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**QUEST FOR AUTHENTICITY IN NTOZAKE SHANGE'S
DRAMATIC POETRY**

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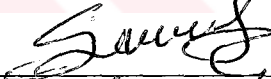
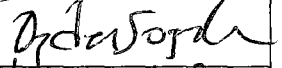

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AMERİKAN KÜLTÜRÜ VE EDEBİYATI Anabilim Dalında 2501020048 numaralı İNCİ BİLGİN'İN hazırladığı "AMERİKAN ZENCİ TİYATROSU" konulu YÜKSEK LİSANS / DOKTORA TEZİ ile ilgili TEZ SAVUNMA SINAVI, Lisansüstü Öğretim Yönetmeliği'nin 10. Maddesi uyarınca 22.06.2004 SALI günü saat .13.30.....'de yapılmış, sorulan sorulara alınan cevaplar sonunda adayın tezinin KABULÜ....."ne* OYBİRLİĞİ / ~~OYÇOKLUĞUYLA~~ karar verilmiştir.

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ABSTRACT

African American women's writing expresses the twofold oppression black women have experienced due to their race and gender. Hence, their writing involves a search for identity. Ntozake Shange, one of the prominent figures of African American female canon, dramatizes this search for identity in her dramatic poetry distinctly. Shange's search in her dramatic poetry involves a reinforcement of her African American roots as well as a dignification of black womanhood. However, her search for identity in content is accompanied by another search in form. Her experimental language as well as her transition between the genres betray another quest she goes through: One to authenticize her experience as well as her writing. Shange's quest for authenticity attributes her many roles most of which imply binary oppositions such as individual versus collective, traditional versus original. Furthermore her writing explores a triple voice owing to her African American and feminist ties. In other words, Shange's writing reveals reconciliation versus revolt which in turn authenticizes her writing and accounts for her challenging existence in the African American female canon.

ÖZ

Amerikalı siyah kadın, yazınında ırkından ve cinsiyetinden dolayı yaşadığı bastırılmışlığı dışavurur; dolayısıyla yazını derin bir kimlik arayışı içerir. Amerikalı siyah kadın geleneğinin tiyatro türündeki en önemli temsilcilerinden olan Ntozake Shange'nin dramatik yazını, bu derin kimlik arayışını çok farklı bir biçimde yansıtır. Amerikalı siyah geleneğine de bağlı kalarak köklerini ararken aynı zamanda da siyah kadını geçmişle uzlaştırarak onu yüceltme arayışındadır. Diğer yandan, içerikteki bu arayışını biçimsel arayışıyla güçlendirir. Dili kullanımındaki deneyselliği ve türler arasındaki geçişi, arayışını daha derin olduğuna işaret eder: Yaşadıklarını ve yazını özgünleştirmek. Shange'nin özgünlük arayışı, ona çelişkili sıfatlar atfeder: Bireysel olduğu kadar kolektif, geleneksel ama orijinal. Yazınıysa üç kimliğini açığa çıkarır; Amerikalı, siyah ve feminist... Diğer bir deyişle, Shange'nin yazını uzlaşmayla isyanını bir arada barındırarak özgünleşir ve özgünleştikçe rakipsizleşir.

PREFACE

How am I to write poetry? At this point when the object of attention in the poems become metaphor not for poetry but for the self, that the search for a way to write poetry becomes a search for identity as well. - Marianne Moore

The 20th Century was witness to a rise in African American Drama as it introduced many prominent figures such as Amiri Baraka, Ed Bullins and August Wilson. However, its distinctness lies in the flourishing of a female canon led by Alice Childress and Lorraine Hansberry in mid 1900's, which is continued today in the works of many contemporary dramatists such as Adrienne Kennedy and Ntozake Shange, who have taken on the task of giving voice to the two times suppressed black woman.

Among these playwrights, Ntozake Shange has been the most strikingly original one since her search for identity is integrated into her writing in terms of both content and form. While she experiments on the smallest segments of her individual and collective self, her writing transcends over rules of language as well as genre. It does not suffice to say that she is in a quest for identity as what she experiences is rather a quest for authenticity.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine Ntozake Shange's dramatic poetry with a view to highlighting the revolutionary attitude that lies beneath. I would like to note in advance that at the early stages of this research I had the challenging experience to reach Shange's plays as most of them were out of print.

I would like to thank my dear supervisor Dr. Özden Sözalın for her inspiring drama classes and full support in each and every stage of my study. Many thanks to my beloved instructor, Prof. Dr. Ayşe Erborı, who taught me all I know about African American tradition and to Assoc. Prof. Dr. Türkan Araz whose intriguing feminism and women's writing classes brought me another perspective. I kindly express my gratitude to my dean at Haliç University Faculty of Science and Letters, Prof. Dr. Atilla Özalpan, for providing such a distinct atmosphere of study. I would express my deepest thanks to Dr. Çiler Özbayrak,

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INTRODUCTION

The notion of self involves a dialectical process in which one comprehends his/her own identity through the other's. The dialectics of race, ethnicity and gender involve the conception of 'self' and 'other' on a relational and problematic level. As one is oppressed and even made invisible in a society dominated by the "self-same", the 'other' fails to develop a healthy identity, in other words an actualized self. When one represents a minor group of the society and condemned to be 'the other', one has to oppress his own individual features for the sake of a collective fate, as is expressed in Du Bois's conception of black experience in America:

One never feels his two-ness, -an American, a Negro, two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideas in one dark body.....The history of the American negro is the history of this strife,- this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self (Du Bois, 1994: 2)

The situation becomes much more problematic when otherness is doubled through an interweaving of race and gender issues. Belonging neither to the category of black men nor to that of the white women, the black woman is situated at the bottom of any social group.

Being both black and woman, Ntozake Shange internalizes the condition of the other twice, hence acquires a two times otherized conception of herself. Borrowing Frantz Fanon's terms she considers her experience as a black woman 'a combat breath'. Doubly oppressed, doubly 'other'ized, she is obliged to experience commonness as well as a cognition of a 'collective identity'. Since she does not possess anything special to her, she is distanced from an individual identity. Borrowing from Robert Stepto the terms he used to analyze African American writing in his **From Behind The Veil**, one can consider Shange's writing as a 'search for authenticity' as well as authority.

One of the prominent black women playwrights of American drama, Ntozake Shange (En-to-zä-ke Shong-ga) was born on 18 October 1948, in Trenton, New Jersey as Paulette Williams, the eldest child of a highly intellectual family. When her family moved to St. Louis, Missouri, Shange had to face with the realities concerning her race in a German-American school. However, the same St. Louis offered her acquaintance with a wide range of art such as opera, dance, music, literature and painting which would later feed her writing skills. Shange who was an enthusiastic reader even in childhood, started her first readings with Mark Twain, Herman Melville, Simone de Beauvoir, Jean Genet and W.E.B. DuBois who was also a family friend. Shange completed high school in New Jersey where she witnessed the oppression black females experienced in America. Then she started Barnard College and during her college education she divorced her former husband. Shange attempted suicide due to the sense of loss, this early divorce caused. Even though Shange confessed her drug addiction and attempted suicide a few times as a reaction to society, such a life style did not affect her life as a successful student. She earned a bachelor's degree in American studies from Barnard College in 1970, with honors. Subsequently, she acquired her MA in American studies in 1973 from the University of Southern California, Los Angeles. In 1971, she decided to take an African name. From then on, she was called Ntozake "she who comes with her own things" Shange "who walks like a lion", a name which accounts for her quest to possess something new as well as her challenging attitude.

Shange started her teaching career in 1972 in Sonoma State College followed by Mills College, and the University of California Extension where she taught humanities, women's studies and Afro-American studies. At the same time she was dancing and reciting poetry with the Third World Collective, Raymond Sawyer's Afro-American Dance Company, West Coast Dance Works; and her own company which was then called For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide. Shange moved to New York City where she was inspired to produce her choreopoem **For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When The Rainbow Is Enuf** (produced in 1975). Shange owned her reputation when she was 27 years old, with the publication of this choreopoem. While continuing teaching at

City College of New York, she has had several volumes published: **Sassafrass: A Novella** (1977); **Nappy Edges**, a book of poems (1978); and **Three Pieces** (1981), a book which contains three theater pieces. A number of her short stories were also published: **Yardbird Lives**, **the Little Magazine**, **HooDoo #7**, **the Black Scholar**, **Ms. Magazine**, **Midnight Birds**, and **the American Rag**; poems by Shange were published in **Black Maria**, **Black Heights**, **the Black Scholar**, **Yakity Yak**. Yale University, University of North Dakota, Howard University, New York University, Detroit Art Institute, Southern University are among the institutions Shange lectured between 1976 and 1980. Also, in 1977, Shange married her second husband, David Murray, a musician, while Shange worked as an assistant professor of English and drama at Douglass College, a collection of over fifty of her poems was published by St. Martin's Press in 1978. Shange still continues her teaching career and lives with her daughter in New York City. Her published books can be listed as such:

- **For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When The Rainbow Is Enuf** (San Lorenzo, Cal.: Shameless Hussy Press, 1976; London: Eyre Methuen, 1978).
- **Sassafrass: A Novella** (Berkeley, Cal.: Shameless Hussy Press, 1977).
- **Nappy Edges** (New York: St. Martin's, 1978).
- **Three Pieces** (New York: St. Martin's, 1981).
- **Some Men** (N.p., 1981).
- **Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo** (New York: St. Martin's, 1982).
- **A Daughter's Geography** (New York: St. Martin's, 1983).
- **From Okra to Greens: A Different Love Story** (St. Paul: Coffee House Press, 1984.)
- **See No Evil: Prefaces, Essays & Accounts, 1976-1983** (San Francisco: Momo's Press, 1984.)

Ntozake Shange was awarded several times for her play productions. Her play productions are listed below:

- **For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When The Rainbow Is Enuf**, New York, Studio Rivbea, 7 July 1975; New York, New Federal Theatre, March 1976; transferred to Public Theatre, 1 June 1976; transferred to Booth Theatre, 15 September 1976.
- **A Photograph: A Still Life With Shadows/A Photograph: A Study of Cruelty**, New York, Public Theatre, 21 December 1977; revised as **A Photograph: Lovers-In-Motion**, Houston, Equinox Theatre, November 1979.
- **Where the Mississippi Meets the Amazon**, by Shange, Thulani Nkabinda, and Jessica Hagedorn, New York, Public Theatre, December 1977.
- **From Okra to Greens**, New York, Barnard College, November 1978.
- **Black & White Two-Dimensional Planes**, New York, Sounds-In-Motion Studio Works, February 1979.
- **Spell #7**, New York, Public Theatre, April 1979.
- **Boogie Woogie Landscapes**, New York, Frank Silvera Writer's Workshop, June 1979.
- **Mother Courage & Her Children**, adapted from Bertolt Brecht's play, New York, Public Theatre, April 1980.

Ntozake Shange's writing reflects the climaxes of her own life. Searching for a unified identity as a black woman, Shange expresses her quest through her writing. As she writes, she gradually personalizes her writing both in terms of content and form. She not only adheres to her African-american , feminist role but also transforms into a non-collective, thoroughly individualized style. Parallel to the searches in content, her writing challenges the traditional rules of its genre and deserves to be considered truly experimental in form. For instance including a chapter full of dialogues, her novel **Lilianne: The Resurrection Of The Daughter** reveals how Shange alternates descriptive analysis with dramatic dialogues. Depicting Lilianne while talking to the psychotherapist, Shange represents her

characters in action like in drama even though in the rest of the chapters, her characters are presented through narration. Likewise, Shange considers her drama “poetry of a moment” (Shange, 1994: 67), donating it with poetic language. Most of her poetry, on the other hand, consists of performance pieces accompanied by music and dance. Many critics view her different style of writing as choreopoems. Shange’s search for a new conception of African American female identity leads to another search for a new dramatic form as vivid as drama and as imagist as poetry which may be considered dramatic poetry.

Focusing on her six published choreopoems which reflect different segments of her quest, this thesis aims at examining the major dynamics as well as the outcomes of her revolutionary quest. In an interview with New York Times in 1989, Shange accounts for the dynamics of her quest:

...I’m a woman playwright. And I would hope that my choice of words, choice of characters and situations reflect my experience as a woman on the planet. I don’t have anything that I can add to the masculine perception of the world. What I can add has to be from what I have experienced. And my perceptions, and my syntax, my colloquialism, my preoccupations are found in race and gender (qtd. in Tekinay, 2001 :147).

Shange’s writing reflects not only her experience as a black woman but also her quest for African American roots, a dignified black womanhood as well as a unified identity. Thus, Ntozake Shange’s dramatic poetry can be considered in three periods which altogether highlight this inner quest. The more she writes the more she personalizes her ‘collective identity’ and asserts the dignity of her individual identity fed by her collective ties. Deconstructing the rules of language as well as those of genre, Ntozake Shange places herself at a dignified point and demands her authenticity as well.

1. A SEARCH FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN ROOTS

The Negro race is a mighty one
The work of the Negro is never done
Muscle, brains, and courage galore
Negroes in this house
Meet me at the back door
Oh! The negro race is a mighty one
Each and every one of you is an example of one
Oh! The negro race is a mighty one
We goin to show the world
What can be done
Cause the Negro race is a mighty one
(Shange, 1985: 23).

Ntozake Shange proudly declares that she is the grandchild of a nation suffering slavery especially in three of her plays; **Spell #7**, **Boogie Woogie Landscape** and **A Photograph: Lovers In Motion**, which she published in the same play collection entitled **Three Pieces** in 1979. These plays accompanied by music and dance reveal that Shange attempts to present the traditional African elements in her dramatic writing. Her writing may not be called mere drama as she states that her main objective is to capture “the poetry of moment” as well as “the emotional & aesthetic impact of a character or a line” (Shange, 1994: 67). As Y.S. Sharadha suggests Shange’s search for an African American drama is an attempt to convey the theatre of her time to the realm of drama which represents the lives of the black (Sharadha, 1998: 92). Shange’s performance pieces, however, do not merely represent the lives of the black but stands at a critical point as she revises and subverts the stereotypical figures of that race.

Hence, Ntozake Shange’s search for African American roots involves a new representation of blackness. This quest leads her to introduce a new language

alternative to English through which Shange claims she was taught to hate herself (Shange, 1994: 68). For it is only through this new language, she believes that she can express the thoughts and feelings she wants to communicate. Thus she asserts that she deliberately deforms the English language to reflect her quest to respond to African American tradition not only in content but also in form: "I haveta fix my tool to my needs" (Shange, 1994: 68). Hence, Ntozake Shange's **Three Pieces** may be considered a search to reconcile with the African roots. Through this collection, Shange signifies on English language as well as European literary tradition. Responding to her African heritage as well as reinforcing it with her American experience, Shange adheres to Du Bois's depiction of double consciousness:

Negro is sort of the seventh son, born with a veil and gifted with second sight in this Americanized world, a world which yields him true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of the other (Du Bois, 1994: 2).

The 'second sight' Du Bois claims the negro is gifted with, accounts for Ntozake Shange's authentic style of writing, rich and witty use of language and original devices she feeds her writing with. Her quest for a response to the previous call of African American Literature in content accompanies another search for an original form of drama.

As Henry Louis Gates suggests the black writers;

explicitly and implicitly, turn to the vernacular in various formal ways to inform their creation of written fictions. To do so it seems to me, is to ground one's literary practice outside the Western tradition. Whereas black writers most certainly revise texts in the Western tradition, they often seek to do so "authentically", with a black difference, compelling sense of difference based on black vernacular (Gates, 1998: xxii).

