

**TRANSMUTING ARISTOTELIAN REPRESENTATION
IN THE STAGING OF THE DOUBLY OTHERED SUBJECT IN
ADRIENNE KENNEDY'S
FUNNYHOUSE OF A NEGRO, THE OWL ANSWERS
AND
A MOVIE STAR HAS TO STAR IN BLACK AND WHITE**

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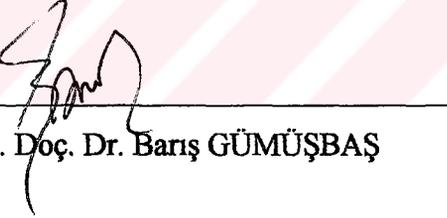
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ARİSTOTELES’İN TEMSİL KURAMININ DÖNÜŞÜMÜ:
ADRIENNE KENNEDY’NİN
FUNNYHOUSE OF A NEGRO, THE OWL ANSWERS
VE
A MOVIE STAR HAS TO STAR IN BLACK AND WHITE
OYUNLARINDA “ÖTEKİLEŞTİRİLMİŞ” ÖZNEİN SAHNELENMESİ

Adrienne Kennedy (d. 1931), 1960’lardan beri çağdaş Amerikan tiyatrosunun en yenilikçi eserlerini üretmektedir. Çalışmalarının çok az bilinmesi, eserlerinin belli bir kuram veya kuramlar çerçevesinde incelenememesi ve öznel bir tarza sahip olmasından kaynaklanmaktadır. Yazarın kariyerinin dönem noktaları oldukları için tez çalışması Funnyhouse of a Negro (1962), The Owl Answers (1963) ve A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White (1976) adlı oyunlarla sınırlanmıştır.

Bu oyunlar sahne anlatımları ve bakış açıları nedeniyle Aristoteles’in temsil kuramından ayrılırlar. Aristoteles’in “çoğunluğu” temsil eden beyaz erkek kahramanı, kendisini ve kendisiyle özdeşleşen seyirciyi baskın ideolojinin içinde tanımlar. Ancak Kennedy’nin öznesi, bu ideolojinin içinde değildir ve hiçbir homojen grubu temsil etmez. Seyirci, çoğunlukla olumsuz bir imaj yaratan bu özneye özdeşleşmekten çok, bu kişiyi çıkmaza iten süreci, dolayısıyla da bu süreci kontrol eden baskın ideolojiyi sorgulamaya başlar. Aristotelesçi temsilin harekete geçirmedeği, hatta engel olduğu bu sorgulayıcı davranış, seyircinin kendi bilincini tanımlama, kendi tavrını ortaya koyma çabasıdır.

Adrienne Kennedy, oyunlarında tiyatrunun geleneksel öğelerini kullanmasına karşın, bunları kendi tarzında yeniden düzenler. Bu bakımdan, temel olarak yaptığı, dram sanatının özünü oluşturan temsil kuramının biçimi ve içeriğinde değişiklikler yapmaktır. Aristoteles’in kuramını sorgulayan bu tip yaklaşımlar da, çeşitli ilgi alanlarından beslenen tiyatro incelemeleri açısından çağdaş bir anlayışın ortaya çıkmasına önayak olmaktadır.

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Adrienne Kennedy (b. 1931) has been writing for the American stage since the 1960s. The indifferent attitude toward her work is mostly due to the fact that it resists fixed interpretations and theatrical classifications. Since they are the most distinguished plays of her oeuvre, the scope of the thesis is limited to Funnyhouse of a Negro (1962), The Owl Answers (1963) and A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White (1976).

The theatrical narratives of the plays and their points of view are the factors that differentiate them from the Aristotelian theory of representation. Aristotle's white male hero who stands for the "majority" prescribes himself and the spectator who identifies with him, in conformity with the dominant ideology. Adrienne Kennedy's subject, on the other hand, perpetually resists being located within this (or any other) ideology and resists representing any homogenous group. Kennedy's audience, rather than identifying with the subject, who, for the most part, displays negative role models, concentrates on the process which drives her to contradiction. This concentration is a critical one, since the process that drives the subject is controlled by the authoritarian ideology. This critical thinking is vital for the formation of the spectator's own subjectivity, which is denied the audience in Aristotelian representation.

