Sanja JUKIĆ
Biljana OKLOPČIĆ
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Lorenza Jägera 9
HR-31 000 Osijek
sjukic@ffos.hr
boklopcic@ffos.hr

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STYLISTIC READING OF THE AMERICAN DREAM MYTH IN MARSHA NORMAN'S '*NIGHT, MOTHER*[1]

Abstract

The American Dream is one of the most enduring myths in American history, politics, culture, and fiction. Its hypothetical promises of upward mobility, comfortable life, wealth, economic independence, respectable job, equality, and home ownership have offered (almost) everyone a fair chance to succeed in the United States. As any dream, the American Dream must be regularly reexamined, even questioned, to ensure at least the illusion of its viability for the people and nation it serves. Such a reexamination occurs in Marsha Norman's play *'night, Mother* (1982) where sustainability of domestic felicity, unnegotiable social equality, and pursuit of material wealth as the symbolic incarnations of the American Dream myth have been challenged by being turned into minus devices that lead to the break-down of the American nuclear family. This paper aims to question the American Dream myth in Marsha Norman's play *'night, Mother* through the lens of Marina Katnić-Bakaršić's stylistics of drama discourse (2013) to show that different stylistic strategies are used

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to create various aspects of the unsustainable American Dream as well as to emphasize the possible impact of their textual meaning on the depiction of problems arising from the individual—society—the American Dream interrelationship.

Keywords: Marsha Norman, *'night, Mother*, the American Dream, myth, desire, the American Dream, stylistics, mother-daughter relationship

The concept of the American Dream is deeply rooted in American culture and is, according to Jim Cullen, a kind of national motto codified by the Declaration of Independence and the American Constitution and utilized by different social structures when facing crises (5). Its key components are economic and/or social success, search for equality, home ownership (with suburbia life routines, which, "trivial in themselves, had a cumulative effect that felt like security" (Cullen 156)), and a dream of personal fulfillment. In Cullen's view, the concept of the American Dream is ambivalent in itself as it is perceived simultaneously as "the most lofty and the most immediate component of an American identity, a birthright far more meaningful and compelling than terms like 'democracy,' 'Constitution,' or even 'the United States'" (5).

Adopting Cullen's views on the American Dream as a cultural construct fueled by the desire for upward mobility, comfortable life, wealth, economic independence, respectable job, equality and home ownership, Vanessa Del Carpio also emphasizes its omnipresent and inclusive character by stating that "the principle of equality has been the reasoning and basis for achieving the American Dream for many systematically underprivileged and marginalized groups" (69). Yet, like Cullen, Del Carpio warns about systematic contextually conditioned transformations of the American Dream, eventually culminating in its antithesis—the self-purposefulness of the ideas it promotes, especially those concerning family, gender, health, morality, wealth, wisdom, and inborn abilities. The transformative nature of the American Dream myth, which calls into question its positive connotations and explicit practical impacts, i.e. its manipulative potential in social reality, has evoked a number of (critical) responses including literary, cinematic, and theoretical.

In her *Antologija američke drame* (12–17), Sanja Nikčević, for instance, classifies contemporary American dramas as subversive or affirmative based on their relationship to the concept of the American Dream. Whereas affirmative American drama confirms the fundamental values of the American Dream,

subversive American drama rejects the idea of the American Dream as the socio-economic, cultural, existential, and even personal imperative and warns against potentially destructive consequences of the acceptance of this myth as the governing principle of one's behavior and actions. According to Nikčević, the characters in contemporary American plays have a key role in the further division of subversive American drama into old and new (*Subverzivna američka drama* 29, 73). In old subversive American drama, (self)repressive implications of the American Dream are through the characters relationships brought to the extreme—to the elimination of the character (seen as a loser) as they fail to fulfill the American Dream. The failure to succeed is thus perceived as defeat that has to be punished in order for the character to compensate for the lost dignity (Nikčević, *Antologija američke drame* 12). In the new subversive American drama, the influence of the American Dream loses in part its original power, the characters are still losers but their failure to succeed is accepted without guilt as the faith in the American Dream slowly vanishes (Nikčević, *Antologija američke drame* 12): the characters have the right to be imperfect as the American Dream has proven to be the imperfect concept of the American identity (Nikčević, *Antologija američke drame* 12–13).