Revolving the dramatic plot around the issue of race in her three plays while introducing new dramatic techniques and a new language, Shange tries to authenticate her writing. She adheres to her traditional ties involving music, dance and magic as well as oral stories.

One of the oral elements frequently used in Shange's plays is the trickster figure. Helen Lock in her article entitled "Transformations of The Trickster" defines the trickster figure as a central archetypal character whose major attribute is to swindle and play tricks in order to deceive. In the same article, she traces the development of the trickster from an archaic archetype in ancient folklore to a modern literary figure which functions as a purveyor of tricks, especially on the reader. Another definition of the trickster archetype is given by Henry Louis Gates focusing on two signal trickster figures namely Esu-Elegbara and the signifying monkey. Gates considers Esu-Elegbara as "a figure of nature and function of interpretation and double-voiced utterance" and the signifying monkey as "the figure of figures" (Gates, 1998: xxi). Hence, Esu with its two heads stands for the double voice of the interpreter and the interpreted, whereas signifying monkey represents the signifying language. In one of the myths of Afro-American oral literature, the monkey plays an intricate game on the lion through their mutual friend, the elephant. Using the elephant as an instrument to swear at the lion, the monkey mocks the lion. Unable to decode the parable signs, the lion takes the monkey's signifying speech on the narrative level and fights with the innocent elephant. However on the meta-linguistic level, it is the monkey challenging the authority of the lion. As Gates suggests, pretending to speak literally, but speaking figuratively, the signifying monkey breaks the authority of lion the king through mimicry (Gates, 1998: 56). Thus, the signifying monkey serves as a trickster who pretends to be stupid behind a cunning fool's mask. Similarly, while her characters signify on simple speeches, Shange at times dwells at the crossroad of criticism through double utterance.

Shange's treatment of the issue of race varies in each play of this collection. In **Boogie Woogie Landscapes**, she conceptualizes the subconscious connotations of blackness through dreams. **A Photograph: Lovers In Motion** centers around the

revelation of blackness through art and love. In **Spell # 7**, Shange depicts a reconciliation of black characters with blackness through minstrel performances. In her article entitled “Black Minstrelsy and Double Inversion, Circa 1890”, Annemarie Bean suggests that through minstrelsy,

African American minstrels were showing audiences that minstrelsy was just a show, a pretense, a performance of color and gender rather than a presence African American culture, even when performed by African Americans (in Elam, 2001:187).

However, the way Shange plays with the minstrel mask implies that it is not merely a show but a means of black self-expression. All three plays analyzed in this chapter offer a response to the previous call of the previous African American writers.

Tracing the development of modern black drama in **Performing Blackness**, Kimberly W. Benston suggests that the major concern of modern black theater is no more “educating the people” but “embracing the audience in collective affirmation of certain values, styles and goals” (Benston, 2000: 51). Benston further argues that modern black theory has refigured and reclaimed the black legacy; supporting his view with the displacement of dramatic narration into collective improvisation (51). According to Benston, the call and response tradition is adhered to for the sake of an authorial mastery. In this respect, modern black drama unites searches for collective identity and individual identity which reinforce each other.

Similarly, Ntozake Shange’s plays in this chapter try to confront with black identity as well as black experience in terms of content. The response to the call of the previous African American writers and the embodiment of African American elements imply an adhesion in form as well. Doing this, Shange reinforces her collective ties and asserts her black identity. Hence, the common ground in these plays is that they all celebrate the black tradition while glorifying black individuals.

1.1. A Fantastic Encounter With Subconscious Blackness: **Boogie Woogie Landscapes**

A fantastic tone is explicit in the presentation of race issue in her play **Boogie Woogie Landscapes** which is first published in 1979. In this play Shange depicts Layla whom she considers 'an all-American colored girl' (Shange, 1981: 113), a child of educated black parents while dreaming. Through her encounter with night life companions who bring music and dance, Shange depicts Layla in a journey towards her subconscious, which is reminiscent of Shange's own life. As Shange notes in the stage directions, their visit indicates "the first instance of spirits& an attitude toward life that makes fantasies tangible" (113). Shange opens the doors of fantasy through dreams in order to handle the issue of race, in a way reminiscent of her use of magic in **Spell#7**. As Neal Lester argues "Use of a dream motif as a structural device frees Shange from an artificially ordered portrayal of human mind at work, even when one's body and consciousness are at complete rest" (Lester, 1995: 176). Layla goes through a moment of epiphany that enables her to redefine her very existence. Sharadha suggests that the play "... with no traditional plot or theme, resembles the stream-of-consciousness style of James Joyce. Bits and pieces of Layla's experiences, memories, and dreams are presented in such fragmented fashion that it is difficult for the audiences to find a theme in the piece" (Sharadha, 1998: 117). The play **Boogie Woogie Landscapes** is considered among Shange's most experimental pieces by Edith Oliver:

Delienating the internal emotions of one girl as she sleeps, Layla's memories join the 'nite life companions' of her psyche to create 'an emotional landscape/a felt architecture' in a stunningly original evocation of what it means to be 'a colored girl' in America today (in Shange, 1981: cover page).

Layla's awareness of the audience and her address "dontcha wanna be music n ease on into the fog/ like rain&sun/like daybreak/dontcha wanna be..." (113) announces a play-within-a-play structure. The companions who are identified as

cast at the beginning but referred to as n.l.c.1-2-3-4-5 , abbreviation for night life companion in the text, reflect Layla's subconscious. In this respect they reveal her past as a colored girl as well as her deepest fears concerning race because "she is trapped in black&white..." (114). The yearning towards other sorts of color is made explicit by the depiction of her cheek in daffodils. At this stage, however, Layla is not aware of the ongoing problem of race as her initial concern is nature rather than culture. Associating herself with fog, she is distanced from the reality of culture as "She never thought people, places or ideas were anything other than black & white" (114). Yet Layla signifies on nls's speeches since she takes their speech on the narrative level, figuratively: "dontcha wanna be music&ease into the fog? Dontcha wanna be like rain/like a cosmic event..." (114). Through Layla, Shange adheres to the signifying tradition Henry Louis Gates, Jr relates to the African American folk story 'signifying monkey' (Gates, 1998: xix). Furthermore, the dialogue of Layla with the characters involves another African American feature 'call' and 'response' which Robert Stepto considers the major objective of African American writing (Stepto, 1991: xvi); which draws on the blues tradition. In this respect, the nlc's function as the common voice calling Layla back to her kin.

At the beginning of their speech, Layla responds indifferently to the n.l.c.s as she is an 'all American colored girl'. Yet the stories of suffering African American people which the n.l.c.s tell Layla, gradually change Layla's main concerns. Finally Layla meets her subconscious sense of blackness which Zora Neale Hurston expresses as "Someone is always at my elbow reminding me that I am the granddaughter of the slaves" (in Norton, 1979: 1437). Layla reveals her hidden obsession with race by eating black and white newspapers. Gradually Layla notices her racial identity as "Everything she touches gets blacker" (115) since "She was black enuf awready" (115). In this respect, the nlc's start to narrate Layla's story. For instance in response to the white men urging them "nigghas/niggahs/go home/niggahs!", the n.l.c.s in unison tell the story of little black children:

the lil black things/ pulled to her&whimpered lil black whys/"Why did those white men make red of our house/ why did those white

men want to blacken even the white doors of our house/why make
fire of our trees/&our legs/why make fire/why laugh at us/say go
home/aren't we home/arent we home? (118,119).

Upon hearing the story, Layla adds "I drew the lil black things with me under my bed&wiped the scarlet stains from their mouths with the light of myself" (119). As this quotation indicates, Layla has disregarded her fears concerning race in childhood and now projects her subconscious dilemma on the children. When the little black why's grew further and the defense mechanisms no longer worked, the little girl "...got too big to hide under her bed, she didn't really want to hide any more" (119). Throughout the play, Layla gradually becomes any African American woman rather than any American black woman as suggested at the very beginning. Parallel to this content, there are similar implications in the form. This play involves African American elements together with hope as in his criticism to the play, Neal Lester also mentions:

Using expressionist techniques, impressionistic imagery, and her characteristic collage of dance, music and poetry, Shange presents a choreopoem that is more complicated structurally, more theatrically complex, less idealistic philosophically, less naturalistic performatively, and more 'entertaining theatrically' than her previous dramas (Lester, 1995: 175).

The room for hope is made explicit through the rainbow simile which brings other colors to Layla's life because "she was too full for a black&white&skinny life" (120). A psychoanalytical reading of the play focusing on Layla's motives, implies a search for fantasy. One of her parable dreams involves even a solution to the notion of race foregrounding the neutral color gray. The African elements such as spirit and gold embedded in her dream also reveal her subconscious sense of blackness. Layla's yearning towards a marine intrusion in order to become like wind, like rain, a cosmic event involves uniting with nature, hence implies a distance towards culture. The images of glass and mirror stand for self-reflection as well as transparency. In turn, Layla

is in search for a unified identity. The association of her hair with accorn, however, signifies the racial codes directed towards her. The image of a white man spreading an undesirable, sick kiss on her mouth spoils the blue fantasy in her dreams as in the middle of them she notices her reality. Reflecting the submissive side of this experience, Layla confesses “I am sometimes naked but mostly I wear my past/the pinafores&white socks that shamed me” (122). Yet revealing her inner revolt, she declares that this woman with accorn hair can be caressed and “can stimulate even the men with leica eyes” (122). These words reflect not only the macho point of view directed towards women but also the prejudice towards the black race. Hence, no black woman with accorn hair is considered a suitable match to any white man with leica eyes.

The dilemma women experience is further revealed through the depiction of a woman who wants to be loved by a man. As she wishes to meet her partner, she encounters two aggressive women reminding her of feminism: “Noone shall be able to see any sexual violence or rape” (124). Another criticism is directed towards New York Times “can the ny times dance?” (125), because it does not concern itself with race and gender issues so much. Thus Layla projects her hatred towards racism onto the black and white newspaper and eats it. As this incident suggests, Layla at this stage is very well guarded against the racial issue going on. Her reconciling American side is gradually replaced by her protesting African side. Furthermore, her feminist side is foregrounded as she has no more tolerance for any derogatory feminine depiction: “I can’t stand no man calling me babe to my face” (126). Being two times suppressed, Layla tells that she feels herself like an oven. Sharadha traces this simile to Layla’s sense of emptiness and wish to be filled in order to justify her existence (117). The oven simile may also stand for her lament to turn everything darker as everything she touches gets blacker. At this stage of her search for identity, Layla may be experiencing a process of self-alienation as Sharadha claims (118). This self-alienation involves an unease to reconcile with a black female identity.

However in Layla's case, the encounter with nlc's introduces her African roots much more than her female identity. References to black musicians and dancers as well as the accompanying African folk elements, music and dance indicate a call to enjoy if not to transgress the African heritage. In her article entitled "Oh Tiny Land Mass Just Outside of My Vocabulary: Expression of Creative Nomadism and Contemporary African American Playwrights", Kimberly D. Dixon traces African American drama to a 'creative nomadism' motive that enables the playwrights to represent movement and homelessness together (in Elam, 2001: 212) . Thus it may be possible to relate Shange's treatment of music and dance as accompanying elements, to the continuous migration her ancestors once experienced. Centralizing African American elements, music and dance probably purvey a possible escape from the past memories. Hence, the sorrowful past experience "in atlantic city, club harlem, bein colored on the 4th of July" (128) is distanced. A final reconciliation occurs since a call to enjoy the rhythms of the tradition announces: "rock me daddy roll me daddy bring met them . rythms &blues, I'm a neo-afrikan lady" (129).

That the play ends with music and dance further implies reconciliation. Finally the night life companions come alive celebrating the passing of tradition to the younger generation. The illusion is broken but chant can still be heard implying that the past is over and the future is promising, yet sorrowful memories of the past remain unforgettable. The play **Boogie Woogie Landscapes** dramatizes the connotations of being black and offers a chance to reconcile with them. Ntozake Shange considers this play "the secrets and traumas of an Afro-American childhood, a double entendre about myself, the many different places I have lived and their varying psychological topography" (qtd. in Sharadha, 1998: 119). Representing the oppressed African American child in a a parable journey, Ntozake Shange justifies her own motives for the quest for the African roots.

1.2. A Revelation of Black Identity

A Photograph: Lovers In Motion is another play published in the collection **Three Pieces**. Although it is not a play consisting of choreopoems like many others, Neal Lester mentions that many critics viewed it negatively owing to its unintegrated dramatic structure (Lester, 1995: 140). Tracing the criticism on the play, Lester claims that Shange in this play, does not focus on traditional plot development but focuses on the responses of the black characters (141). However, Shange's foreword to the plays reveals that she does it on purpose in order to introduce something original to American drama which she considers shallow, stilted and imitative (Shange, 1994: 67). Similarly, Sharadha suggests that the dramatic action in this play reveals African American initiation and survival rituals (Sharadha, 1998: 103), attributing Shange the role to authenticize dramatic action.

In this play, Shange centralizes the issue of race on the search for identity a black artist, Sean, experiences. His dilemmatic love affairs with Nevada, Claire and Michael as well as his insincere friendship with Earl reveal that nothing in life is as it seems to be. At the beginning of the play, Sean is presented while taking photos of Michael who is dancing. Michael who brings Sean's life music and dance, symbolizes the African heritage Sean belongs to. She is Sean's true lover while the rest of the characters, namely Nevada, Claire and Earl stand for the individualistic American world. The play depicts Sean in a journey where he tests the identity that dominates him; collective versus individualist.

At the beginning of the play, Shange notes in the stage directions that the door of Sean's studio is always open. Anybody can easily intrude as his doors are open without distinction. Figuratively, it is implied that Sean is unable to choose the priorities of his life. Only Michael who is a dancer, is special for him ; yet he is not strong enough to appreciate even Michael. His words "There are a number of women in my life who I plan to keep in my life & I'll never let any of them come between us/between what we have in our world/ you hear" (Shange,

1981: 61), reveal that Michael is different than the rest. While he takes photos of Michael, dance and photograph are somehow integrated. Doing this, Shange projects her major objective in her plays; a capture of artistic moment that she suggests at the very beginning of her foreword to **Three Pieces**. It may be concluded that in Shange's depiction, true love is an aesthetic moment that can be captured like poetry. Her use of poetic language in this play supports this view. For instance Michael's words while talking to Sean are full of imagery: "I'm not just turning the pages/I'm feeling these photographs like I feel dance/you know/so a spark gets in my chest/leaps thru my calves&thighs til I wanna jump up &down" (58). However as soon as there is any intrusion like the entrance of Earl, their special dialogue becomes ordinary: "That's right/we are struggling artists together/right Sean?"(59).

Sean's tension to assert his intellectual capacity and literacy is reminiscent of the tension of his African American ancestors. Frederick Douglass in his slave narrative suggests that he was made a man through literacy. As Robert Stepto develops further, through documentation, the African American author tries to authenticate his writing which is the only way to declare literacy and freedom (Stepto, 1991: 21) . Similarly, Sean continuously refers to Alexandre Dumas, Victor Hugo and other celebrities. His ambition to be famous and dignified is revealed in his following sentences:

those guys/frank stewart&pinterhughes/adger cowan/they're from new york. &they have never seen what I see/ how cd they?There is no light anywhere like there is in san Francisco. Wait till I get my first show/ there have never been any photographs like the ones I'm gonna take (57).

Through art, Sean is in need of subscribing his name and declare his very existence to the white world. While Earl is talking to Nevada about Sean, he accounts for Sean's motives as such: "he needs what you&I have/ nevada. A sense of his future. That a black man lived to hear his name shouted on the streets" (67).