Kennedy, while making use of the traditional dramatic elements, combines them in a new way, which would articulate her vision of reality. Such an attempt can only be described as transmuting representation. This act of reframing, furthermore, encourages a contemporary understanding of theatrical studies; one, which comprises and invites the viewpoints of other disciplines such as feminism and cultural studies.

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INTRODUCTION

Most critics consider Adrienne Kennedy as one of the most significant playwrights of the contemporary stage. Herbert Blau describes her as “evocatively gifted,” and as “one of the most distinct representatives of the last generation of American dramatists (1987: 43),” while one of her commissioners Joseph Papp comments that “Adrienne Kennedy is one of this country’s most important and impassioned writers.”¹ Similarly, the African-American author Ishmael Reed’s view is that “[l]ike most great artists in whose work different cultures and styles converge, Adrienne Kennedy is unique.” (Kennedy 2000). However, it is rather recently that her works are receiving a substantial amount of interest. Her highly complicated and experimental style prevents Kennedy’s works to meet the public, usually limiting their commutability within the boundaries of academic circles and curricula.

Since her first Obie award-winning play Funnyhouse of a Negro was produced in 1964, directed by Michael Khan, her work has received criticism mostly in the contexts of European avant-garde movements. William Elwood attributes Kennedy’s plays to German expressionism in their tendency to transcend the physical, delving into the realm of the unconscious, presenting the “internal, psychic, and emotional truth.” (1992: 86). Elwood detects in her plays “a complex arrangement of the Aristotelian elements of drama,” “a powerful abstraction of human existence” and the exploration of “deeper levels of meaning” that are buried in the unconscious mind, the qualities which he attributes to German expressionism (1992: 86-87).

Elinor Fuchs, on the other hand, establishes a parallel between Kennedy’s plays and the early symbolists. She focuses on the issues of death and the dramatic form “that eschews plot and character development [and] reveal[s] itself through sheer density or saturation.” (1992: 79). Emphasizing the “metaphysical and timeless” quality in Kennedy’s plays that transcend “beyond the social and political order,” Fuchs evaluates the contexts of culture and history as sources of eternal and unchangeable conflicts: “Whatever is always was and cannot be altered.” (1992: 79).

Although she acknowledges the strong influence of culture and history (but not gender) in the plays, Fuchs' final argument is that

“...Kennedy places her characters in...cultural and historical contradictions and boiling subjectivity... [but] her focus is never social interaction... [it is] the mystery of the isolated soul (1992: 80).”

Kennedy's departure from mimetic representation and her need to remove the pressure of reality, in order to set free the oppressed desires converge with the strategy of surrealist drama, the Theatre of The Absurd and the Theatre of Cruelty. Compared to the Theatre of Cruelty, surrealist drama and the Theatre of the Absurd focus more on the isolated nature of the individual, whose world is devoid of meaning. The Theatre of Cruelty, on the other hand, assumes that there is “life's intensity,” the “magic in our lives” and manifests that theatre serves to draw out this archaic force, this intrinsic sensual energy through ritual (Artaud 1958: 9). Although their treatment of the individual is not very similar, their common suggestion turns out to be a theatre in which the unconscious is presented and the realistic materiality of the immediate environment is eschewed for the nature of the inner world. Acknowledged “as a genuine instrument for logic and the discovery of reality” (Esslin 1974: 14), language takes on other functions to imply its metaphysical aspect. In the first manifesto of the Theatre of Cruelty, Artaud defines how language should function: “It is not a question of suppressing the spoken language but of giving words approximately the importance they have in dreams.” (1958: 94).