When it comes to literature and film, one of the harshest literary critiques of the American Dream as a cultural construct is, without doubt, Hubert Selby Jr.'s novel *Requiem for a Dream* (1978) where the transformation of the American Dream's work ethics into the dream of easy money and instant success has tragic consequences for all the characters.[2] The novel's film adaptation of the same title by Darren Aronofsky (2000) also clearly indicates the always present issue of interpolation of the American Dream into the practice of social functioning both in the twentieth and twenty-first century, emphasizing the transformability of the American Dream and its destructive consequences. Like Selby Jr. and Aronofsky, Marsha Norman, an American playwright of Southern roots, has in many of her plays, *'night, Mother* (1982) included, depicted women trapped in oppressive and even repressive situations, in lives with no release, accepting/battling/resigning to social, cultural, and gender expectations of the American Dream myth.

[2] It has to be noted that Cullen also points to the potentially destructive aspects of the American Dream caused by the changes in work ethics introduced by Hollywood, celebrities, and the "California dream" of easy living or at least living that seems easy (172), which is a viewpoint that can be applied to reading Selby Jr.'s novel as well.

Norman herself considered *'night, Mother* "'a play that no one would ever want to see, so there were no compromises to be made'" (qtd. in Gussow 49). When *'night, Mother* won the 1983 Pulitzer Prize and was in 1986 adapted into the film featuring Anne Bancroft and Sissy Spacek, it became rather obvious that this was the play/the film that everyone wanted to read/see as it sent a powerful message about "women forcibly severing ties of blood, marriage, family, the past" (Gussow 49) as well as about "a reevaluation of tradition" (Gussow 49) embedded in the American Dream myth whose utopian character was anticipated by James Truslow Adams,[3] the very founder of the term. To convey this message, Norman builds the plot of *'night, Mother* around several symbolic incarnations of the American Dream (such as family stability, homeownership, and in particular the quest for equality as related to marginalized groups) that operate as minus devices or "the heavy and light holes of an artistic structure," . . . "an unrealized but structurally perceptible element" (Lotman 51, 103, 184) in the play. The way "an unused element, a minus device, is related to the structure of reader expectation, and the way the latter, in turn, is related to the probability that a textually fixed element will be used in a given constructional position, also makes the information carried by the minus device a wholly real and measurable quantity" (Lotman 51).

As one of the symbolic incarnations of the American Dream, the dream of family stability is rooted in the beliefs that "family is more important than power and economic security" (Del Carpio 72) and that family should be protected by whatever means necessary (Jillson 176) to ensure a good life for its members (Bilakovics 368). The "non-utilization" (Lotman 51) of this dream is in Norman's *'night, Mother* present at least in two ways: firstly, as Norman's reduction of the concept of family to a biological coincidence: "MAMA: Family is just accident, Jessie. It's nothing personal, hon. They don't mean to get on your nerves. They don't even mean to be your family, they just are" (23). Secondly, as gradual stripping away of the "layers of distortion and obfuscation that have plagued" (Radavich 120) the Cates family for years to reveal the damaging family dynam-

[3] "The American Dream is that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement. It is a difficult dream for the European upper classes to interpret adequately, and too many of us ourselves have grown weary and mistrustful of it. It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position" (Adams 404).

ics: "JESSIE: You didn't have to lie to me about Agnes. MAMA: I didn't lie. You never asked before. JESSIE: You lied about setting fire to all those houses and about how many birds she has and how much okra she eats and why she won't come over here. If I have to keep dragging the truth out of you, this is going to take all night" (Norman 44).