His following words further depict the white conception of blackness: “yeah. see whatta niggah cd do when the rest of us were slaves” (68). A similar dialogue takes place between Earl and Claire while talking about Alexandre Dumas and Sean’s admiration for him. Claire tells that Alexandre Dumas smelled ‘an acrid stench/the stench of a niggah’ and adds that Sean smells like a niggah, too. These words imply that even if a black man is a celebrity, nothing changes the way he is perceived in society.

Although everybody around Sean perceives him as a **niggah**, still a half slave, Michael focuses her interest in Sean as an individual. When Sean is with Michael, he is united with his collective self which is a part of nature:

Michael/stick with me/I’m a genius for unravelling the mysteries
of the darker races/sometimes our spit seems to be brine from the
sea& those ships/a grease burn on some woman looks like a brand/
Michael/I swear I know who we are... I know who we are (77).

Bell suggests that Afro-American novel centers around a quest for dignity involving both ancestral ties and individual potential and adds that through this quest the divided, alienated self turns into a truer, better unified, literate self (Bell, 1987: 60). Extending this argument, it may be concluded that African American art, involving dance and photograph, is a quest to unite the collective and individual self.

The play also displays some feminist mood between the lines. Sean’s categorizing the women in his life into two implies a macho perspective. Claire and Nevada are women who give him just fun whereas Michael may be a sincere companion for life. Besides, this male perspective is internalized by most of the female characters. For instance, Michael who is aware of Sean’s love affairs does not resist but sparing her bed from the other women’s. Similarly, the lesbian tension between Claire and Michael indicates a search for authority. However,

Shange successfully deconstructs the patriarchal view internalized by women by depicting them as the strong characters.

Michael is the figure who accuses Sean of neglecting his ancestral ties and thinking that being a niggah is being nothing. She arouses a stream of consciousness in Sean reminding him of the African American tradition. Doing this, she constantly refers to the strong African American woman figures and reinforces the matriarchal grandma image of their tradition. When she tells him about how her grandma carried a shotgun to protect black children from the white, she points out the role of the female in African American culture. Thus, the feminist tension that is sometimes revealed in the play remains an instrument to refer to the African American tradition. While Michael tells anecdotes, she uses the black traditional folk element trickster.

Reminiscent of the trickster figure, the signifying monkey in African American tradition, Michael uses a figurative language. For instance when she tells about a monkey his father once had a monkey to which he treated better than her, her words involve irony. Doing this, she pretends to take the situation easy. Michael who seems to be duped by Claire and Sean dupes them indeed. Pretending to tell Sean how her grandma used to tell them about Garvey, Du Bois and others; she tells Sean about the whole tradition.

The search for identity Sean experiences goes parallel to his search for his African roots. Through this process, art sets a tool to ensure his own worth: "I that art was survival" (85). Sean confesses that he fails to love anybody even himself. Thus his intention to declare "I'm a man" reveals nothing but a sense of self-questioning. While he utters that he is a man, he also implies that he is not really a man. He recalls the monkey his father used to feed and asserts his secondariness again and again. An image of a silent boy is configured as the lack of response to the continuous question "lil boy what did you do while he fed his monkey?" (88) embodies. Similarly, Michael tells Sean's story using monkey simile. This simile implies that Michael depicts Sean as a signifying figure who searches for authority through trick.

The final scene that unmask everybody, conveys a specific message: Nothing is worth compromising for your own roots, therefore in such a pragmatist world, you should stick to them. As opposed to Michael who represents Sean's natural ties, Nevada, Claire and Earl stand for his cultural identity. When Sean confesses his love towards Michael and prefers her to Nevada, he declares the superiority of love over money, art over matter; hence his African side over American. He ends up asserting **contours of love unnoticed** and reconciling.

1.3. A Proud Declaration- Colored&Love It

Ntozake Shange's play **Spell #7** embodies the issue of race through a reverse minstrel show. Her use of minstrelsy implies a response to the previous call to transcribe the oral tradition. By hanging the mask from the top of the ceiling in front of the stage, she foregrounds the issue of race. Considering the minstrel mask "grotesque, larger than life misrepresentation of life" (Shange, 1994: 71) in the initial stage direction, Shange attributes the racial codes an illusionary role. The very existence of a magician, Lou, who casts a spell on the characters at the very beginning, conveys the play to an illusionary ground. Reinforcing the notion of illusion, Shange introduces her nine characters, namely Lou, Alec, Dahlia, Eli, Bettina, Lili, Natalie, Ross, Maxine in a play-within-a-play structure. Since the characters who meet in a bar atmosphere developing strategies to struggle against the racist approach in American theatre at the time are themselves black actors/minstrels each performing single acts of black people suffering.

Shradha suggests this play "attempts to create a liberated stage space for black self-expression" (Sharadha, 1998: 98). Yet this self expression may involve duality owing to the black 'double consciousness' suggested by Du Bois. Since minstrelsy signifies not only a traditional tie to adhere but also a veil to abolish. In Claudia Tate's interview, Shange comments on the function of minstrelsy in this play as such:

It was risky for us to do the minstrel dance in *Spell# 7*, but I insisted on it because I thought the actors in my play were coming from pieces they didn't want to be in but pieces that helped them pay their bills. Black characters are always closed up in a point (Tate, 1983: 172).

At the very beginning of the play Lou initiates the minstrel show through a spell:

ain't no colored magician in his right mind gonna make you white.
I mean this is blk magic you looking at. I'm fixing you up good /
fixing you up good&colored, you gonna be colored all yr life you
gonna love it/ bein colored/ all yr life/ colored and love it/ love it/
bein colored. *Spell#7* (72) .

The magician Lou's spell on the black characters implies the dark history of black race while foreshadowing a reconciling end at the same time. Shradha suggests:

one major difference between Shange's minstrel show and traditional shows is that Shange's black minstrels do not effect stereotypical comic relief through their portrayals. They rather recall the black people's subservience to whites (95).

However the conception of race on an illusionary level, breaks the seriousness of the race issue while it adheres to the foolishly innocent yet political tone of minstrel shows. Another reference to the traditional minstrel shows is asserted when Lou's function in the play is examined. Lou purveys a focalizing function in dramatic form as it is through Lou that the audience gets to know the characters. Doing this, he assumes the role of an 'Interlocutor' in traditional minstrel shows which Cronacher defines as:

the 'straight man' to two 'end men', who speak in an imitation of African- American dialect and play the bones and tamborine. The interlocutor feigns a dignified air and is responsible for setting jokes and regulating the pace (Cronacher, 1992: 185).

Tracing Lou's function to the traditional minstrelsy, Neal A.Lester in his **Ntozake Shange: A Critical Study of the Plays** also depicts Lou as such:

Just as the traditional minstrel shows incorporated an Interlocutor or 'straight man' who served as master of ceremonies for the vaudeville entertainment, Shange introduces Lou as that figure who narrates the action, summons the action to perform, and provides transitions between the scenes (Lester, 1995: 86).

However, depicting Lou as the interlocutor Shange does not merely adhere to the traditional shows but subverts the role of the interlocutor as Lou is "not a straight man" only "but a trickster figure who fools white in the audience with the trope of the minstrel show." (Cronacher, 1992: 185) . Since casting a spell both on the characters and the audience as well as undoing his spell at times, Lou dupes them.

Such a subverted representation of minstrelsy in play **Spell#7** involves parody as Lester argues "In reassessing African American experience and accentuating those positively sustaining aspects of racial identity, Shange creates a parody of the traditional American minstrel shows..." (83) . As the black faced Dahlia passes the black-faced mask to Alec and the other performers while singing and dancing, a sense of ceremony is conveyed mockingly. This act centralizes the notion of black race as it signifies the passing of a collective notion or tradition namely minstrelsy from generation to generation. However it also implies that minstrelsy could have been removed through a single touch. As a revolt against the repetitive call of white voices "Hey niggah/ over here... hey niggah/over here..." (Shange, 1994: 74), the black-faced figures reveal their masks. As the masks are abandoned, the present time when the performers are ordinary actors/actresses is

introduced. Yet they continue doing steps like in minstrel sequence indicating that although the mask is revealed and the performers become ordinary people, they are still minstrels.

Challenges to the traditional conception of the black race are introduced gradually. Eli's speech which he considers "construction of myself" refers to the connotations of black race as 'we speak english carefully&perfect antillean french, our toilets are disinfected" (76). His words may be considered an answer to the white race considering their language improper and their toilets infected. A journey to the past suggesting parallelism between the minstrel mask and memories of being colored occurs through the minstrel performers. For instance Alec's tone while talking about white girls reveals the undesirable position of the black girl: "Everybody in the world knows that rich girls are hard to find." (99) and " So hard to find a rich white girl who is so dumb, too" (100). His words refer to the figure of the black dumb girl in minstrel shows. His further sentences imply the notion of the undesired black woman : "The whole world don't turn out for a dead black woman like they did for Marilyn Monroe" (100). However probably the most impressive sense of a black woman is conveyed through a black woman's words. Internalizing the white look , she can not believe that a man would like her and justifies it as "That night I must have looked beautiful for a black woman" (Shange, 1994: 104). No man would normally desire her, so she considers such an interest: "strange/there are millions of us" (105).

As the minstrel mask is abandoned through Lou's spell, the traditional connotations of the black race are reversed. The depiction of the white race in save america t-shirts, mcdonald's hats from the black perspective as well as the imitation of a white dance style announces a reverse minstrel show. Ross starts to tell& play his sexual affair with Fay, a white whore, as a taxi driver. Natalie who is an ordinary performer decides to play the role of a white girl for one day and through her eyes Shange depicts white women as artificial and weak. Natalie ends up thanking God for being black. Lily's dream of a white girl obsessed with brushing

her hair, attributes the white race an obsessive depiction. She mocks the image of a white girl narrating her dreams of the white of egg which is not white in her dreams.

The structure of the play also foregrounds the traditional minstrel show centralizing the use of poetic language as well as music and dance adhering to the African American tradition. As E. Barnsley Brown in her article "The Human Body In motion: Writing The Body of Ntozake Shange" asserts "Shange uses music, dance, and the 'Nommo' or magic force of the word to deconstruct racist representations of African Americans in the theater and to offer a means of transcending them" (Brown, 1999: 219) . Doing this, Shange ends up having recentralized a new form of music, dance and a new language as well as providing the blackface mask a reconciliatory position.

Even if the mask is abandoned the stories full of suffering, tend to centralize the issue of race. For instance when Alec starts to narrate and Natalie to act a black woman's, Sue Jean's story, the black mask appears on the stage. While Sue Jean's story about her baby called 'Myself' which she had to kill in order to survive is foregrounded, Lou through magic abandons it once more. The problem of representing the other race is reflected through Eli's question "How is she gonna play lady MacBeth and MacBeth is a white dude?" (Shange, 1994: 78). In order to survive on the American stage, they have to be minstrels as Bettina notes "if that director asks me to play it any blacker, I'm gonna have to do it in a mammy dress" (78). Alec challenges the traditional minstrel role the black race is condemned to play "I'm not playing the fool or the black buck pimp in the circus. I'm an actor not a stereotype." (108,109). As Brown suggests " Shange's use of the minstrel mask as a framing device points to how African Americans have been framed by the American theater with its stereotypical representations of blacks and paucity of challenging work for them" (Brown, 1999: 221) . Lester adds that "*Spell #7* not only lashes out to stereotyped roles of black actors, but it redefines unflattering stereotyped behavioral patterns of blacks" (Lester, 1995: 111) .

The black actress playing the white woman signifies a reversal of minstrelsy. In this respect, connotations of white race from the black perspective is

foregrounded such as flinging the hair as soon as one gets up, or pretending to like people of the other race while despising them, indeed. As the white girl is depicted while pinching the cheeks to bring color back the white race is associated with paleness. Moreover the sign that is replaced on the stage "White woman sold out" (Shange, 1994: 112) suggests that the white woman is perceived as an object. Being black is also associated with being absent as well as having social disease and molested children. Reconciling with black color "I'm so glad, I'm colored" (113), the black performers actualize Lou's spell "You gonna be colored all your life you gonna love it & being colored & all your life" (116). Finally the minstrel mask is lowered signifying the end of the show as well as a reconciliation. However it remains visible indicating it is never really forgotten.

Foregrounding minstrelsy while at the same time subverting its main devices, Shange introduces a revisioned, postmodern version of it. She employs the blackface mask as the central image to introduce the traditional connotations of black race. However decentralizing the minstrel mask throwing it away through spell, Shange gradually reverses the connotations of black race and projects them onto the white race. That she finally recentralizes the blackface mask lowering it but not thoroughly abandoning it, indicates reconciliation as well as remembering.

At the end of the play Lou proves the strength of his reversing magic both on the characters and on the audience with these lines: "crackers are born with the fight to be alive / i'm making ours up right here in yr face / & we gonna be colored & love it" (116), and as Brown suggests here "his speech is double voiced due to the double meaning of make up" as "his language implies that he is not only spontaneously creating the "right to be" for blacks but is also "making up" or putting make-up on the faces of the audience." (Brown, 1999: 222). Quoting "we gonna be colored&love it" Brown claims that here Shange addresses not only to the black actors/actresses but also to the audience (222). Deriving from her suggestion, it may be claimed that pretending to reconcile by decentralizing the blackface mask on stage, Shange conveys the center 'black race' on the level of the audience. Karen Cronacher in her article "Unmasking the Minstrel Mask's Black Magic in

Ntozake Shange's *Spell #7* supportingly argues that Shange's play reclaims and rewrites the legacy of minstrelsy "writing herself back into a history in which she was... implicated by virtue of her race ..." (Cronacher, 1992: 178) . As even when the show ends and the mask is recentralized on the stage, the minstrel show on the level of the audience continues. Shange's words commenting on the function of minstrels reveal this second show played on the audience:

The minstrel may be banned as racist, but the minstrel is more powerful in his deformities than our alleged rejection of it. For every night we would be grandly applauded. Immediately thereafter we began to unveil the minstrels who turned out to be as fun-loving as fay..., as contorted as Sue Jean..., as angry as the actor who confides..... & after all that our true visions & rigors laid bare, down from the ceiling comes the huge minstrel face laughing at all of us for having been so game... (Shange, 1994: 68).

Hiding her spell on the audience, Shange is the minstrel of this second show. Shange's motive accounts for Lou's words referring to the inner play the actors and actresses played as characters, "in this place ... only magic is involved in undoing our mask" (91). However the mask she wears should remain unrevealed as outside the stage, race as an issue becomes heavily tender to handle.

2. SEARCH FOR A DIGNIFIED BLACK WOMANHOOD

When there is a woman there is magic. If there is a moon falling from her mouth, she is a woman who knows her magic, who can share or not share her powers. A woman with a moon falling from her mouth, roses between her legs and tiaras of Spanish moss, this woman is a consort of spirits (Shange, 1982: 3).

Tejumola Olaniyan suggests that the gender of black cultural identity is strictly male (Olaniyan, 1998: 119) and considers Shange among the few figures in the female canon who remarkably challenge this situation.

Ntozake Shange's plays reflect her motives related not only to transcend her African roots but also to justify her past experience as a woman. In an interview with **New York Times**, she accounts for her womanly motives that makes some of her plays sound a little feminist:

I'm a playwright. But I'm a woman first. I'm not a generic playwright. I'm a woman playwright. And I would hope that my choice of words and my choice of characters and situations reflect my experience as a woman on the planet. I don't have anything that I can add to the masculine perception of world. What I can add has to be from what I've experienced. And my perceptions, my syntax, my colloquialism, my preoccupations are found in race and gender (qtd. in Tekinay, 2001: 147).

