and the Why*, Treem says of the characters,

I wanted to include those two theories and talk about the generational conflict between older and younger professional women. I had just had an experience where I felt betrayed by an older colleague, so that was definitely part of the inspiration.... I remember, when I started *The How and the Why*, I was really asking myself what it meant to be the daughters of the feminists. Because, at the time, I personally felt confused and the older women I turned to seemed even more confused than I was. (Treem, S. 2011)

Treem's concerns about the generational conflict she identifies within her play are widely held. In her book *Gender Trouble* Judith Butler, seeks to find a route for feminism which allows for the subject of "woman" to exist in the natural changing state inherent in all cultural and social constructions. The conflict between Zelda and Rachel, as well as the inconsistencies between The Grandmother Hypothesis and The Toxicity of Sperm, underline the challenges built into the defense of a definition of a subject which is truly without definition and in a constant state of change. Butler describes it thus:

If a stable notion of gender no longer proves to be the foundational premise of feminist politics, perhaps a new sort of feminist politics is now desirable to contest the very ramifications of gender and identity, one that will take the variable construction of identity as both a methodological and normative prerequisite if not a political goal. (Butler, 1990)

Rachel confronts Zelda directly with the changing definition of womanhood and the weight of that change as it pertains to the definition of woman and the female body.

RACHEL: How old is Marie?

ZELDA: What does that have to do with -

RACHEL: She's your age, isn't she?

ZELDA: Yes

RACHEL: From the generation of martyrs.

ZELDA: The generation of what?

RACHEL: "According to Marie," we bleed each month so that, when the time comes, our fetuses can drink our blood. How noble of us. How selfless. So much better than an anti-pathogen theory, with its erotic overtones and carnal implications. Of course, everyone would much prefer a theory in which women bleed to sustain their babies rather than to protect themselves from penises. Even if it's wrong. (58)

Rachel suggests that the preference is for comfort with the definition of the female body as it has always been defined, rather than the truth of that form. The construction of woman is more important than the actuality of woman.

Rachel identifies a problem in both the political and medical spheres of womanhood, the definition of the woman by her role as mother, and more specifically as reproductive carrier. The problem of perceiving women and their functions as existing only to fulfill the needs of a fetus and later a child, are inherent in Zelda's "Grandmother Hypothesis," and are echoed by the concerns of Shildrick in her examination of the traditional view of the female body. Shildrick contends that in the historic and existing

discourse on medicine, the woman's body is represented as one of emptiness, in the absence of a fetus, and disconnectedness and marginalization, in the presence of one. "To all intents her body is simply a container, contingently filled, but essentially empty, and the woman as person is marked by absence." (Shildrick, M. 1997) However, escaping from the traditional and prescribed link of woman and mother is perhaps too deeply rooted to escape. Kristeva writes extensively on the importance and eminence of woman's role as mother and the psychological associations that come with it. In writing about the artistic depiction of Mother, Kristeva identifies the problem of the idealized vision of Mother.

The very existence of aesthetic practice makes clear that the Mother as subject is a delusion, just as the negation of the so-called poetic dimension of language leads one to believe in the existence of Mother, and consequently, in transcendence." (Oliver, K. 1997)

It is this delusional vision of Mother which Rachel has carried with her all her life, and the image with which Zelda clashes; not only because of who Zelda is, but because of what Zelda's reality and existence says about Rachel.

Kristeva's examination of the relationship of mother and child, and in specific daughter, is of course, important to examine in the context of Zelda and Rachel's relationship. Kristeva argues that the bearing of a child connects and splits a woman from her mother in a complex way. "By giving birth, the woman enters into a contract with her mother, she becomes, she is her own mother; they are the same continuity differentiating itself." (Oliver, K. 1997) In *The How and the Why*, the creation of biological theories stands in for the childbearing process. Zelda talks about Rachel's theory as she would talk about the process of child birth, and in doing so creates a parallel with her own actual pregnancy and decision to give up Rachel,

ZELDA: (*quietly, urgently*) You've come up with a really good idea. It took rigor, it took study, it took courage and it took genius. And it is *yours*. You created it. You *gave birth* to it. Don't give it away because you are frightened of the implications. It is yours. Keep the damn thing! (36)

Couching Zelda's experience of childbirth, which is not shared, within the context of the birth of a theory, which is, Zelda is able to establish a connection with Rachel. This is a line in the play that stops Rachel from leaving the room and pulls her to Zelda for advice and commiseration. Rachel's constant conflicting impulse to run from and pursue her mother take on greater significance, when viewed through Kristeva's theories about daughter's instinct to become her mother. Zelda identifies in Rachel a desire to take her place in some way,

RACHEL: I mean the Grandmother Hypothesis is wrong. Don't take it personally.