Another symbolic incarnation of the American Dream is, as already mentioned, the dream of homeownership, which has the broadest appeal and is most widely brought into being in the United States (Cullen 2003; Del Carpio 2015). Homeownership "represents personal independence and privacy, the earned culmination of working toward material success and standing, and a place to raise one's family within a neighborhood" (Bilakovics 369). The "meaningful absence" (Lotman 51) of this incarnation of the American Dream is in the play emphasized by the characters' "shallow possessive individualism" (Bilakovics 378), trivial hedonism, and social voicelessness. The house, even though owned by Thelma ("this is her house" (Norman 2)), radiates no ancestral presence or history. It is situated "way out on a country road" (Norman 3) and there is "no physical connection to a neighborhood or community . . . Very few visitors come to visit; we are told that Jessie always leaves when they arrive, and Agnes no longer stops by at all" (Radavich 120). The plot takes place entirely within the "near-claustrophobic" (Tyler 46) house interior, which is feminized, i.e. littered with magazines and needlework catalogues, Mama's needlework, pillows, afghans, quilts, doilies and rugs, cakes and sweets, connoting gendered social division, existential limitedness, and social invisibility. The suburbia dream as a desired "demographic hybrid" (Cullen 144), as a safe oasis of routinized life patterns, as a desired and existentially fruitful unity of urban and country life is shown as problematic as the dysfunctional mother-daughter relationship and the daughter's decision to commit suicide "depict destructive and sinister forces that secretly operate underneath the polished surface of the lovely American small town and the postwar consumerist dream" (Pokrajac).[4]

The most important symbolic incarnation of the American Dream is the dream of equality, be it political, civil or social,[5] whose promise extends to

[4] Unless otherwise noted, all the translation from Croatian to English were done by the authors of the paper.

[5] Political equality refers to the rights of citizens in relation to the government; civil equality pertains to the rights of citizens in the public sphere; social equality refers to the rights of citizens in their personal dealings with each other.

everyone and makes everyone eligible for the American Dream as "everyone has the hypothetical possibility of being equal in public life" (Cullen 108). As such, the dream of equality relies on individuality, individualism, and freedom of opportunities as its core values. Those values, however, have been only partially granted, or usually denied, to marginalized groups, in particular women. Women were, and still occasionally are, reduced to "commodities who sell themselves to the highest bidder in their attempt to move up the American dream's socioeconomic ladder" (Tyson 17) and "objects [who] look only in order to be looked at while looking" (Tyson 30) or are made to compete "against well-entrenched white men in a matrix of established law and policy that they had developed to protect their current interests and future prospects" (Jillson 7). In Norman's play, the absence of the equality dream is depicted through the marginalized position of women characters whose interactions, when analyzed through the lens of Marina Katnić Bakaršić's stylistics of drama discourse (2013), testify to the fact that the dream of equality "has largely been a male dream, though one hopes that it does not have to be—will not always be—so" (Cullen 119).

The play *'night, Mother* features just two characters—mother Thelma Cates, referred to as Mama throughout the play, and daughter Jessie Cates, with the plot centering around Jessie's decision to commit suicide and Mama's attempts to prevent Jessie from doing it. The reader learns about other characters (Mama's friend Agnes and her daughter Carlene, Jessie's husband and son—Cecil and Ricky, Jessie's brother Dawson, sister-in-law Loretta, Jessie's late father, etc.) and their influence on Mama's and Jessie's actions, decisions, and their relationship through referential dialogs,[6] revealing Mama's discursive dominance due to the information she possesses, which make the reasons of Jessie's decision more clear (Jessie's illness, Jessie's relationship with her father, Cecil's adultery, etc.). Mama uses these dialogs to transfer from the subordinate position (she is upset because she does not know why Jessie needs a gun) to the position of the dominant (or equal) discourse partner who, at least seemingly, could influence the course of events. The conflict between mother and daughter is produced through the dynamics of change of their situational, and then consequently, discursive statuses.[7] By using the concept of motherhood as one of the

[6] Referential dialog is, according to Marina Katnić-Bakaršić, used to provide information about events that occurred before the play takes place.