Shange adds her feminine perception of the world to most of her plays including the whole **Three Pieces** collection. However, some of her plays such as **From Okra To Greens**, **For Colored Girls** and **The Love Space Demands** involve more than that since Shange in these plays not only shares her experience as a black woman but also stands at the crossroads of criticism. Her utterance within no utterance alludes to the function of Esu Elagbara in African oral tradition. Doing this, she sometimes goes political which she believes is quite normal: "I think the dangerous mistake that women make is to assume the personal is not political. When I make a personal statement, it is to me a political statement" (qtd. in Tekinay, 2001:

147). Being a black woman in a white patriarchal society implies being two times oppressed, hence involves a deep subconscious trauma which is explicit even in her use of such a fragmented language. Tracing the development of a white female based feminism, bell hooks considers the black female experience in the lowest scale of being:

As a group, black women are in an unusual position in this society, for not only are we collectively at the bottom of the occupational ladder, but our overall social status is lower than that of any other group. Occupying such a position, we bear the burnt of sexist, racist and classist oppression (hooks, 2000: 16).

Located in such a low rank in society, the black woman is so oppressed that there remains no social group for her to purvey the role of an oppressor as bell hooks further remarks (16). Hence, hooks in her **Talking Back** notes that since feminism does not involve black women, a new model of black feminism should be constructed (hooks, 1989: 182). For this reason, she stresses the importance of consciousness raising among black females and calls black woman writers to take action (182). To encourage the sharing of black female experience, hooks notes that when she shared her own experiences of racism and sexism, a 'veil' was lifted, particularly in relationships with black men (177).

Belonging to the two times suppressed group, Ntozake Shange responds to hooks's call and borrows the term 'combat breath' Frantz Fanon first used to refer to the French colonialism experienced in Algeria, in order to describe her own experience (Shange, 1994: 68). Adding the notion of femaleness to this term, she considers the black female experience a combat breathing. Hence, black woman's writing is donated with a mission: To take a deep breath in and give it out aloud. Shange's writing reveals this search for a disowned breath. While tracing the black female writing in her introduction, Claudia Tate suggests:

They project their vision of the world, society, community, family, their lovers, even themselves, most often through the eyes of black

female characters and poetic personae. Their angle of vision allows them to see what white people, especially males, seldom see (Tate, 1983: xvi).

Ntozake Shange reflects her experience as a black woman from her different angle in her performance pieces. Her approach to feminism is usually not more than an attack against sexism. The following lines by Shange account for her reasons to depict women in their search for identity:

One of the reasons I like writing about adolescent girls and young women is because we know so little about ourselves; in a literary sense, there are so few of us. And one of the reasons I try to investigate girls from different backgrounds and girls with different senses of success is because I want to make sure that we all know that none of our desires are illegitimate (in Mahone, 1994 :323).

Her female characters tend to subvert the gender roles as they are never stereotypical women. Shange through her successful imagery, embodies the oppressive minds of the white man, white woman and black man internalized by the black woman and offers challenge. Shange asserts that her writing is inspired by African American female experience in the following lines:

My light is always female. I believe this from my grandmother, my great-aunt Effie and my mother. They survived death, disease, war, white people and plain old hatred with dignity and style. I just want to approach what they did; not even be it, just get near there. They were fabulous women. “ (in Mahone, 1994: 326).

As Glenn Jordan and Chris Weedon suggest “Fiction by women of colour addresses the multiple power relations which constitute femininity and make the problem of achieving a positive identity so complex (247). Furthermore in Lale Demirtürk’s words, black female writing “revises the stereotypical images of black women in American society... by creating strong female characters” (in JAST, 1997: 77). Demirtürk traces the strength of female characters in rebuilding negative self-definitions and controlling their own self images as human beings, rather than as

objects, in terms of sex and race, to a term she borrows from Michael Awkward; “the redemptive possibilities of female coalescence” (77).

In **The Love Space Demands**, Shange’s focus is on the inner conflict the black woman goes through in terms of love. In this piece she suggests that an affectionate love becomes impossible for a woman if her personal integrity is not full. **From Okra To Greens** employs a black female in relation to her male partner. Idealizing their relationship, Shange gives the black female figure a chance to express her very self. **For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow Is Enuf** does not only depict the hard conditions of black women but offers a reconciliation with black femaleness at some points.

Claudia Tate considers black heroines in a struggle not lighter than that of the guerilla warrior. Tate further suggests that the main strategy, here, is self-conscious affirmation of black womanhood which she traces to a gathering of individual consciousness with a collective sense of sisterhood (xxiii). Finally, she names the quest black female goes through, ‘a survival with dignity’ (xxiii).

In this respect, Ntozake Shange’s struggling women may be considered warriors who fight for their own individual consciousness for the sake of a collective dignity. In Claudia Tate’s interview, Ntozake Shange supportingly notes that her heroines are different and strange which makes her proud (153). The following lines by Shange reveal that even though she personalizes them, a common ground is observable:

I feel that as an artist my job is to appreciate the differences among my women characters. We’re usually just thrown together... Our personalities and distinctions are lost. What I appreciate about the women whom I write about, the women whom I know, is how idiosyncratic they are. I take delight in the very peculiar or particular things that fascinate or terrify them. Also I discovered that by putting them altogether, there are some things they all are repelled by, and there are some things they are all attracted to (in

Tate, 1983:153).

In other words, depicting her female characters in their individual search, Shange underlines their collective strength more strongly. Since, even if the characters are different, this does not really differ them from each other but from the traditional female figures.

The following lines quoted from Patricia Hill Collins's article "The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought" also suggest that the individualization of black female figures by raising consciousness serve a collective goal:

Black feminist thought's potential significance goes far beyond demonstrating that black women can produce independent, specialized knowledge. Such thought can encourage collective identity by offering black women a different view of themselves and their world than that offered by the established social order. This different view encourages African American women to value their own subjective knowledge base. By taking elements and themes of black women's culture and traditions and infusing them with new meaning, black feminist thought rearticulates a consciousness that already exists. More important, this rearticulated consciousness gives African American women another tool of resistance to all forms of their subordination (in James, 2000: 186).

As a black woman playwright, Ntozake Shange owns the mission to transcribe individual experiences for the sake of a search for collective dignity. Sharadha supports this point: "Shange's works dignify women's suffering and inform females that they have responsibility to love themselves and each other enough to resist oppression" (77).

This mission attributed to Shange by the previous call involves not only the formation of new representations of black women but also offers possible ways for their construction. Focusing on Shange's four plays that reflect this mood, this chapter examines this process in three steps. A subsequent and even chronological analysis of these plays may imply hints from Shange to the black women. The first step is meeting her subconscious dilemma induced by the cultural codes and roles

she has internalized. The second step involves her struggle to reconcile with her past which she finally achieves. The last step requires a strong utterance ‘ I exist!’ which gradually brings peace to her life.

2.1. Revelation Of Inner Conflicts: Love Space Demands (A Continuing Saga), I Heard Eric Dolphy In His Eyes

The Love Space Demands, published in **Plays:One** collection, involves a collection of poems performed as a dramatic piece. It was first performed in the USA, in 1991. A British premiere, performed by Shange, was given at the Cochrane Theatre in London, 1992. It differs from the rest of Shange’s dramatic poetry as each poem has its own title. These poems capture specific states of mind and unite for a common goal which Shange addresses in her Prologue “Can colored people be beloved?” (121). Owing to its call and response feature, **The Love Space Demands** is reminiscent of the African oral tradition saga and the dramatic piece is , thus, also called ‘A Continuing Saga’.

Even if Shange sometimes reveals her African American roots in **The Love Space Demands**, her female identity is more dominant. In her introduction to **The Love Space Demands**, Shange notes that she headed off to her Women’s Meeting with desperation while she struggled for writing the introduction (119). She further confesses that she realized the women could hardly separate “love from sex, sensuality from affection, devotion from masochism, and independence from the fear of intimacy” (119). Through separate poems, Shange depicts the ideal love from a female perspective. In most of the poems, the persona addresses the beloved questioning whether a sincere love is possible for any woman. This questioning functions as a test of self-esteem. Claudia Tate argues that:

... women must assume responsibility for strengthening their esteem by learning to love and appreciate themselves-in short, to celebrate their womanhood. Only then will they be able to become involved in mutually fulfilling relationships (xxiii).

The first component of this performance piece entitled 'Even tho yr sampler broke down on you' is a love poem in which the persona recalls the pleasant days she spent with her companion. Sometimes a political tone is revealed in her address as she refers to Harlem corner, Baptist and methodist cults as well as a black performance they saw:

You hummed to me while I was
Reaching for the/ceiling/where our
Folks was carryin on before Michelangelo
Or Lionel Richie/... (133).

Although the poem praises blackness through these lines "(you know where my beauty marks are/all over HARLEM)" (133), it involves more than a celebration of black race. Indeed, the poem celebrates the modern love of a black couple who enjoy theatre as well as music "my own rhythm section/that petal" (134) and who can declare their love in two languages "cada vez" , "let love" (134). The companion is associated with charm as "niggahness of... quick light kisses" (134).

"Serial Monogamy" similarly questions the meaning of love:"is it/one at a time or one for long time?" (135). Reminiscent of the monkey in African oral tradition who continuously signifies on the lion's speech taking it on figurative level, Shange signifies on male compliments. Doing this, she mocks the male conception of communication as such:

... if my eyes light up cuz
some stranger just lets go/caint stop hisself
from sayin
"yr name must be paradise"

if I was to grin or tingle/even get a lil happy/
hearing me and paradise synonyms
does that make me a scarlet woman? (136).

Questioning the gallantries by men towards the other sex, Shange adheres to what Mary Wollstonecraft suggested before the eighteenth century turns: “I lament that women are systematically degraded by receiving trivial attentions, which men think it manly to pay to the sex, when, in fact, they are insultingly supporting their own superiority” (15).

“Intermittent Celibacy” may be considered the most assertive component of the collection in terms of female spirit. It even goes feminist at times since it opposes female gender codes. The female persona declares her freedom of sex and calls for a male companion to satisfy her bodily desire. For instance, the persona asks to be made a ‘woman’ instead of a ‘bad girl’ and utters “let me out the deprivations of virginity” (138). Hence, the classical association of men with body and women with soul is subverted.

“Chastening With Honey” involves an attempt to reconcile with one’s own identity for the sake of a true love. It questions the function of writing and the meaning of speech which sometimes fail to account for deep emotions. Through Biblical references, the dramatic persona associates the touch of her lover with fall from the garden.

“A Third Generation Geechee Myth For Yr Birthday” ,similarly, traces a collective experience of humanity, the birth. Attributing the birth a mythological context such as;

when we fall from the stars to the bellies of our mothers
/some folks say they’s music in the air/dontcha think/
we tumble thru a niggah night (144),

it suggests that every human being, white or black, man or woman, experiences birth in the same way (145). Hence, this poem may be considered a call for equality as it celebrates the moment before culture is introduced.

“Loosening Strings Or Give Me An ‘A’” reflects the inner quest the female persona goes through her relation with ‘niggah man’ (147). Her quest involves a declaration of literacy since there are many references to prominent figures of music like Eric Clapton as well as literature: “I never left in search of an artist as a young man/yes I read ULYSSES...I know my Joyce” (146). The references to Ulysses also imply an identification that reveals the search for identity the female persona experiences:

Yes/Ulysses he done come home
Yes/I must be the New World
Yes/Ulysses he done come home
Yes/I must be the New World
Yes/ I’m in tune (147).

Signifying on the male canon, the female persona asks for the first letter of the alphabet ‘A’ to generate this ‘New World’.

The most assertive of this piece is mesl (male english as a second language): in defense of bilingualism since it alternates both English and the male gender within a game she announces at the very beginning. Doing this, Shange initiates a subversion of the gender codes as well as the language and gets rid of the responsibility. For instance, a man ‘offers himself’ to a woman and the female character suggests “there are no umpires/in my game&no men in lil striped shirts/usin sign language deaf women don’t understand” (149).

Furthermore, the male figure is depicted as shallow in terms of emotions. Since when she calls her male companion to play with her in her ballpark where

nobody is a loser, he simply responds: “everything seems to work out when we talk it over in bed” (152). Finally the game turns into an erotic affair in which language is hyphenated “ooooooh...let’s see/that/again/slowly” (152) and the male authority is degraded as his body is offered.

“Devotion To One Lover Or Another” and “If I Go All The Way Without You Where Would I Go” involve bold lines full of love and desire addressed to the male companion. At times, an erotic tone which Shange notes in her introduction that she is astonished by, dwells on these lines. Even though these two poems seem to deal with love and racism underlining “we colored&in love” (155) and “our tongues/the edge of the world” (158) more than sexism, they introduce a new conception of the black female; a desiring, declaring as well as demanding one.

I Heard Eric Dolphy In His Eyes is a similar performance piece by Shange written as subsequently entitled poems, namely “I Heard Eric Dolphy In His Eyes”, “Crack Annie”, “Running Backwards/Conroe To Canarsie”, “Open Up/This Is Police”, and published in the volume **Plays: One. Like The Love Space Demands**, this piece also deals with female and male relationships. In her Introduction, Shange explains her motives for writing this piece as such:

I didn’t know what was being said to me, sometimes. Sometimes, I couldn’t fathom why any of us were doing what we were doing and calling ourselves somebody’s beloved. The poems and monologues in *The Love Space Demands* and *I Heard Eric Dolphy In His Eyes* are real questions I have asked and the sharp edges of the answers (121).

Besides, Shange keeps reminding the violence African American people were exposed to.

In “Crack Annie”, the sorrowful fate of African American women is introduced through a mother’s lamenting monologue. Since she suffers from hunger, she has to sell her seven year old daughter to ‘Cadillac man’ with whom she herself

also lies. Justifying herself as “she caint get pregnant/shit/she only seven years old” (167), she reminds of Sethe’s following lines when she has to kill Beloved in Toni Morrison’s novel **Beloved**: “How if I hadn’t killed her she would have died and that is something I could not bear to happen her” (Morrison, 1987: 200). The tragic end that meets Beloved whose milk was stolen by a white man resembles that of Annie’s whose childhood was stolen by the white ‘Cadillac man’ who left her bleeding. Configuring the mother in regret, Shange clearly depicts how she is victimized by her fate.

2.2. How A Black Woman Reconciles: **For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/ When The Rainbow Is Enuf**

For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow Is Enough may be considered the most popular performance piece of Ntozake Shange, again written in choreopoem form. It is published both as a choreopoem in **Plays: Once** and as a single choreopoem.

In her introduction to **For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow Is Enuf**, Shange notes that the choreopoem was first presented in a woman’s bar around California in December, 1974. She adds that the performance of five women, including herself, received attention among women spectators. Referring to the portrayal of male characters as indifferent, violent oppressors, Russel considers **For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow Is Enuf**,

One of the first black feminist plays to speak honestly about the terrible rupture in male/female relationships and the denial of black women’s voices in American society (178).

For many other critics, too, **For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow Is Enuf** is the most feminist piece of Shange. Involving a revolutionary mood, this play reflects the tension of black female experience. Accounting for the major motives that nurtured the choreopoem, Shange refers to the active woman presence in gatherings:

... San Francisco was inundated with women poets, women's readings, & a multilingual woman presence, new to all of us& desperately appreciated. The force of these readings on all over our lives was to become evident as we directed our energies toward clarifying our lives- & the lives of our mothers, daughters and grandmothers as women (x).