ZELDA: Rachel. You don't need to destroy me to make room for yourself.

RACHEL: Destroy you? Why would I want to destroy you? You are nothing to me. You're just someone who came before me and got it wrong.

Silence. Zelda stares at Rachel (58-59)

Rachel finds herself at odds with Zelda because of these conflicting reactions. She is dealing with the shattering of the ideal of Mother, but in being faced with her biological mother is still faced with a deeply held aspiration.

Kristeva identifies this as a normal tension between mother and daughter. "The body of her mother is always the same Master-Mother of instinctual drive, a ruler over psychosis, a subject of biology, but also one toward which women aspire all the more passionately simply because it lacks a penis." (Oliver, K. 1997) Rachel's desire to be, and also to somehow replace, Zelda comes through several times in the play, the example above highlights her destructive impulse, but before we see this, we see Rachel's desire to follow in her mother's footsteps,

RACHEL: What's it like to win the Dobzhansky prize?

Zelda is taken aback

ZELDA: Uh, it's a thrill of course.

RACHEL: You got it for the Grandmother Hypothesis.

ZELDA: I did, yes.

RACHEL: How old were you?

ZELDA: Young. Your age.

RACHEL: You were 28?

ZELDA: 29

RACHEL: Fuck.

ZELDA: Excuse me?

RACHEL: I'm so behind.

ZELDA: It's not a race. (21-22)

Rachel is after the same honors and achievements her mother pursued, she measures herself by the timeline Zelda's career followed, and her theory seeks to unseat her mother's and place her as a force in the evolutionary understanding of the female body. The competition between mother and daughter, and the problem which arises in the attempt to pass power from one generation of feminists to another, share a resonance which has been historically problematic for the feminist movement.

The challenge is in finding a way exchange and share power between generations. This has traditionally be a struggle for feminism, and it is no less a problem for Rachel and Zelda. Rachel expresses frustration with the second generation of feminists when discussing criticism of her theory,

RACHEL: I never expected it to come from a woman.

ZELDA: What?

RACHEL: The criticism. The most ... injurious criticism. I expected it to come from a man. But not a woman. I thought we were on the same team.

ZELDA: Yes, well that was naive of you. (53)

Rachel has an expectation to be backed by the female community, through the merit of her gender alone. However, the goal of feminism, Kristeva argues, is not to possess the social contract and use it in the same ways it has always been used; she posits that the more desirable attitude is to replace it with something more acceptable.

Without refusing to or sidestepping [the] sociosymbolic order - consists in trying to explore the constitution and functioning of this contract, starting less from the knowledge accumulated about it than from the very personal affect experienced when facing it as subject and as a woman. (Kristeva, J. 1981)

Kristeva would argue that what is important to the subject approaching the feminist message and mission is not, what its history has been, but what the experience of those identifying with its cause now. Rachel's experience is of an orphaned daughter, who has no one to turn to but a mother who has previously rejected her.

Although the only characters we encounter on the stage are Zelda and Rachel, their world is influenced by others who affect them profoundly. Rachel is orphaned and her adoptive parents are not given names or spoken of in detail; we know only what Rachel tells us about their deaths.

RACHEL: They were just old. He died of lung cancer. And then, she followed him, like a year later. She just kind of...lost her will to live. (16)

Rachel's survival, like her adopted mother's, is significantly linked with men. She is mentored in her work at NYU by Charles Byrne, whom it is suggested is somewhat less than progressive in his feelings about scientific issues as they pertain to the female body and its evolution. Rachel has also allowed herself to be tethered to Dean, her boyfriend of three years, who is as close as she has to family.

RACHEL: He is all I have.

ZELDA: That's not entirely true, is it?

RACHEL: Yes. My parents are dead. The only person who gives two shits about what happens to me is Dean. (36)

The final important male figure in the play is Henry Mortimer, another brilliant evolutionary biologist, who served as Zelda's mentor and lover when she was Rachel's age. Zelda reveals him to be Rachel's biological father near the end of the play, and Rachel is completely taken in by the myth of him.