[7] Katnić-Bakaršić singles out three identities that create the sense of power in a play—*socio-cultural, situational* and *discursive*. Socio-cultural identity is connected to gender, nationality, race, age, or

archetypal phenomena most susceptible to social manipulations,[8] Norman thus demonstrates the inability of the American Dream myth to preserve/maintain the principle of equality in achieving social prosperity formally inaugurated by legal acts that guarantee institutional adherence to the principles of American democracy in a patriarchal context. In this oppressive and repressive system, the mother figure is, without doubt, unprivileged, marginalized and powerless, which allows Norman to show the illusive nature of American society as the society of the equal along with all the destructive consequences that accompany such a representation. Such a position of the mother/woman identities points to the statuses that are determined by their social inferiority and powerlessness caused by the patriarchal context they live in.[9]

The only authority who has stable and unquestionable discursive power in the play is the author's voice that in stage directions takes up the inclusive We perspective (Katnić-Bakaršić 163), i.e. simulates the instructive dialog[10] of power with the reader. Allowing the reader to enter the privileged author space, the author draws them into the illusion of participating in the creation of meaning. On the other hand, the author manipulates the reader through the author perspective and the reliability of information the author as the all-knowing narrator possesses: "Oddly enough, Jessie has never been as communicative or as enjoyable as she is on this evening, but we must know she has not always been this way" (Norman 2). In addition to the information about the characters' age and appearance, the author's voice provides "commentary and explanation" (Biti 53): "It is only in the last year that Jessie has gained control of her mind and body, and tonight she is determined to hold on to that control" (Norman 2), gives insight into how the characters are seen by their surroundings: "Other people have rarely found her quirky sense of humor amusing" (Norman 2), and clarifies the characters' traits: Mama "believes that things are what she says they are" (Norman 2). The manipulative quality of stage directions operates as a stylistic

class; situational identity is a contextual modification of socio-cultural identity; discursive identity is a microidentity determined by direct communication realities (122–23).

[8] In her paper "Angels or Demons: A Comparative Analysis of Motherhood Concept in World Literature," Üstün Kaya argues that mothers are "powerless due to the expectations and rules imposed upon them by patriarchy and society in which 'as mothers, women have been idealized and exploited' (Rich 1995: Introduction: 17)" (876).

[9] "Their house [is] turned into a metaphoric jail in which both women are imprisoned. Consequently women are denied . . . their identity in that patriarchal society" (Raflis 13).

[10] Instructive dialog is a subtype of pragmatic dialog where there exists a clear conflict between a dominant and a subordinate speaker (Katnić-Bakaršić 139).

device intended to encourage the reader to observe and question social power relations and their consequences for unprivileged individuals in the American Dream myth: Mama and Jessie's marginalized status is both gender-related and determined by the life circumstances they have no control over.

The tragic consequences of transferring the dream of equality into personal existential imperatives are further brought into being by the compactness of the play's form. The play *'night, Mother* has no act or scene divisions, "no intervals to relieve the building tension" (Bigsby 238). The compositional homogeneity of the text, which is emphasized in the introductory stage directions: "There will be no intermissions" (Norman 3), serves at least two functions: (1) to simultaneously draw attention to Jessie's decision to commit suicide and to examine the possible reasons that led to it, and (2) to contribute to the gradual build-up of anticipation in real time (the action takes place from 8:15 PM to 10:00 PM), which is additionally "reinforced by a working clock onstage" (Begley 346). Yet, although there is no formal, explicit compositional division, the analysis of the play's language reveals the possibility, as well as the interpretive need, for the implicit compositional division of the play into three parts: (1) the part before Jessie's suicide announcement, (2) Jessie's suicide announcement, and (3) the part after Jessie's announcement. The central indicators of transition from one part to another are breaks in the dynamics of the relationship of domination and subordination between Jessie and Mama. These breaks are realized through the change of dialog types and the distribution of silence; they are announced by stage directions as the medium that governs the placement, duration and connotations of silences between dramatic lines, proxemic relationships, as well as the spatial-temporal context, which helps to determine the meaning effects of verbal and non-verbal segments of the play.