These lines imply that Ntozake Shange is greatly inspired by the women who got together in order to share experiences. Hence, she owns a mission to share the collective experience of her female ancestors through **For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow Is Enuf**. As discussed in the Introduction, Shange's writing is fed by her experiences. However, it should be noted that some of her writing involves more than Shange's individual experience as her collective experience is also introduced. This is the case in **For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow Is Enuf** as any black female is represented through her inner conflict.

At the beginning of the choreopoem, Shange notes in the stage directions that the atmosphere is dark and the seven women figures all freeze implying a mood of depression. Shange initiates her choreopoem with the following lines by lady in brown who comes to life:

dark phrases of womanhood
of never havin been a girl
half-notes scattered
without rhythm/no tune
distraught laughter fallin

over a black girl's shoulder
it's funny/it's hysterical
the melody-less-ness of her dance (3).

Her words addressed to the other ladies involve agony since the colored woman does not have an integrated identity. As her experience is full of abuse, she has been made a woman suddenly. Her 'half-notes' involving neither rhythm nor tune as well as the 'melody-less-ness' of her dance imply her hyphenated existence. Her solos are 'interrupted' and her performances are 'unseen' since her past is full of intrusion. The following lines by lady brown offers a call for reconciling with black femaleness:

somebody/anybody
sing a black girl's song
bring her out
to know herself
to know you
but sing her rythms
carin/struggle/hard times
sing her song of life
she's been dead so long
closed in silence so long
she doesn't know the sound
of her own voice
her infinite beauty
she's half-notes scattered
without rhythms/no tune
sing her sighs
sing the song of her possibilities
sing a righteous gospel
let her be born
let her be born&handled warmly (4-5).

Serving as the evoker, lady in brown may be considered the shadowing of Shange on her dramatic piece. Since, brown is not one of the colors of the rainbow although the other figures, namely, 'lady in red', 'lady in blue', 'lady in yellow', 'lady in purple', 'lady in green' and 'lady in orange' take their names from the colors of the rainbow. Lady in brown gives the message of the choreopoem even at the beginning as "this is for colored girls who have considered suicide but moved to the end of their own rainbows" (6).

Hence, lady in brown stands at an omniscient point like Shange who describes her place in the choreopoem as such:

I am on the other side of the rainbow/picking up the pieces of days
spent waitin for the poem to be heard/while you listen/I have other
work to do (xvi).

These lines by Shange imply her individual distance from the characters as her free and literate individual identity holds sole authority. The ladies who represent colors of the rainbow do not stand for individual identities, since together they make up for the collective identity of any suffering black woman. They are the voices of any black woman around the country, outside 'Chicago, Detroit, Houston, Baltimore, San Francisco, Manhattan, St.Louis' as they introduce themselves. Even though they come from different places, their collective fate is the same as the reality of the black woman does not change anywhere.

Barnsley E. Brown notes that the speaking subject voices of these women do not speak in unison until the final scene (216). She traces their speeches in monologues to lady brown's call for singing the black girl's song at the beginning (216). In this respect, the continuing tone of monologue that finally generates the choreopoem may be considered a sisterly adhesion to the African American tradition of 'call and response'.

Each lady starts to tell her singular story full of suffering in response to the other ladies. While their individual stories differ, the antagonist patriarchal system brings them together on a common ground. Race and gender together occupy every breath the ladies take. They are the victims of black male figures who can test their power only on them as Sojourner Truth asserts in Women's Convention in Akron, Ohio, 1851:

...That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man – when I could get it - and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? (Truth 1851)

The male companion figures Toussaint and Beau stand for the black man's betrayal of black woman's dreams and ideals of love. The abuse,

NO MAN YA CANT GO WIT ME/ I DONT EVEN
KNOW YOU/ NO/I DONT WANNA KISS YOU/
YOU AINT BUT 12 YRS OLD/ NO MAN/ PLEASE
PLEASE LEAVE ME ALONE/ TOMORROW/ YEAH
NO/ PLEASE/ I CANT USE IT (37),

and later abortion “nobody came/ cuz nobody knew/once I was pregnant&shamed of myself” (23), they have to experience as well as the unprepared motherhood “mama’s little baby likes shortnin, shortnin/mama’s little baby likes shortnin bread” (6), induce their half experience, in turn hyphenated identity. In every step towards individuality, a male intrusion occurs. The black woman's experience resembles the broken beats of blues each time repeating itself with a single difference.

In Render Me My Song: African-American Women Writers From Slavery To The Present, Sandi Russell considers the black women's using of

elements such as blues, jazz, black urban speech, contemporary music, history, science fiction, recipes, dreams, magic and mundane to be speaking out in their own way (162). Russel traces Shange's use of these elements as a black woman writer a declaration of a collective voice (178). The body language they use through dance and their fragmented language may be considered among their means of self-expression.

Shange's collective identity is in charge of depicting these women in their searches for identity. Initially, the characters' search for identity is dominated by the patriarchal view offering them no alternative but to satisfy the social expectations directed towards them, since the female figures are at the collective stage in which they function as a common sense. The internalized values are the only paradigm for their conception of self as Claudia Tate in her Introduction to **Black Women Writers At Work** also remarks in the following lines:

Ntozake Shange in *For Colored Girls* calls attention to how male-oriented black women are, how all women in general are. The level of self-esteem of many personae in the choreopoem is a direct result of whether the man-woman relationship is exploitative. In the end the women realize that their sense of pride and well-being must first emanate from within themselves before it can be shared with another person (xxiii).

Tate further suggests that basing one's self-esteem on self-sacrifice, even if for the sake of one's family, is a self-destructive proposition (xxiii). In this respect, women can have healthy relationships only when women get to know themselves and confront with their womanhood. Hence, a reconciliation with both individual and collective identities is a prerequisite for their social welfare. Having been robbed of all her attributes, the black woman finally finds her voice through *lady in green* who calls back for all her belongings: "this is mine/ntozake 'her own things'/that's my name/now give me my stuff/I see ya hidin my laugh/" (50).

Giving the black woman a voice to ask for both individual and collective attributes, Ntozake Shange asserts the dignity of a black female. Similarly, in

Contemporary American Drama 1960-2000, Asli Tekinay suggests that **For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow Is ENUF** is a “celebration of her womanhood and African-American heritage; Shange is celebrating being a black female in modern America” (157).

In **Creating The Self In The Contemporary American Theatre**, Robert J. Andreach traces the function of these ladies:

They are seven individuals, symbolized by the seven colors, who discover a common experience and heritage, symbolized by the circle that manifests itself as a rainbow. The two images are the same image, retracted or extended. In closing the performance, the ladies are either retract into a circle or extend into a rainbow because the goddess, the feminine self, is both communal and individual, cultural and personal (11-12).

Andreach further mentions that women can gain confidence only if they learn the importance of their desires and dreams, namely the colors of the rainbow, as well as the culture they belong to, which the circle stands for (Andreach, 17-18). Neal A. Lester however, interprets the rainbow image as the collective voice of women of color :

Visually and aesthetically these women are a rainbow and only collectively are they able to dramatize the fullness of black female identity. The rainbow, then, symbolizes a physical beauty in the ethnicity of the black female as well as her spiritual beauty she understands when she becomes aware of her own inner rhythms (26).

Supporting Neal A. Lester’s claim, Sharadha adds that the unusual existence of the color brown in Shange’s depiction of rainbow, implies the collective experience of being colored as well as the sisterly communion for being a part of nature (76). Hence, the image of rainbow may be associated with the collective identity of black women while its each component represented by a different color stands for their individual differences. In this respect, the color

brown might be taken as the uniting cause which is the celebration of their nature, being colored and women.

The circle, however, represents the boundaries these women have experienced as well as their challenge against the culture. Reinforcing the myth of the earthly mother goddess, these women unite with the Egyptian goddess Sechita which, symbolically, is a celebration of their existence against the Eurocentric tradition as well as an offer of a matriarchal alternative.

Reconciling with their race and gender, these women who had once considered suicide have recently learned that the rainbow is enough to survive. Andreach comments on the connotations of the final image, sun, as such:

... the journey to self-realization must continue, even though the quester, male or female, feels the ambivalence of a divided existence in a broken world, one part going back into the past of history and myth to recover the heritage and another part voyaging forward in the hope of creating a new, integrated self (30).

Appreciating their individual differences and confronting with their collective ties, they finally reconcile declaring "I found god in myself/and I loved her/I loved her fiercely" (Shange, 63).

Sharadha notes that Shange's affirmation of God in herself involves a revelation of a fresh perspective towards the world as well as the pride for being a woman (89). As Sharadha also puts, depending on the following lines by Shange in a personal interview in August 1986, one may claim that Shange actualizes her feminist moods through **For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow Is Enuf**.

'I found God in myself' is feminist ritual. It's feminist hedonist awakening...It's hedonist in the generic in the generic sense of hedonist as feminist self-realization that allegedly occurs...[The

black woman] finds it [God] outside [herself] (qtd. in Sharadha, 90).

2.3. She Expresses Herself: From Okra To Greens

From Okra To Greens consists of a collection of different poems brought up together in 1984 for stage purposes. Neal A. Lester notes that there is so much criticism directed to this play especially because it has no inner coherence (224). However, considering herself not a dramatist but a poet, Shange distances herself from such criticism.

A simplistic tone of African folk stories is explicit in **From Okra To Greens** that enables her to utter messages within no utterance. Hence, the African American female tradition of story telling is signified on. Alice Walker asserts in her **In Search Of Our Mothers' Gardens** that story telling was the only possible heritage African American mothers and grandmothers could pass to the succeeding generations (240). Configuring Okra who constantly refers to her grandma's stories as her dramatic persona, Shange adheres to her collective ties and confirms that the roots are transcended.

In each poem, Ntozake Shange depicts Okra who stands for any black woman in communication with Greens, the black male companion. The following lines by Shange exemplifying her own love affairs, depicts a realistic scene from a black couple's relationship:

...I am certain that the volatility of most of my relationships with English speaking African-American men can be attributed to intense ontological struggles: Whose universe is it? (in Golden, 1993: 207).

However, the situation in Okra and Greens's relationship is quite idealized since Greens assists her to attain her identity. The first time they meet, Okra is described as "the woman dont stand up straight aint never stood up straight" (1). The introvert, crooked figure is severely pulled on her shoulders, perhaps signifying

the difficult experience black women collectively went through. Her movements involve some African dance figures through which she represents the suffering black women. The use of dance in this play simply functions as a means of black female representation. In his article “Black Salome: Exoticism, Dance, and Racial Myths”, David Krasner defines most black female choreography as such:

...drawing on vaudeville and black traditions of dance, and fusing these together, always with a combination of instinct, reflection, and meticulousness. Every gesture she incorporated to the choreography had some triple meanings, and she not only had to weigh the significance of the meanings but also had to consider the ramifications of the image of black women collectively (in Elam, 2001: 207).

All her attempts to stand up lead to a final surrender as she is further curled over herself. The more she tries to stand against the culture, the more isolated she becomes and turns back to her inner world. Gradually the reason why she is so curled is revealed through these lines:

Wasnt just she cdnt stand up straight/she cdnt
hardly keep somebody else's body outta hers
&since everybody cd see/ immediately
this child always bends over
always twists round herself to
keep from standing up (3).

Hence, her curled image implies not submissiveness against cultural codes but a natural need for protectivity. As the myth of earthly mother goddess supports, motherhood is associated with nature as opposed to the cultural essence of fatherhood the patriarchal system imposes. Neal A. Lester also associates this

motive with the wish to crawl back to the earth even to go back to the mother's womb, in turn to be a part of the nature. Her encounter with the male figure who "...didn't know what a stood //up straight man felt like" (3) takes place in a closet and once in a sudden she meets the culture: "they curled round/nobody cd tell anymore/ what to get outta the way of/ &they never spoke/of their condition" (3). This sexual affair that is new to them both somehow unites them and the third person narration becomes personalized as 'I' in Okra's case, signifying the voice of the female identity.

In the second poem, they are presented in the middle of a political conversation, talking about the white shouting at them when they watch TV loud. During this conversation, Okra recalls how her grandma used to cook greens in a pot and asserts why she likes greens: "that's why I like GREENS/I know how to cook em" (5). This second greens spelled in capitals refer to the male companion who is so familiar to Okra that she tells that with greens, she goes back to her very roots.

This journey to their roots involves a walk at the heart of nature, namely at asbury park in october as well as a spiritual rise to blueness narrated by Greens, accompanied with rythms of blues. Their mutual love is expressed through the chapter which implies the lack of language to account for some emotions as Okra continuously questions "what language is it in" that they share love and finishes as "I say simply/give me yr tongue /darling" (10). Hence, language as a cultural construct may not suffice to share feelings as opposed to the natural instincts that the tongue stands for. When their relationship is considered within gender stereotypes, Okra is the dominant, demanding part interestingly. Lester notes that it is not coincidental that their sexual identity is present even when they talk about politics or daily routine (230). Underlining the initial appearance of Greens whose eyes have depicted the black woman within problems, Lester suggests:

In acknowledging and celebrating their own sexuality, Okra and Greens also recognize and attack the double standard that sexually liberated women are subject to greater risks socially, physically, and emotionally than their male partners (232).

However, the scene of revelation in which Greens confesses that he had an affair with 'hussy in red' transports their relationship to a familiar territory: Many black men cheat on black women. While describing how she feels when Greens left her, Okra somehow becomes the curled woman again:

When you disappeared/ a tremendous silence shook
My body till my bones split/ I hadta grab my sinews
From the mouths of bats (19).

The only excuse which supports that Greens is not one of the 'some men' Okra often refers to, is his apology and sincere regret. As Okra confesses her fantasy that she has been married to Bob Marley for seventeen years, the fair balance is once more acquired. Lester here mentions that not acting her temptations out, Shange through Okra sympathizes with the female figure (258). Indeed, as both Okra and Greens use the poetic language quite effectively, the former to express her deep feelings and the latter to express his desire, Shange stands at a critical point. Okra turns her face towards nature while Greens is interested in culture reminiscent of the previous mythological allusion as well as the dialectics of modernity namely nature versus culture. Homi Bhabha focuses on this aspect of cultural identity depicting the self in its dialectical process with society through its transition from nature to culture (43) in his **The Location of Culture**. In this process of internalization, Bhabha attributes the self 'a civil state' as well as a 'social instinct' which in a vicious circle guarantees the continuum of this dialectics. In this respect, Okra and Greens together make up for an integrated cultural identity each standing for one single side of it. Lester suggests that this representation offers another potential gender stereotype which conceptualizes man's province as the world and woman's the home (259). Okra's constant referance to her country as 'our father's lands' (24) while talking about her admiration to Marley, supports this argument.

The same piece involves a critical view towards black men as Okra depicts all colored men as 'kintergarden teachers' (22). The classical association of child

nursing with women is, hence, subverted. Consequently, the stereotypical image of a black man is transformed. Likewise, the good colored men are 'from Uranus' in her depiction implying their rareness.

The last poem in which they are on a honey-moon at the heart of nature prophesies the forecoming child. Despite the criticism which considers the child a present from Okra to Greens accounting for the title of the book, Lester argues that Shange means a literal present, the "feminist poem' (260). In this respect, the sun and the sea stand for the triumph of nature over culture indicating that they are reunited.



3. A NEW FORM: REVOLT VERSUS RECONCILIATION

Ntozake Shange's dramatic poetry that involves searches for African American roots and dignified black female identity, possesses both a revolting and a reconciling attitude. Responding to the African American tradition and reinforcing the black feminist voice, she adheres to her collective ties. However, she never compromises her individual identity as she comes with her own things, 'Ntozake'.