RACHEL: Oh my God. Henry Mortimer is my fucking father??

Zelda looks around the bar, embarrassed.

ZELDA: *whispering* Keep your voice down.

RACHEL: *Why didn't you just say Einstein?*

ZELDA: Is it really that big a deal?

RACHEL: Are you kidding me? The Father or Hormone Replacement Therapy? (66)

Rachel's fascination with her father's work, even though Zelda explains it to have since been debunked, in large part by her mother's work, reflects Rachel's inherit and occasionally misplaced trust in patriarchal dominance. The three men have acted in one way or another as a support system for these women but, during the course of the play, Rachel and Zelda clearly stand on their own. The circumstances which brought them to this crossroad are different, but those same circumstances serve to bring them together.

After Dean leaves Rachel, she has no family to turn to except the mother who gave her up. Zelda suggests that to be a real partner Dean should have supported Rachel even as she moved past him professionally, however Zelda did not give the same chance to Mortimer and so puts herself in a weakened arguing position. Zelda, having given up her daughter as part of her break with masculine influence in her life, now must find a way to reconnect with her daughter and create the lasting partnership which has eluded both.

The rift between Rachel and Zelda shares a resemblance with the rift between second and third generation feminism. In rejecting the patriarchal structure, as Zelda rejected Henry, the second wave rejected their own mothers, and as a movement rejected the role of mother to the next generation of feminists. When Rachel needs to know why she happened and why she was given up, Zelda explains in terms of why she needed to break from Henry; linking that the rejection of motherhood to the rejection of patriarchal control,

ZELDA: I had an idea, Rachel. A hypothesis that argues women are more evolutionarily important than men. And I had a boyfriend. Twenty years my senior. My professor. A man I revered. And yes, loved. Whose entire career had been built on the opposite assumption. I could publish my hypothesis. Or I could bury it. And go on with him. Probably grow old with him. I chose to publish it. (84)

Just as Zelda links love to a biological process she can recognize and rise above, she also appears to have felt the same way about motherhood. Her rejection of Henry accompanies a rejection of Rachel, and she is now seeking to mend that broken mother/daughter bond. As the time comes to pass the torch, Zelda now finds that Rachel is not interested in inheriting her mother's legacy but rather building her own. Zelda wishes to mend a wound after it has already become a scar. Rachel feels that she has been failed by the generation of feminist's whose legacy she is meant to inherit.

RACHEL: You fucking feminists. You're so hypocritical. You go on and on about female empowerment and all you did for us, but the truth is, you're ten times harder on us than anybody else. (58)

Susan Faludi's examination of feminist history outlines a conflict mirroring that of Rachel and Zelda. "Over and over, the transit of feminism seems to founder in the treacherous straits of mother-daughter relations. Over and over, a younger generation disavows the women's movement as a daughter disowns her mother." (Faludi, S. 2010) Like Zelda and Rachel, the two generations of feminists must strive for a way to find common ground, between the traditional and changing messages of the ever evolving movement.

In an interview with the McCarter Theater for the premiere production of *The How and the Why* in January 2011, Sarah Treem references an October 2010 article in Harper's Magazine entitled, "American Electra: Feminism's ritual matricide". In this article, Susan Faludi recounts the path of feminism from first wave to the present; in recounting the current and historical clashes of feminist generations, Faludi suggests

that the history of feminism is one of matricide which prevents trust between current generations and blocks a peaceful and equitable transition of power.

These two legacies—the continued matricide and the shape-shifting contamination of commercialism and commercially infused relativism in feminist activism and scholarship—have created a generational donnybrook where the transmission of power repeatedly fails and feminism’s heritage is repeatedly hurled onto the scrap heap. What gets passed on is the predisposition to dispossess, a legacy of no legacy. (Faludi, S. 2010)

Treem goes on in the interview to state that though she went into the process believing that one side had to be right and the other wrong, the process changed that.

When I started the play, I was convinced that one character had to be right, and the other, wrong. For a long time I was trying to figure out who was going to win this fight—in terms of what a woman’s life path should be, which choices she should make. There had to be an answer to the “woman question.” What I figured out with this draft is...they’re both right... and wrong. And that’s the only possible answer. The only truth there is. (Treem, S. 2010)

The process of writing the play became for Treem a proving ground for the values espoused by both generations. This comes through in the text and suggests that the future of feminism is not down one path or the other, but a combined one.