If we allow for the implicit three-part composition of the play, the first part introduces Mama's behavior pattern through instructive dialogs. Articulating banal demands (such as to buy cupcakes, to do a manicure, to measure a piece of knitting, to hand a basket, to bring down a milk can), Mama positions herself as the dominant speaker, yet a physically passive and dependent character. After Jessie announces that she is looking for a gun, a series of mutual subversions of exchange dialog[11] occurs. This means that a constant repositioning of the char-

[11] Exchange dialog implies the exchange of information similar to everyday communication; its subtypes are instructive and interrogative dialog (Katnić-Bakaršić 138–39).

acters' power relations takes place, indicated by the alterations between their situational and discursive statuses and exemplified by information withholding, Jessie's parentification[12] behavior and linguistic act of subversion—Jessie asks why questions and Mama asks reason questions but neither provides answers. Even though the conflict is not verbalized, it is latent and emotion-driven, with the dialog being broken and fragmented. In this part, stage directions are mostly kinetic or proxemic signals describing everyday activity movements (for instance, Jessie's exits operate as a non-verbal rejection of communication and physical contact with people around her as well as an attempt at organizing her individual micro-space; Mama approaches Jessie and takes charge) or giving replies an expressive function. The first part eventually culminates with Mama and Jessie's willingness to take part in the exchange dialog. The dialog consists of Mama's and Jessie's auto-referential conclusions about their marginalized status, social invisibility, and dysfunctionality grounded in their failure to amass enough material wealth and to make themselves socially recognized within the American Dream myth: "MAMA: I am not trying to help, sugar. (No answer) We don't have anything anybody'd want, Jessie. I mean, I don't even want what we got, Jessie. JESSIE: Neither do I" (Norman 10; bold ours).

In the second part, when Jessie announces her decision to commit suicide as an act of individual choice, there is a shift in Mama's communication strategy and the exchange dialog transforms into a confrontation dialog full of Mama's exclamatory lines. The dialog culminates in Mama's conscious advocation of traditional gender roles emphasizing women's inequality, with the aim of provoking Jessie's reaction. Mama thus hopes that Jessie will oppose her stereotypical views by giving up on her suicide decision when witnessing Mama's attempts to transfer parental responsibilities to her son Dawson, i.e., to the man who, as a man, can solve the problem while Jessie, the woman, causes it:

> MAMA: Well, I am calling Dawson right now. We'll just see what he has to say about this little stunt.
>
> JESSIE: Dawson doesn't have any more to do with this.
>
> MAMA: He's your brother.
>
> JESSIE: And that's all.

[12] The term parentification was first used by Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark (1973) to indicate behavior where a child takes up the roles and responsibilities of parents (Puljić 3).

> MAMA (Stands up, moves toward the phone): Dawson will put a stop to this. Yes he will. He'll take the gun away. (Norman 16)[13]

Even though Mama appears to commit intragender subversion, her ultimate goal is, however, something else: she wants to give Jessie back control over her life. To do this, Mama affirms the patriarchal idea of gender inequality in order to rob Jessie of the core values of the equality dream—personal freedom and self-interest, i.e. the control over her life—and paradoxically to save her.

The third part of the play can be read as a series of Mama's consciously calculated moves aimed at preventing Jessie from committing suicide as she lists possible reasons that would make such a decision unnecessary—gardening, doing crosswords, taking care of the dog, shopping, rearranging furniture, going to work, crocheting or having an idyllic future with her son Ricky and her ex-husband Cecil. Mama thus (un)consciously resorts to the familiar / the material / the cliché as the universal remedy for all the problems, i.e. her current problem with Jessie, merely underlining "the pointlessness of her own strategy" (Bigsby 234). Similarly, Mama uses her ownership of the house, which is one of the criteria for the successful completion of the American Dream, to blackmail Jessie into giving up her decision, thus transforming the house into the place of conflict and suicide, which radically subverts the idea of success behind this very criterion: "MAMA: No. You can't do it. I won't let you. The house is in my name" (Norman 19).