Shange's writing technique is what distinguishes her from the other female writers in the canon. Although what she says has been already said, how she says is very innovative. In this respect, Shange contributes to the tradition by repeating the tradition with her own difference. Doing this, she may be considered both a traditionalist and a reformist. Her writing may be considered a reform since it is a challenge to the existing system and offers ways to transform it. Shange revises blackness subverting all its connotations in *Spell #7*. Suggesting a rainbow for colored girls who have once considered suicide, she celebrates black women's identity in *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow Is Enuf*. As Carole Boyce Davies argues,

Black women's writing/existence, marginalized in terms of majority-minority discourses, within the Euro-American male or female canon or Black male canon... redefines its identity as it re-connects and re-members, brings together black women dis-located by space and time (Davies, 1994:4).

Davies's remarks above, account for Shange's search for her collective identity. Adding that black women's writing re-negotiates the questions of identity, Davies further suggests that in order to account for black female experience, assumptions about identity, community and theory have to be reconsidered (3). Considering identity in interaction with community as well as offering an alternative view both in content and in form, Ntozake Shange actualizes Davies's suggestion.

Shange alternates the theory through a new form of language and genre. Doing this, she individualizes her writing for the sake of a collective reason. Since English which reflects the white eyes remains insufficient to tell the black experience, Shange uses her black vernacular while writing. This may be considered a political stand declaring an African American language. Furthermore, as a woman, Shange uses a symbolic language full of hyphenation that accounts for her female experience. Being both black and woman, Shange combines these two features and distances her writing twice from the regular English language. Since, according to Shange, English is not only white but also male.

Her alternative genre is indeed a transition between the genres. Even though her pieces have stage directions, they are poems in form. Shange's new genre, 'choreopoem', which is poetry written for performance has its own variations. Some have titles like in **Love Space Demands** or **Okra To Greens** while some involve dialogues in the form of poems as in **A Photograph** and **Boogie Woogie Landscapes**. While they can be integrated in terms of content as in **Spell #7** or **For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow Is Enuf**, they can be individual poems without inner coherence like in **I Heard Eric Clapton In His Eyes** or **Love Space Demands**. Some of Shange's novels involve dialogues, too, like drama. For instance, Lilianne's dialogue with the therapist in **Lilianne: The Resurrection Of The Daughter** is written in dramatic form whereas the rest of the novel is in conventional novel form, involving a narrator.

Shange personalizes her writing as she offers her own alternative in it. At this point, Shange as the authorial voice asserts her power on her writing. Since, this is her authenticating difference.

3.1. A New Language

Shange's writing calls for a deep psychoanalytical concern in terms of the new language and genre she has introduced. Kimberly D. Dixon traces Shange's rebellious attitude against Standard English to a "...moving away from the established patterns of some cultural practices and by incorporating others in new or unexpected ways" (in Elam, 2001:217). Dixon further suggests that this migration of Shange leads to an ambiguous positionality and a free-moving consciousness (217). Accordingly, Shange's free moving consciousness challenges the rules and classifications of English language and offers a means of transforming them. In **Playing In The Dark**, Toni Morrison articulates the use of English language among the Africanists and remarks:

the language no doubt had to be English, but the content of that language, its subject, was to be deliberately, insistently un-English and anti-European, insofar as it rhetorically repudiated an adoration of the Old World and defined the past as corrupt and indefensible (Morrison, 1993: 48).

Morrison claims that there emerged a specific Africanist form of expression for political reasons. She adds that even the white depiction of black characters involves a standard use of language. According to Morrison, the criteria for Africanist idiom is such:

How the dialogue of black characters is construed as an alien, estranging dialect made deliberately unintelligible by spellings contrived to defamiliarize it, how Africanist language practices are employed to evoke the tension between speech and speechlessness; how it is used to establish a cognitive world split between speech and text, to reinforce class distinctions and otherness as well as to assert privilege and power; how it serves as a marker and vehicle for illegal sexuality, fear of madness, expulsion, self-loathing (52).

As Irigaray notes, "...all language is [also] metaphorical, and that, by denying this, the language fails to recognize the 'subject' of the unconscious"(110), language encodes the subconscious. In her article entitled "Contemporary American Women Playwrights: a brief survey of selected scholarship", Christy Gavin also argues that Shange "replaces traditional text and dialogue with a 'coded language' that best expresses the experiences of blacks and other Third World peoples" (in Murphy, 1999: 241).

A study of Shange's language and all its codes would highlight her subconscious dilemmas not only as a black but also as a female writer. In Shange's speech, too many hyphenated sentences and half-finished expressions induce a 'deferral' of meaning in language. Her experience full of dispossession is revealed in her free associations in which the relation between form and meaning can hardly be fixed.

Davies further remarks why black female writing can not be settled in terms of form:

Migratory subjects suggests that Black women/'s writing can not be located and framed in terms of one specific place, but exist/s in myriad places and times, constantly eluding the terms of the discussion. It is not so much formulated as a 'nomadic subject', although it shares an affinity, but as a migratory subject moving to specific places and for definite reasons (36-37).

Deconstructing English which she considers white and male, Shange seeks to justify her black female voice. Shange's form of writing highlights her search to account for the black experience and offers a means of authenticating it.

In her Foreword to **Spell #7**, Shange considers English as:

the language that I waz taught to hate myself in/ the language that perpetuates the notions that cause pain to every black child he/she learns to speak of the world the self (68).

Furthermore, referring to English as “the straightjacket that the english language slips over the minds of all americans” (68), she rejects to use the language that does not account for the experience of her kin. Sometimes not only English but all languages are insufficient to tell such sorrow. Hence Shange alternates language with a use of music and dance. In Tejumola Olaniyan’s words, for Shange, “song and dance are the African American’s potent media for remembering the unsayable” (125).

In **Scars of Conquest/Masks of Resistance**, Tejumola Olaniyan supports that Shange challenges the hegemony of Western culture and the sub-ordinant, male-centered discourse of black difference (122). Mahone also notes that Shange considers English language the primary prison of black women writers (325). Shange’s language transcends the rules of language with its innovations such as no capitalization of letters, no punctuation between the words, even abbreviations of the words and spelling in black vernacular. The following quotation from **Boogie Woogie Landscape** exemplifies how she plays with the English language:

dontcha wanna be music/dontcha wanna be music/dontcha wanna
be daybreak&ease into fog/a cosmic event like sound/rain
yah/like rain
like when a woman can walk down gold street
feeling like she’s moved to atlantis
when the mine’s been closed a hundred years
&the only gold is music sepin thru fog
it’s what we call a marine intrusion
interlopin visions&lost deities findin the way home
cuz we dont recognize what’s sacred anymore (113).

The arbitrary abbreviations she uses such as 'dontcha wanna' instead of 'Don't you want to' or 'cuz' instead of 'because' subverts the rules of the standard written English. The inclusion of 'yeah' also signifies a writing in speech form. However it is not written in Standard English speech form as 'sepin thru' implies. As there is no punctuation in Shange's writing, it is difficult to detect where a line ends. Furthermore the repetition of some expressions such as "dontcha wanna be" distances the message. The reference becomes indirect. Hence, the meaning in sentences are continuously deferred. For instance, "dontcha wanna be" refers to "music", "music" and "daybreak&ease into the fog". As for "a cosmic event like sound" and "rain", the reference is not so obvious. Since, it may mean "dontcha wanna be a cosmic event like sound and rain" as well as "ease into the fog: a cosmic event like sound and rain".

Another important feature of Shange's original use of language is that it is not rule-governable. For instance, Shange uses 'findin' instead of 'finding' whereas she writes 'feeling' as it is. In this respect, it may be concluded that Shange's writing does not even obey her own rules.

As Henry Louis Gates notes, the tendency of African American writers to use black vernacular in their writing signifies the search to ground their literary practice outside Western tradition and to write 'authentically' with a black difference (xxii).

In her interview with Claudia Tate, Shange accounts for her reinvention of English in terms of spelling and punctuation which may not be explained with a collective search:

It bothers me...to look at poems where all the first letters are capitalized. That's why I use the lower-case alphabet. Also, I like the idea that letters dance... I need some visual stimulation, so that reading becomes not just a passive act and more than an intellectual activity, but demands rigorous participation (163).

Indeed Shange's adhesion to African American roots does not merely account for using black vernacular in her writings. The following lines reveal Shange's reasons for doing this:

The spellings result from the way I talk or the character talks, or the way I heard something said. Basically, the spellings reflect language as I hear it. I don't write because words come out of my brain. I write this way because I hear the words (163).

In this respect, Shange also tries to capture the familiar sound to describe the familiar experience. As Y.S. Sharadha suggests, Shange could not have expressed her experience in an 'alien' language:

Shange, in order to sing a coloured girl's song, must recreate the language of her experiences, a language which in its concrete particularity has almost never been spoken. The voices of the black women have been negated by the standard English grammar that has forced Black people to fit their experiences into alien language patterns. Black women's experiences have also been negated by a literary tradition that celebrates the experiences of white men. Shange ignores standard grammar in her effort to capture the nuances of Black women's speech patterns and experiences (79).

As Sandi Russel notes Shange recommends the black authors to find their own voices rather than being a part of the collective black voice. Russel concludes that Shange minds idiosyncratic or recognizable distinctions for this reason (178). Otherwise she would not bother herself with how to express and would just focus on conveying the collective message.

Shange's language unites the experience of the black with that of the female. Y.S. Sharadha argues that Shange's writing is reminiscent of Virginia Woolf's since,

In both Woolf's and Shange's writing, experience is perceived as a flow with pauses, but without the clear ordering required by the standard sentence is an imposition, an attempt to control reality (80).

Shange adheres to the female writing standards Woolf has set long ago. Doing this, she reinforces the search for a female writing. However, Shange's language adds other elements to that of the white feminists' as her writing introduces a black female language which reflects the contradictory experience. Her language signifies both fragmentation and unity, individuality and collectivity. It is a means of expression for the sake of none-expression and at times even vice versa as Davies argues:

It is this tension between articulation and aphasia, between the limits of spoken language and possibility of expression, between space for certain forms of talk, and lack of space for Black women's speech, the location between public and private, that some Black women writers address (153).

Reminiscent of Helene Cixous's 'écriture feminine', Irigaray suggests that women should leave the patriarchal language and begin to speak in their own language which should be formed (51). As language is parable, the language that reflects female experience should account for the oppression they went through. Tejumola Olaniyan also justifies the need for a black female language suggesting "The enormous political implications of the inexpressibility of pain demand the invention of all kinds of avenues to bring pain into the realm of language" (131).

The boundaries of white and male dominant English language, therefore, should be challenged. Tongues should utter new codes to convey the message. Deriving from the tongue simile that Shange often uses in her dramatic poetry, it may be claimed that tongue represents the subjection of language. Tracing Layla's yearning to speak freely in **Boogie Woogie Landscapes**, Barnsley E. Brown suggests:

This yearning, imaged by Shange in bodily metaphors of the mouth and tongue, combines with Layla's physical presence on stage to suggest that Layla has moved from being an object to being a subject. She is no longer silent/silenced or a mere disembodied voice but is instead a speaking subject whose "tongue" connotes a language of her body as well as a spoken language. Her multi-voicedness is thus not only manifested in the polyphonic chorus of night-life companions and her own voice, but also in the present(ed) articulations of her body on stage (217).

For tongue is a means of self expression and speech, and consequently for communication. In this respect Layla's previous condition, a tongue unable to utter a message implies the deconstruction of self. Davies suggests that a hyphenated or interrupted language as well as silence implies a pre-symbolic stage for women (163), reminiscent of a genine in the mother's womb. She traces the function of mother to a figure of dispossession in patriarchal culture as well as a figure of language and articulation (163). This may account for the tendency in the female canon of American drama to depict female characters as split selves like in Marsha Norman's *Night Mother*, Wendy Wasserstein's *The Heidi Chronicles* and Adrienne Kennedy's *Funny House Of A Negro*. Shange's women in *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow Is ENUF* are similarly depicted as hyphenated identities with fragmented speech. Gwen Raaberg attributes the continuing sense of fragmentedness a technical function:

The printed text of the choreopoem is also a collage, using a shortened form of spelling and a typography that juxtaposes fragmented elements to emphasize shifts in the tone and intensity of the language. Shange's poetic language manifests the sounds and rhythms of African American speech, giving voice to a "black girl's song"... (158).

Since these black women are "half-notes scattered / without rhythm/no tune" (Shange 3). Barnsley E. Brown adds that this fragmentation of language also

announces “the fragmentation of the speaking subject” as each woman speaks in several voices (213).

Brown further suggests that Shange does not provide a single protagonist in order to demonstrate that the voices are universalized (214). Thus, the women are undeveloped characters in the process of ‘becoming’.

According to Luce Irigaray, the father who represents culture, ignores the generative power of the mother and asks for authority. It is the father who superimposes the universe of the language and symbols (41). The penis is one of the symbolic ways he asserts his power on women and language is hence decoded. The mother renounces being a woman for the sake of motherhood while men don’t renounce their manness for the sake of fatherhood (43). In this respect, as soon as the child passes to the symbolic stage, he/she encounters the language of patriarchy. In her article “Feminist Theory and Contemporary Drama”, Janet Brown mentions the importance of body for a distinct feminist drama as such:

Language and physical representation of the body, theatre’s two means of communication, each present special problems to the feminist creator. The human body, unmediated by language, might seem to offer the best hope of a pure expression prior to socialization by the patriarchy (in Murphy, 1999:166).

The only silence is experienced in the mother’s womb in the pre-symbolic stage when the child is a part of nature. Hence, Irigaray suggests a celebration of the pre-symbolic stage when both mother and child are spiritually alive:

We must also find, find anew, invent the words, the sentences that speak the most archaic and most contemporary relationship with the body of the mother, with our bodies, the sentences that translate the bond between her body, ours and that of our daughters. We have to discover a language [langage] which does not replace the bodily encounter as paternal language [langue] attempts to do, but which can go along with it, words which do not bound the corporeal, but which speak corporeal (43).

Shange actualizes what Irigaray suggests and depicts her female characters in the pre-symbolic stage. As they are unable to speak in full sentences they convey their messages either through silence or body language. When they encounter the patriarchal culture, however, their language becomes hyphenated like their interrupted lives. Shange, however, is in search for a passage to the symbolic stage although she depicts her female characters in the pre-symbolic stage, because as an author, she needs the power and authority of the word. As Toni Morrison notes, the language a writer uses signifies his/her power and its limitations (Morrison, 1993:15). In this respect, Shange asserts her power through the rich and bold use of language which successfully challenges the cultural boundaries imposed upon her discourse as well as the linguistic limitations her text encounters.

The relationship between language and power is also revealed through the patriarchal discourse and the vocabulary it offers. In Claudia Tate's interview, Shange remarks that as men are brought up in a patriarchal world, their vocabulary is constructed accordingly. Shange further notes that men do not have a developed emotional vocabulary like women's as they do not take care of other people's lives like women (in Tate, 151-152). As women deal with other people's emotions, female language is also associated with gentleness. For instance, Shange mentions that many people asked if Sean in **A Photograph** was gay just because "real man" don't feel, act, or talk that gently and beautifully (in Tate, 161). Similarly in **Okra To Greens**, the dominance of emotions in Okra's words is very explicit.

Shange's successful use of body language contributes to her power of expression. Reinforcing African American femininity, body movements imply both political discourse and technical device. Barnsley Brown asserts the function of body movements in Shange's plays as such:

Indeed, Shange's drama reveals that the body's movement on stage is a text in and of itself, a text that punctuates the words of a

dramatic piece with breath, posture, and gesture so that they are, in some sense, embodied for the audience (212).