It is this conclusion which Kristeva imagined in her article "Women's Time ". She envisions a third generation, not definable by a chronological generation, but rather a signifying space.

It can be argued that as of now a third generation is possible, thus a third generation which does not exclude - quite to the contrary - the parallel existence of all three in the same historical time, or even that they be interwoven one with the other." (Kristeva, J. 1981)

What Faldi, Treem and Kristeva, and indeed Zelda and Rachel in the play, are arguing for is a break with the historical nature of the development of the feminist movement, characterized by the tearing down of the previous wave generation to make way for the next wave of feminism. Instead, modern feminist theorists call for a sharing of ideas and purpose moving forward. In her book *Feminism and Theatre*, Sue-Ellen Case cites similar stressors between feminist theory and works as they act on the theatre. She explains the essentialist versus materialist debate in the world of theatrical criticism, but calls for a coming together aimed at accomplishing shared goals.

Perhaps these positions could be combined in some way, or, within a historical context, perceived as alternative theoretical strategies for specific political purposes. They need not operate as competing theories for a controlling position that subsumes practice and organizes positions. (Goodman, L. 1998)

Case argues for the development of a feminist style of theatrical creation and critique, one which might well benefit the complex, and at times seemingly contradictory, nature of Treem's *The How and the Why*.

The interplay of the content of the text and its style is an examination of the challenges in shaking traditional forms and styles. Despite the piece's grounding in a feminist world view, the style is rooted in realism. The play follows a linear timeline and, despite some possibly far-fetched coincidences and motivations, inhabits the real world. In production, the realism of the script has led to realism in the design approach. Both Emily Mann's production at the McCarter Theater in Princeton (Jan. 2011) and Seth Rozin's at Interact Theatre in Philadelphia (Oct. 2011) were staged on completely realistic sets. The script does not call specifically for such fully realized environments, noting only,

Time: Present. Late Autumn.

Place: A Senior Professor's office in Cambridge, Mass. Later, a dive bar in Boston. (2)

The decision to stage the play on such fully realized sets is an interesting one, more in line with the traditional values of theatre performance and presentation. If as Mark Fortier suggests in his book, *Theory/Theatre*, "one task of feminism is to overturn traditional systems of representation" (Fortier, M.1997), the setting of the play in highly realized environments is potentially problematic. In her chapter, "Towards a New Poetics", Sue-Ellen Case argues for the breaking down of traditional values and methods in the development and production of feminist work.

New feminist theory would abandon the traditional patriarchal values embedded in prior notions of form, practice and audience response in order to construct new critical models and methodologies for the drama that would accommodate the presence of women in the art, support their liberation from the cultural fictions of the female gender and deconstruct the valorization of the male gender. (Goodman, L. 1998)

Case goes on to discuss and highlight the importance of the science Semiotics in finding new ways to express the ideas and ideals inherent in feminist theatre. It is not clear whether the location of the text in a realistic production is meant to serve as a way to bring feminist dialogue into a position where it might be more acceptable to the masculine gaze of the mainstream and therefore increase the tension of the masculine and feminine energies of the piece; or rather use the setting as a means of softening the blow of the progressive ideas of the text on the audience. In the examination of semiotics as it applies to feminine theatre it is important to remember that consideration of the audience for whom the work is intended becomes paramount. "The gender, class, and colour of the audience replace the aesthetic traditions of form or the isolated conditions of the author's intent" (Goodman, 1998). When everything on stage becomes a sign to the audience of the ideology and values of the culture it is perhaps possible to intensify these messages outside of the context of the realist style of the dialogue. "The elements of theatrical communication such as language or set pieces no longer appear to be objective, utilitarian or value free. The author's or director's intent

ceases to be perceived as a singular enterprise" (Goodman, L. 1998). It may not be possible to locate *The How and the Why* completely outside of the realist world of its dialogue; it would however be of interest to see the realistic dialogue set in a more minimalist or surreal environment, creating the potential for unlocking new and significant areas of tension between the text and the prevailing culture.