In the lines to follow, Mama's verbalization of horror culminates in exclamatory rhetoric indicated by a scale of Mama's emotions in stage directions (Mama is emotionally devastated, hurt, angry, desperately afraid (Norman 79)): she forbids Jessie to kill herself, threatens to call Dawson, accuses Jessie, wants to make her feel guilty—"It's a sin. You'll go to hell" (Norman 18). Yet, for once, mama "lays aside the trivia with which she distracts herself, ceases playing the role into which she has fallen, and fights for her daughter's life with every weapon at hand" (Bigsby 235). Mama and Jessie's intimacy dialog[14] has not been founded on reciprocity and equality, which are "the necessary conditions for the dialog to remain at the level of intimacy" (Katnić-Bakaršić 143): to Mama's emotions of

[13] Confrontation dialog is the most productive type of dialog in a play as it constantly produces new interactions (Katnić-Bakaršić 133–38).

[14] The intimacy dialog is grounded on the idea of support, intimacy, and affection between characters; its preconditions are equality and reciprocity (Katnić-Bakaršić 141–43).

despair, pain, helplessness, fear—she is "nearly unconscious from the emotional devastation" (Norman 79), to Mama's plea for forgiveness, to Mama's declarations of love, to Mama's screaming and yelling, Jessie responds by withdrawal—physical and emotional: "Let go of me, Mama. I've said everything I had to say" (Norman 87) and the intimacy dialog transforms into the confrontation dialog, dominating the third part of the play.[15]

Although Mama initiates confrontation, it gets only partially realized because Mama's stimuli lines do not provoke the desired reaction from Jessie—her responses are ironic, calm, and not connected to the conversation topic. However, from the discontinuously realized exchange dialogue, it is possible to identify the reasons for Jessie's decision. They are: (1) her emotional state: Jessie feels "tired . . . hurt . . . sad . . . used" (Norman 28), (2) her failure at upward mobility, i.e. to achieve economic security and ensure a brighter future for herself, as integral to the concept of the American Dream:

> JESSIE: I took that telephone sales job and I didn't even make enough money to pay the phone bill, and I tried to work at the gift shop at the hospital and they said I made people real uncomfortable smiling at them the way I did. . . . You know I couldn't work. I can't do anything. I've never been around people my whole life except when I went to the hospital. I could have a seizure any time. What good would a job do? The kind of job I could get would make me feel worse. (Norman 35),
>
> (3) her inability to "fix" her own life, thus making suicide the only act of individual freedom she may possess: "it's [life's] all I really have that belongs to me and I'm going to say what happens to it. And it's going to stop. And I'm going to stop it" (Norman 36), (4) the failed family stability: Jessie sees herself as a failed woman, wife, and mother as her husband Cecil left her and her son Ricky has a criminal past and present, for which Jessie blames herself: "He walks around like there's loose boards in the floor, and you know who laid that floor, I did" (Norman 60), (5) her illness: Jessie considers her epilepsy a biological handicap, (6) her personal disintegration and disillusionment, i.e. being "forced to confront not simply a bad day but an irrevocably sad life" (Gussow 46): "And I can't

[15] The drastic transformation of Mama's infantile behavior pattern into a functional fight for Jessie's life calls for return to the play's introductory stage directions about Jessie's psychological state, which shows that Mama's infantility is just pseudo-infantility intended to have a therapeutic effect on Jessie.

do anything either, about my life, to change it, to make it better, make me feel better about it. Like it better, make it work" (Norman 36), (7) her unrealized individuality: "It's somebody I lost, all right, it's my own self. Who I never was. Or who I tried to be and never got there. Somebody I waited for who never came. And never will" (Norman 76), and (8) a wider community driven by the ideology of success, "a social and political world which menaces individuals who have no more control over their fate than she does" (Bigsby 234), thus constantly reminding her of her own failure.