Doing this, Shange alternates the linguistic state of expression which is sometimes insufficient to account for emotions. Supportingly, Okra asks what language is it that can express her feelings and answers her own question through body language. Barnsley E. Brown also remarks:

Shange...rejects the orthography, syntax and punctuation of standard English in favor of a colloquial "black" English that resonates in the theater and dances on the page. She (re)figures standard English to create a language that derives its force from the movement of the body... (223).

As Brown suggests dance enables Shange to generate another language. A language that embodies the rhythms of her kin and the motives of the 'fluid' female body. This language is stronger than words and more vivid than patterns. Through dance and music, Shange reinforces her collective ties and asserts her individual identity. Neal A. Lester also remarks that Shange's language is rhythmical and moving in the following lines:

Because of Shange's intense concern for language, both verbal and nonverbal, her theatre pieces reveal her utmost attention to the rhythms of words -through unpredictable usage of dialect, slang, Portuguese, Spanish, alleged profanity- and use of the body through improvised dance and physical movement (273).

In her Preface to **I Heard Eric Dolphy In His Eyes**, Shange notes that music and dance are the most convenient techniques to convey emotions other than words:

The rhythms and language of the monologues compels the movement and music that that lead us to the next spoken words. Some things fall easily into speech, while others defy verbal

exegesis, available only through music, and the fluid or percussive eloquence of the human body in motion (160).

These lines by Shange not only reveal a feminist discourse in terms of her approach to the use of music and body but also a response to the African American tradition. Hence, through music and dance, Shange subverts the white male means of self-expression as Barnsley E. Brown suggests:

Her dramatizations of the forces affecting the black woman's body signify her rejection of the Western dichotomy of body versus mind in favor of an Afrocentric ideal in which body, mind, and spirit are one and sensuality is embraced as a means to heal and discover the self... Thus dance becomes a mediating device, a means by which Shange can both write and rite (i.e. ritualize) the black woman's body, healing its historical dismemberment from racial and sexual oppression (212).

Furthermore, dance is a way of celebrating the moving capacity of African American woman's body. Symbolically, through dance, black woman's freedom of space is celebrated.

She is mobile as well as free, which indicates a challenge against the cultural boundaries. Through dance, the woman's body reunites with the healing power of nature which feeds her productivity. In this respect, the black woman asserts her power through music and dance. Barbara Frey Waxman's following remarks support this view:

Inheritors of both African and American cultural practices and attitudes, many African American writers, particularly women who are finding their own voices as writers, have turned to dance as a thematic or metaphoric motif for empowerment and self-proclamation, as well as for literary sisterhood. When the protagonists of Paule Marshall, Ntozake Shange, and Alice Walker dance, these authors are using dance as a metaphor to signify their characters's self-discoveries, self-expression, and self-endorsement.

While dance events within the narrative free the protagonists to redefine and be themselves, dance rhythms often pervade these authors's prose, freeing the texts from traditional language, structures, and genres (93).

Dance may be considered a climax in which emotions are stimulated extensively.

The different figures in dance which together form a composition go parallel to the quest for identity which is both individual and collective. While dancing, the characters are both different and similar. They all move their body in a different manner; yet they all contribute to the same composition. On an allegorical level, the characters with individual experiences, share a collective ground. For instance, the ladies in **For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow Is Enuf** have different colors of the rainbow. However, they are part of the same rainbow. The circle they form while dancing represents their common fate although they move differently. Similarly, the actors and actresses in **Spell #7** pass the minstrel mask to each other. While doing this, each one dances in different figures. The passing of the minstrel mask which signifies their collective background, is a common figure in their dance. Shange's characters not only dance but also communicate using the languages of their bodies. Moving freely, they celebrate the straightness of the crooked image of black woman as depicted in **From Okra To Greens**.

In her article entitled "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism", Barbara Smith suggests that sexual and racial politics as well as black and female identity are inextricable elements in black women's writing. She adds that fed by these elements, black women writers's way of expressing themselves constitutes an identifiable literary tradition (in Hull, 1982:163). Since the black women writer's use of black female language to express their own and characters' thoughts may not be accidental as she notes (164). In her following lines, Smith traces the distinctness of black female writing to the use of language:

The use of Black women's language and cultural experience in books by Black women about Black women results in a miraculously rich coalescing form and content and also takes their writing far beyond the confines of white/male literary structures (164).

As the above argument indicates, black female writing generates its own tradition through the different use of language. Hence, black female writing accounts for the fragmented experience as well as the double oppression black women were exposed to through its hyphenated expressions accompanied by music and dance.

Likewise, Shange employs dance and music in her performance pieces as alternative means of communication. Doing this, she offers another language, that of the body, to express blackness and femaleness together. Shange's different use of language somehow introduces a different language. Her language reinforces not only the African American roots but also the black female experience by transcribing both. On the level of her female characters, Shange authenticizes the black female experience and their collective voices. On the authorial level, Shange authenticizes the black female tradition of writing through her experiments on the standard written English.

Subverting the English language which she associates with whiteness and maleness instead of using a thoroughly new language, she signifies on the standard written English. Robbing the English language from all its donations such as capitalization, punctuation, spelling and expressing herself in black vernacular with half-finished lines, Shange locates the standard written English on an unusual ground. As the signifying monkey breaks the authority of the lion through figurative speech, Shange breaks the authority of the English language by subverting it. In her Foreword to *Spell #7*, Shange notes that a New York critic asserts her subversion of English language. According to the critic, Shange is so involved with the destruction of the english language her writing approached verbal gymnastics like unto a reverse minstrel show (Shange, 1994: 67). The expression 'mesl (male english as a second language)' which she entitles one of the poems in *Okra To Greens*, accounts for

Shange's conception of standard written English. In this respect, Shange's authentic contribution to the canon may be considered 'female black english as native language' or shortly 'fbenl'.

3.2. An Alternative Genre

Ntozake Shange's writing challenges the categories of genre as it does not fit into any. Even though her performance pieces are regarded as drama, Shange refuses to be considered a dramatist. These following lines by Shange accounts for her conception of drama as well as her location of self as a writer among the genres:

as a poet in american theater/i find most activity that takes places on our stages overwhelmingly shallow/stilted&imitative. that is probably one of the reasons i insist on calling myself a poet or writer/rather than a playwright/ i am interested solely in the poetry of a moment/the emotional aesthetic impact of a character or a line... (Shange, 1994:67).

Her words suggest that Shange refuses to adjust the Aristotelian understanding of drama which is 'an imitation of man in action'. Since for Shange, either man is depicted solely or his/her poetic address is centralized. As her major focus is on the capture of an aesthetic moment, she is also a poet. She may further be considered an imagist as through dance, music and the magic force of the word, she creates images. Supportingly, Shange refuses to be labeled as a playwright.

Furthermore, Shange states that the conventional form of drama is insufficient to meet her demands as the following lines imply:

for too long now afro-americans in theater have been duped by the same artificial aesthetics that plague our white counterparts/"the perfect play," as we know it to be/ a truly european framework for european psychology/cannot function for those of us from this hemisphere (67).

Since, the African American tradition involves many elements which can not be represented in a euro-centric form of drama such as the use of nommo or the magic power of the word, music and dance as well as the blackface minstrelsy. Shange's performance pieces offer an alternative way to represent blackness. This new genre is so dramatic that one can perform and so poetic that one can read. While talking about the form she used in **For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow Is Enuf**, in an interview, Shange explains her need for choreopoem as such:

...I specifically called for colored girls a "choreopoem" because it isn't a play. I wasn't trying to write a play, because I was primarily a poet at the time. I think I had only written two short stories in my life; all I had written was poetry, so that gets rid of the idea how I constructed it... That kind of art is what I still do, because I'm not following a plot line so much as I'm following the surrender of my audience's emotions to the dynamic of the realities of my characters (in Bryer, 1995:206).

In her article entitled "Black Women Playwrights from Grimke to Shange: Selected Synopsis of Their Works", Jeanne-Marie A. Miller suggests that the choreopoem consists of many poems, each a playlet, which together form a statement (in Hull, 1982 : 289). This prevents Shange's performance pieces to have a linear plot line with climaxes and anti-climaxes. The structure of a choreopoem requires rather a circular structure as every individual episode starts, develops and ends within itself. Barnsley E. Brown also argues that Shange avoids the typical resolution of conventional drama in favor of a much more musical, wholistic structure (212). As Brown further suggests;

Shange dispenses not only with the plot but also with the characterization of Eurocentric realistic drama in favor of a polyphonic form—a series of poems spoken by different voices and interspersed with music and dance. Instead of presenting the traditional exposition, she throws us directly into what she calls "the poetry of a moment / the emotional and aesthetic impact of a character or a line" ... Although her characters each tell their own individual stories, Shange emphasizes their emblematic nature by

leaving them unnamed, and instead identifies each character with a particular color worn on her body (213).

Hence, Shange's characters who stand for a collective point of view instead of their individual identities, remain undeveloped.

As Kimberly W. Benston points out different from her masculine peers, Shange offers a highly experimental dramatic form which explores "the entanglements of authenticity and meditation, originality and historicity, knowledge and performance, identity and identification..." (68). Furthermore, Shange's performance pieces own some features attributed to black female playwrights only. Jeanne-Marie A. Miller argues that black female playwrights differ from the male ones owing to their themes and treatment of black women characters (in Hull, 1982 :289). She further suggests:

Often in plays by Black men, the happiness of black women or their 'completeness' in life depends upon strong Black men. In contrast to white-authored dramas, where Black women have usually appeared as devoted servants to white families, as matriarchs, or as dumb, incompetent people, Black women playwrights have told the Black woman's story-from her point of view. The plays have focused on her tragedies; her struggles; her dreams for herself, her family and her race. The images of Black women are usually positive, and their female characters, for the most part, have great moral strength (289).

As the above statement notes, Ntozake Shange's depiction of female characters differ from that of her male colleagues. Involving music and dance as performative elements, Shange reinforces the African American and the female tone of her pieces. Hence, drama as a genre does not account for the emotions and experiences she intends to represent. Shange's drama transcends the rules of conventional drama. In an analysis of **For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow Is Enuf**, Gwen Raaberg comments:

The piece is a collage of African-American music, dance, and language, drawing on the rich resources of jazz, reggae, oral narration, and conversational speech... The work as performance does not present an action, linear or episodic, but rather juxtaposes fragments of various experiences and feelings, recounted by the performers who are distinguished mainly by the color of their dresses. These women are therefore distinct but are set in relationship through thematic reverberations in their stories and through choreographed movement and dance, which physically interconnects the circle of women... (157-158).

The function of the choreopoem as a form in **For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow Is Enuf** may be traced to the individual and collective addresses of female characters. Although Shange depicts them as undeveloped characters, she still gives them a voice. This collective voice enables them to take individual action. Thus, the performance piece can not be transformed into a linear plot structure like in drama. It is bound by a circular structure since each lady tells her own story which is very similar to the rest. The choreopoem may be the only form to reflect this sense of entrapment in vicious circle. Tejumola Olaniyan suggests that the status of the performers in this piece are not stable as their identities continuously shift between being a performer and character. Olaniyan acknowledges that these dramatized stories and pieces-within-piece are not aimless as such technique is used in the context of combat breathing (Olaniyan, 1995: 128). In this respect, the technique used in **For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow Is Enuf** reflects the collective experience.

Similarly, the characters in **Spell #7** stand for a collective voice rather than individual utterances. As involved in Karen Cronacher's article "Unmasking the Minstrel Mask's Black Magic in Ntozake Shange's **Spell #7**",

In **Spell #7**, Shange deconstructs the humanistic assumption of character as a stable identity by foregrounding the role of narrative in the construction of a subject. The plot of the play consists of actors and actresses taking up the position of narrator as the remaining cast enact the story, so that the actors and actresses do

not retain fixed identities, but are subjects-in-process confronting the constraints of a hegemonic system of representation....her characters take up positions, a strategy, that emphasizes the constructed nature of identity rather than naturalizing identity (Cronacher, 1992: 184).

Even though its characters are also undeveloped, **Spell #7** among Shange's performance pieces may be considered closer to dramatic structure, because owing to the symbolism of the blackface mask, it offers a resolution. The reconciliation with past which implies a resolution, attributes **Spell#7** a linear structure despite the similar stories being told over and over by different characters. There is an episodic structure owing to the repetition in terms of story telling. The act of story telling which is also explicit in **For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow Is Enuf** may be related to the African American oral tradition. The characters in **Spell #7** and **For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow Is Enuf** suddenly become narrators telling individual stories in poetic form. In this respect, these pieces involve drama, and short story as well poetry. Thus, it is difficult to determine the genre these pieces belong to.

In Claudia Tate's interview, Shange states that she is astonished to hear people talking about the poems in **Spell #7**. The following lines by Shange reveal that she can not fix this piece into any genre:

I didn't know there were any poems in **Spell #7**. I was having difficulty understanding what people were saying I was doing. I decided that I wouldn't pay any attention to what they were saying. I'll just call these pieces "things"... (165).

As for **Okra To Greens** , **Love Space Demands** and **I Heard Eric Dolphy In His Eyes**, the term 'choreopoem' should be used. Since these performance pieces involve a transition between poetry and drama like many of Shange's dramatic pieces. These pieces, however, consist of separate poems with different titles. Hence, one may not claim a circular structure in these pieces as there is no

coherence between the episodes. In each episode, a different story is told and when they come together, the piece resembles a serial movie.

Boogie Woogie Landscapes and **A Photograph: Lovers In Motion** may be considered plays with poetic language. These pieces have linear plot structures in which characters experience a stream-of-consciousness. Although Layla is depicted in her fantastic dream, the play resolves with the departure of the night life companions leaving Layla within her sleep. Layla may be regarded as a stereotypical character representing “an all-american colored girl” with Shange’s words in initial stage directions (113). However she gradually develops and meets her subconscious blackness. Similarly, Sean goes through a spiritual journey in which he asserts both his collective and individual identity. As compared to Layla, Sean is less stereotypical a character since he is distinguished from many black men with his gentleness and fragileness.

Shange’s performance pieces imply a transition between drama and poetry. In an interview, Shange answers a question about the connection between her novels, poetry and playwriting as such:

Usually, to write a poem is my first impulse, but I also write alot of narrative poems. In some of these narrative poems, I’ve been able to find plot lines and characters which are implied but I might not have known it, so I can move them out and into something. I used to think that I started doing plays because it forced me to make people or feelings I had clear to audiences who may have never met these people or had these feelings. That’s why I sort of did that... (in Bryer, 1995:210).

Shange further remarks that she prefers to write performable pieces since many black and Latin people hardly read (in Bryer, 1995:210).

Shange’s writing reveals transitions between other genres as well. For instance, her novel **Lilianne: The Resurrection Of The Daughter** involves a

chapter is full of dialogues instead of the narrative voice. The chapter entitled 'Rooms in the Dark', in which Lillianne talks to her therapist, implies a fully dramatic scene. However, the previous chapters are either full of narration or involve parts from Lillianne's journal. Not surprisingly, Shange in her foreword, notes that the novel is being adapted for the stage (in Mahone, 1994: 327). The following lines by Shange reveals why she has chosen to use such a different form for this chapter:

In psychoanalysis, you can't do anything but talk. The limitations imposed by that form allowed me to investigate parts of Lillianne and as a character and certain kinds of language that I would be unable to do in another setting (324).