Like the conflicting structural elements of the text, Zelda and Rachel exhibit behavior and ideas which highlight the tension between the traditionally masculine and feminine. Early on in act one of the play, Zelda assesses Rachel's tenacity and the two end up with a comparison of merits in male behavior versus female.

ZELDA: I myself acquired a reputation for being difficult in my youth. Though, back then I think the clinical term was "bitch."

RACHEL: If you were a man you would have been celebrated for it.

ZELDA: But I'm not a man. Neither are you. I know it seems romantic in your youth to behave badly-

RACHEL: Who said I behave badly? (21)

The suggestion is, that challenging the ideas of others enough to be considered, "difficult" is a male trait, and that when it is a female trait, it becomes an undesirable one. The presence in these two women of what would traditionally be considered "male" traits, speaks to Cixous' "other bisexuality." In her article, "Sorties", Cixous describes this as "the location within oneself of the presence of both sexes, evident and insistent in different ways according to the individual, the nonexclusion of difference or of a sex" (Easthope, A. & McGowan, K. 2004). The ideas of the play and of Cixous circulate around the idea that the construction of "woman" is no longer (if it was ever) applicable to the person identifying as female. The presence of both sexes in an individual is natural and desirable. We see this most keenly in Rachel, who though she is in a field where she competes with and holds her own against men, she still desires the role of wife and mother, roles which Zelda has firmly rejected in her life. Rachel also exhibits throughout the script what might have been until recently referred to as, "unladylike" language. While Zelda uses only clinical terms, Rachel not only uses several derivations of the word "fuck", but refers to penises as "rods" and women's pubic areas as "bushes." There is no indication that this in anyway shocks Zelda, but the distinction is clear, and speaks to the "behaving badly" to which has been previously eluded. But though Rachel's manners may be coarse, her ideals are soft, and she places her future on a more traditionally feminine path than Zelda's.

What the relationship between Rachel and Zelda, as well as the internal struggles of each, illustrates is the desire for integration of the strong self-sufficient feminist ideal, with the traditional roles of mother or wife if those roles are desired. As Butler puts it, "representation will be shown to make sense for feminism only when the subject of 'women' is nowhere presumed." (Butler, J. 1990) What it means to be a "woman" is surfacing as something very complex, and Sarah Treem's play, while not pointing a direction, explores the difficulties in the changing of ideas and forging of relationships during the development of a new definition. Indeed the play ends without any clear suggestion of the next step for these two women. The final scene closes on a tableaux of Rachel headed toward the door but turned toward Zelda and Zelda seated and

motionless, Treem leaves us with Zelda's advice to Rachel for dealing with the chaotic days of this period in her life, "ride them through."

Conclusion

Like many of the great feminist thinkers of our time, Treem leaves us with the message that there are no easy answers for the future of the feminist struggle. The action of the play is circular and repeating, and in the end there is finally no conclusion. We do not see Rachel leave, but the two women end the play with the length of the stage between them. There has been no rejection, but also no enactment of a coming together and no promise of one. The ending is an open door, an invitation into what may come next. The play is useful in exploring our battles as women, but also our common ground and common struggle. In not showing us the characters who make up the support structure for these two women it seems necessary to conclude that Treem wants us to see these women as destined to become each other's supports.

The feeling of the play, and of the feminist theory that supports it is that next step is one of hope and an eventually cohesion, not a foreboding, breaking apart. The play enacts a struggle, but the arch of the motion of this struggle is towards reconciliation and love. The play ends with the dream of joining intact. The dream of being joined together continues to exist in the feminist movement and the suggestion is that it will one day be realized. This is embedded even in the scientific theories inspiring the piece. The two theories, which seem so desperate, which seem to argue for two different visions of woman, are destined to come together. The message of Angier's book is that the theories will evolve and survive to express the duality of woman.

Women shoulder the burden of the human brain. Nonetheless, what a bore to have the burden of human consciousness be so one-sided. Enter the antipathogen aspect of menses. This is a selfish, active, and erotic explanation for menses. We are not helping our offspring or our mates or the whole damned race; we are helping ourselves. (Angier, N. 1999)

Time and evolution seem destined to show that we are not meant to divide our womanhood into mother, daughter, lover, masculine, feminine, but to embrace it and celebrate it whole. Treem's play shows us that this is a rocky road, but it must be traveled; and whatever else we are built for, we are built strong enough to ride it through.

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