In addition to stage directions and dialogs, in each of the play's parts silences operate as "communicative and meaningful elements in interaction and as usable resources" (Herman qtd. in Katnić-Bakaršić 170), emphasizing the unsustainability of the American Dream myth in the Cates family. The reasons for the use of silences are psychological (for instance, Mama's moments of silence signal shock, verbal paralysis, and inability to act) and discursive, signaling "negation, agreement or rejection" (Saville-Troike qtd. in Katnić-Bakaršić 171) of/to one's choices: for example, Jessie's silence is a reply to withdrawal from conversation; Mama's silence operates as a non-verbal understanding of Jessie's condition. Furthermore, intraturnus silences—the silences "within the lines of one character" (Katnić-Bakaršić 17)—are used to process information (Jessie's statement about her father), to prepare a response (the information about Cecil's infidelity) or to acknowledge something (Mama's confession that she wrote Cecil's farewell message). Interturnus silences—the silences "between the replies of two characters" (Katnić-Bakaršić 17)—intensify the atmosphere of tension and horror or announce the discursive turning points in the play. Three significant moments of interturnus silences can be detected in the play—Agnes's reason for not coming (her aversion to Jessie's epilepsy), the truth that epileptic seizures have been present since Jessie's childhood, and committing suicide as Jessie's final line, which is silence.

In conclusion, it can be asserted that the stylistic shaping of the formative parts of Norman's play *'night, Mother*—stage directions, dialogs, and silences—helps reveal the dreams of family stability, homeownership, and equality, the key concepts integral to the American Dream myth, as the minus devices emphasizing the protagonists' inability to adapt to this most cherished and most desired American social and cultural construct. Mama and Jessie's failure to achieve the core value dreams set by the American Dream concept is, as Norman implies, gender-related and is a comment on the position of women within

the American Dream myth paradigm: the idea that Thelma and Jessie/women "make nothing, produce nothing, and have no meaningful part in any larger social network. They seem to be defined primarily as consumers of foodstuffs and television programs. Their existence is socially invisible" (Begley 347). Furthermore, through the radically disrupted verbal exchange between Mama and Jessie, Norman's play *'night, Mother* shows the unsustainability of the concept of the self-authored person inherent in the ideas of individuality and freedom of choice as the key values of the American Dream. Mama does not perceive herself as an author of her own fate as she takes her life for granted: "I don't know what I'm here for, but then I don't think about it" (Norman 49). For Jessie, too, it "is never a question of realising the American dream, embracing the fantasies, realising the myths of American society . . . [but a question of] paying herself the respect of believing that she is at least the author of her own fate" (Bigsby 232; emphasis ours), which she tries to achieve by self-elimination from a society whose dreams of success she cannot meet.

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STILISTIČKO ČITANJE MITA O AMERIČKOM SNU U DRAMI *'NIGHT, MOTHER* MARSHE NORMAN

Sažetak

Sanja JUKIĆ
Biljana OKLOPČIĆ
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Lorenza Jägera 9
HR-31000 Osijek
sjukic@ffos.hr
boklopcic@ffos.hr

Američki je san jedan od najpostojanijih mitova u američkoj povijesti, politici, kulturi i književnosti jer hipotetički svojim obećanjem društvenog uspjeha, udobnog života, bogatstva, ekonomske neovisnosti, dobrog zaposlenja, jednakosti i posjedovanja vlastitog doma (gotovo) svima nudi jednaku priliku za uspjeh. Kao i svaki mit, Američki je san također podložan stalnom preispitivanju kako bi se osigurala barem iluzija njegove održivosti. Takvo je preispitivanje prisutno i u drami *'night, Mother* (1982.) Marshe Norman u kojoj se obiteljska sreća, društvena jednakost i težnja za materijalnim bogatstvom, kao simbolička utjelovljenja mita o Američkom snu, propituju njihovom pretvorbom u negativne diskurzivne mehanizme koji dovode do raspada američke nuklearne obitelji. Cilj je ovog rada propitati mit o Američkom snu u drami Marshe Norman *'night, Mother* koristeći stilistiku dramskog diskursa Marine Katnić-Bakaršić (2013.) kako bi ne samo analizirali uporabu različitih stilskih strategija u konstruiranju neodrživosti Američkog sna nego i naglasili mogući utjecaj njihovih tekstualnih značenja na prikaz problema koji proizlaze iz složenog međuodnosa pojedinca, društva i Američkog sna.

Ključne riječi: Marsha Norman, *'night, Mother*, Američki san, mit, žudnja, stilistika, odnos majke i kćeri