In this respect, the novel as a genre fails to capture the moment which is Shange's major goal. The reason why Shange writes novels may be related to her wish to assert authority as an author. Shange articulates her reasons for writing novels as well as the boundaries she comes across while writing plays as such:

The reasons why I write novels is because writing plays and doing performance pieces and poetry readings leaves me in my fantasy world very much involved with a whole lot of people who talk to me, who clap or don't clap, want to give me my set design budget, who want me to edit out these stanzas or want me not to edit those out, who want me to have comp tickets for only two nights instead of five nights. So it becomes too many people. I like to write long novels because I don't have to talk to anybody. I can stay in my house; I can make up seventeen million characters; I can have them go to bed when the sun comes up; I can do all kind of outrageous things, because in a novel I have the control that a director and a writer have- and a producer, for that matter, because I can decide how lush the scenery is going to be and it won't cost me a cent! (in Bryer, 1995: 210).

These lines imply that the genre in which an author holds full authority, is certainly the novel. Although the existence of a narrator requires a sharing of authority, the narrator is still a reflection of the authorial voice. The novel writing process does not isolate the author from her piece of writing as he/she meets no representations of the characters in action. Another advantage is that the author has a

chance to act freely as he/she has little feedback. Since, the author does not ever meet the reader until the novel is published.

However, Shange's novel **Lilianne: The Resurrection of The Daughter** makes it impossible for her to use these advantages. The dramatic scenes in this novel require performance which limits Shange's imagination. The following extract from Lilianne's conversation with her therapist indicates how the dramatic technique used in the novel reduces Shange's voice into stage directions:

ANALYST: What is your biggest problem?

LILIANNE: Damn it. I told you, Jesus Christ, I musta told you a thousand times. I can't breathe.

ANALYST: When it's silent?

LILIANNE: Yes.

ANALYST: That's why my silences, here with you, are troubling, then?

LILIANNE: Oh... (Long pause) How're you gonna help me in silence?

ANALYST: Well, then we can get to hear the noises in your head that are choking you (in Mahone, 1994: 330).

In her foreword, Shange further remarks that she wished to give Lilianne the chance to talk for herself. Thus instead of a narrative voice that is more dominant over the text than the characters, Shange uses dramatic dialogue in this chapter. The following lines by Shange support this view:

... "Rooms in the Dark" is a sparse section [of the novel] because we have to dance through the words, so we can really make them take root in us. As Lilianne clarifies things, they take root in her, not as chaos or something scary, but in something she can breathe with, relax in and own. She has to own it so that it doesn't terrify her and therefore she can be stronger (in Mahone, 1994: 324).

Doing this, she reduces her authority over the novel on purpose. In this respect, Shange's collective drives are dominant over the individual motives. Since, Shange prefers to write performable pieces in order to reach her folk who do not read. In an interview, Shange confesses that she tries to write performable pieces regardless of genre concerns. She exemplifies **Lilianne: The Resurrection of The Daughter** in order to assert her experimental form of writing:

The novel I'm working on called "Resurrection of a Daughter" has three different kinds of writing in it. There are narrative chapters in the voices of many characters, there are dialogue scenes (including psychotherapy sessions), and there are poems. I'm listening now to see if any of those sections work by themselves, to see if I should just do a night of monologues all about the same person, or if I should do the monologues and the dialogue things, or can I put the poems with anybody. I'm experimenting to see what's stageworthy... (in Bryer, 1995:214).

These lines also account for the reason why Shange includes poems in the novel. Her writing implies an experiment on how the genres work in cooperation and on their own. In this respect, Shange's search for an authentic genre to account for her experience may be ascribed to Carole Boyle Davies's following argument about migrations in Black women's writing:

Migratory subjects suggests that Black women's writing cannot be located and framed in terms of one specific place, but exist/s in myriad places and times, constantly eluding the terms of the discussion. It is not so much formulated as a "nomadic subject", although it shares an affinity, but as a migratory subject moving to specific places and for definite reasons. In the same way as diaspora assumes expansiveness and elsewhere-ness, migrations of the black female subject pursue the path of movement outside the terms of dominant discourses (Davies, 1994: 36,37).

Likewise, Shange's writing urges to explore other locations on the text. Challenging the classical conception of genres, Shange immigrates from one system of expression to another. She experiments on the genres in order to find the most

accurate form to express her experience. On another level, however, breaking the conventional conception of genres, she implies that no genre is fully adequate.

Shange juxtaposes music and dance in her writing in order to reveal an escape from the boundaries of genre. The following lines by Tejumola Olaniyan also assert that music and dance function as substitutes to drama:

In Shange's theater, music and dance are not conceived as ornamental elements added on to enrich the drama but as the very constitutive fabric of the performance, setting and upsetting the pace, underscoring and contradicting the mood, creating and destroying moods, showing the form (the way it is) and the formlessness (the way it is contingent, alterable)... (Olaniyan, 1995:126).

Barbara Frey Waxman traces the use of music and dance in dramatic form to black female tradition. Waxman remarks that black female writers usually use dance in their writing and dance enables both the characters and the authors to act freely:

While dance events within the narrative free the protagonists to redefine and be themselves, dance rhythms often pervade these authors's prose, freeing the texts from traditional language, structures, and genres (Waxman, 1994:94).

Like dance, music purveys an alternative mood within the genre. Through music and dance, it becomes possible to transfer from one genre to another. For instance, choreopoems can be performed easier when music and dance accompany. Hence, a dramatic mood is conveyed with the assistance of these accompanying elements even in the middle of a narration.

The use of music and dance also imply a transcendent mood in which motion and voice can not settle down. The search for an original genre goes parallel to the need for a new means of representation. In **Performing Blackness**, Kimberly W.

Benston views as Shange's use of movement to a protest of Euro-American dance style:

...Shange glances against Euro-American modern dance's concern to locate a gestural vocabulary adequate to the altered temporality of contemporary experience, but avoids its hesitancy in coupling motion with emotion, its fear of 'feminine' excess against the 'masculine' contours of formal precision. Most distinctive in relation to the canons of the modern dance is Shange's sensuous, cerebral, and political amalgamation of word, movement, gesture, and music, which insists on a modal relation between private and public expression (Benston, 2000: 87).

In this respect, Shange signifies on the modern music and dance which can not account for anything more than the contemporary experience or popular culture. Furthermore, she unites the individual with the collective as she responds to the call of her ancestors. Choreographer Dianne McIntyre highlights Shange's use of choreopoem as such:

Choreopoem is an ancient [African] form-words and movement happening simultaneously. It's natural. Zaki made a name for it. The uniqueness of the form as I know it and have worked with it, is that the words are not separate over there and danced to. The words and dance become one-intertwined so you couldn't imagine one without the other. It feels very natural to me- but it is somewhat daring. You have probably seen other people use the form, but it often doesn't work as well as with Zaki's poetry. Her words have the music and the dance in it and the words also have space that is open for the dance (like abstract music) whereas some other poetry may be so explicit that movement with it is redundant (qtd. in Lester, 1995 :4).

Shange's use of choreopoem is different than that of the other dramatists since music and dance are consistently involved in it. Shange demonstrates that genres induce a boundary over expression. Thus, she becomes experimental on the genres she uses. She reveals their arbitrariness by ignoring the rules of Euro-centric forms of writing. Through her storytellers or narrators in drama, poems or dialogues in novel, Shange celebrates her subversion of Euro-centric male system of writing.

As order signifies man and chaos implies woman, Shange breaks the order within the piece of writing. Shange reinforces the famous proverb, “Chaos is the law of nature, order is the dream of man” by bringing the law of nature to the text and breaking the rules of culture.

Doing this, Shange adheres to the black female tradition involving her own difference of expression and originality in form. That she has no place to dwell, is reflected on the continuous transitions in her writing. Neglecting to belong to any genre, also signifies a declaration of independence. Supportingly, Shange’s writing involves free associations which imply a search for authenticity. Challenging the boundaries the notion of genre would require and offering an alternative genre called ‘choreopoem’, Shange uses a distinct form.

Shange reconciles with the black female experience in terms of content while she revolts against it in terms of form. Her revolutionary attitude brings innovation to her writing while her reconciliation implies a unified identity. This conflict, namely revolt versus reconciliation, is what Shange’s writing is fed by. Her experiments on genre ends up authenticating her writing.

CONCLUSION

Ntozake Shange's writing requires a different perspective towards the existing rules or patterns, since it purveys not only a subversion of conventional forms and techniques but also a questioning of racial and gender codes. Her distinctness lies in the way her choice of content is revealed in her quest in form.

On the level of the characters, Shange responds to her African American roots or reinforces the black female's voice. Thus, in terms of content, Shange is motivated by her collective ties. On the authorial level, however, she focuses on the forms and techniques that would express both her collective and individual experience. Her search for a new form of writing involves both her destruction of English language and her experiments on different genres. Shange repeats the black female tradition in terms of form with her own difference. For instance, her representation of hyphenated identity by fragmented lines, oppression by silence and mobility by music and dance are not unusual. However, her use of a fragmented language as well as a mobile genre are incomparable. The way she integrates music and dance to the performance piece or the way she incorporates poetry and storytelling in drama is unique.

Shange's experiments in form further involve a search for authority. Shange as an author wishes to celebrate her difference within the canon. Signifying on English language and conventional use of genres, Shange desires to assert her authority on the text. Her choice of words, different acquisitions as well as original symbolism enables her to authorize on her text. In this respect, it may be claimed that on this level, Shange actualizes her individual motives.

Shange's individual and collective searches somehow collaborate as she satisfies her individual need for authority within a context either celebrating the African American roots or the black female's voice. In other words, the content meets her collective demands and the form accounts for her individual desires. They merge in such a natural way that Shange's writing transcends all cultural instruments.

In terms of content, Shange's writing searches for a reconciliation. Her characters gradually confront with their former experiences. Layla in **Boogie Woogie Landscapes**, Sean in **A Photograph:Lovers In Motion** as well as the actors and actresses in **Spell #7** reconcile with their black identity and actualize the magician Lou's spell: "You gonna be colored all yr life/you gonna love it/ bein colored all yr life" (Shange, 1994:72). Such a confrontation is inevitably experienced in the cases of black female figures. The ladies in **For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow Is Enuf** finally reach a unified identity. Similarly, Okra and the persona in **Love Space Demands** assert their power as black women despite the difficult experience they collectively went through. The discourse of these female characters may be summarized as "We will never consider suicide since we know that rainbow is enough".

The form of Shange's writing, on the other hand, offers a challenge rather than a reconciliation. Thus breaking the traditional rules, Shange revolts against the previous connotations of being black and colored. Shange, on the authorial level, continues her rebellion against the Euro-American and male patterns of writing. Her use of choreopoems as an alternative genre supports this view. Y.S. Sharadha comments on Shange's unique form of writing as such:

With For Colored Girls Shange brought to the American stage a distinctively black feminist perspective. The perspective is manifested in the form of the choreopoem which is interdisciplinary in nature and non-Eurocentric in its texture and expression of African American culture. The choreopoem for Shange is not necessarily meant to challenge the existing European forms of art. It is a form which enables her characters to celebrate themselves. It is further a form through which she is able to declare war on patriarchy's universally oppressive system. The choreopoem for Shange is a mode of empowerment at women ... (Sharadha,1998: 133).

Through her transitional genre and innovated language, Shange revolutionizes the possible ways of writing.

The search for her African roots is one of the reasons for her revolutionary attitude. In order to grasp the theatre belonging to her tradition, Shange uses poetic language and storytelling in her dramatic pieces. Furthermore, she subverts the Standard written English transcribing the black vernacular. Her inclusion of music and dance as well as her references to the blackface minstrelsy and African American tradition of signifying, imply a response to her African blood.

Shange's quest for authenticity involves some binary oppositions such as individual versus collective, traditional versus original, African American versus feminist. Her writing accounts for her individual identity as well as the collective one. Her attempt to merge two split identities that belong to her may be traced to the name she chooses for herself. She is Ntozake who brings her own things to her writing and Shange, 'she who walks like a lion'. The former may be ascribed to her search for authority while the latter stands for her search for authenticity. Her African name implies her search for her roots while her surname underlines the female existence.

Shange is traditional in the sense that she responds to the previous call of her kin. Yet, she is original as her response transgresses the standards. Shange may be considered a feminist as she raises the black female voice and an African Americanist as she ignores the white tradition. In other words, Shange negotiates these differences in order to reconcile the irreconcilable experience.

Doing this, Shange reflects her inner quest for authenticating herself together with the collective experience. Shange is distinguished from other black female writers owing to the merged individual and collective drives reflected in form and content. Since Shange's approach to language and genre is experimental while her depiction and voicing of her characters is original. Shange's writing celebrates her authority and authenticity as a black female writer accounting for both her individual and collective searches. Reinforcing her racial ties and dignifying her gender, Shange adheres to the tradition. To describe Shange, Sharadha utters the following lines:

Employing feminist rhetoric and evocative poetry and blending music, dance, and poetry to express the misery and ecstasy of being female and black in America, Shange is one of the finest African-American playwrights who have forged a new dramatic idiom to capture the nuances of being black in America. With her keen ear for black American idioms recreated in the rhythms and nuances of language of her characters, Shange recalls some of the salient features of the American theatre and establishes a vital link between African theatre and African-American experience (Sharadha, 1998:134).

As Sharadha further suggests, Shange's search for an African American theatre reflects her quest for identity and offers a recreation in the theatre of an African American language (Sharadha, 1998:135). Shange also responds to Helene Cixous's call for 'écriture feminine' as she writes about women's experience and uses a different language. More specifically, however, Shange actualizes bell hooks's call for a black female tradition. Otherwise using the tradition of the white women, Shange would not be able to express the black female experience. Since,

The voices of black women have been negated by the Standard English grammar that has forced black people to fit their experiences into alien language patterns. Black women's experiences have also been negated by a literary tradition that celebrates the experiences of white men (Sharadha, 1998:79).

In this respect, Shange adheres to the black female canon to account for the black female experience. Her writing which involves poetry of a moment, may be traced to the formless volatile structure of the female body. Hence it acquires imagination and creativity. A psychoanalytical reading suggests that Shange as a woman is in search for a solid form. Shange's experiments on language and genre, may be ascribed to this.

On the other hand, Shange signifies on the black female canon with her own difference. On the level of the characters, Shange wears a reconciling minstrel mask. She reveals her mask on the authorial level as she reverses the minstrel show

subverting the English language and breaking the Eurocentric classification of genre. Reminiscent of the signifying monkey, Shange uses the narrative level to celebrate reconciliation and the figurative level to dictate her authority. Like Esu in the African myth, she stands at the crossroads of criticism with her double utterance. Shange's writing brings the minstrel, trickster, dancer, singer, magician and the storyteller together. It celebrates the moving female body as well as her segregated language. Shange belongs to nowhere although she has so many places to belong to. She is Ntozake who belongs to herself and Shange who is the storyteller. In other words, Shange's writing is so authentic as it signifies on the signifying tradition.

As discussed in the previous chapters, these seven published performance pieces by Shange imply a search for identity in terms of content and a quest for authenticity in terms of form. While Shange responds to her African heritage and dignifies the black female experience, she completes a collective mission. On a deeper level, however, she celebrates her individual differences and authority.

The major objective of this thesis has been to highlight the authenticating mood in Ntozake Shange's published performance pieces. Her writing reveals a search for a collective authenticity when her response to the African American and the black feminist traditions is articulated. On the authorial level, however, her writing betrays an individualized quest for authenticity, since the different form revealed in Shange's writing reflects her authorial voice. While Shange transcends over conventional forms of writing, her writing labels itself 'authentic'.

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