In these respects, Adrienne Kennedy's theatre has common elements with the European avant-garde. Like them, she dismantles the Aristotelian form so as to reveal the unconscious; her dreams have a profound effect on her writing, and one of her earlier plays, A Rat's Mass (1967), is actually based on a dream. The traces of these early modernist movements can in no way be overlooked; however, it is Kennedy's attempt to free the doubly othered subject from the context of binary logic that distinguishes her as a unique multicultural dramatist.

Funnyhouse of a Negro (1962) digs into the psychic world—the “funnyhouse”—of a young African-American woman who is so confused about herself that she can identify neither with her black past nor the white middle-class society that surrounds her. Similarly, in The Owl Answers (1963), Kennedy explores the split subject who, on one hand, is tied to the African heritage by birth, and on the other, is craving for access into her white family lineage. These two plays, both one-acts², are Kennedy’s most well known and most frequently produced works.

An even shorter one-act is A Lesson in Dead Language (1968) whose focus is the initiation of female students into womanhood. Submerged in Christian symbols, the play reflects upon the relationship between religion and being a woman/mother/daughter, and invites a discussion of childhood and innocence, in relation to female adulthood and guilt. A Rat’s Mass (1967), too, evolves around Christian symbols, within which the imagery of the African-American brother and sister (presented as rats) is juxtaposed. The central issue of this play conveys questions of sin and guilt, which is again related to Christianity. Rather longer than the other plays, A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White (1976) is drastically different as to its background of the presentation. The story is rendered in the context of the scenes from three Hollywood movies: *Now, Voyager, Viva Zapata* and *A Place in the Sun*. Written in the period in which Kennedy has accomplished herself as a talented and unique off-Broadway playwright, this play meditates on the all-white entertainment business of Hollywood, its power to set the modes of beauty and/or ideal, and its effect on the peoples of other cultures.

Quite exceptional, nevertheless still reflective of Kennedy's oeuvre are her adaptations of the Greek plays Electra (1980) and Orestes (1980), commissioned by the Juilliard School of Music. Bearing Kennedy’s authentic style (see the second note to the Introduction), the two plays are compressed into the one-act form, without having lost their original characterization and plot structure, and have acquired minimalistic elements such as short sentences and repetitions. People Who Led to My Plays (1987), an illustrated autobiography, is noteworthy for the weakening of the authorial tone, which may also be attributed to her plays.

Deadly Triplets (1990) is a prose work of Kennedy's, consisting of a mystery story and an autobiographical piece that sheds light on her plays. Barbara Christian comments that "[t]hough markedly different from her plays, Adrienne Kennedy's mystery story Deadly Triplets gives us insights into the working of a creative mind, how place influences genius, and seemingly innocent events become theatre." The Alexander Plays, written in 1992, is a collection of three one-acts, which are respectively She Talks to Beethoven, The Ohio State Murders, and The Film Club (A Monologue by Suzanne Alexander). Although lacking the overt fury and marginal symbolism of the early one-acts, these plays, again, concentrate on the issues of race, sexuality, sin, guilt and the quest for an all-embracing cultural subjectivity, in the framework of Kennedy's well-known unconventionality.

Kennedy's most recent work is a play in one-act, named Motherhood 2000, which she wrote in 1993, on her son Adam's being senselessly beaten by a policeman. This one-act, which Bonnie Marranca describes as an "anti miracle play," resembles her early works, in its manipulation of the conventional dramatic form and in the playwright's approach to Christianity and the white ideology. Marranca comments that

"[i]n a few short pages Kennedy's compressed, raw emotion and masterful tone of voice relentlessly advance to an ending of tragic necessity which renounces Christian values of redemption and forgiveness in favor of a more elemental justice, for in this godless world only violence prevails (1996: xvi)."

Presenting an oeuvre that reflects a variety of genres and an unyielding innovativeness, Adrienne Kennedy has been working creatively for more than forty years. However, her works are for the most part neglected, as stated earlier, due to their complexity and Kennedy's distance from groups such as feminists and Black Americans. The fact that her work has not been embraced by the movements does not indicate they are not of ideological and cultural value. Actually, in Kennedy's case, it

is quite the contrary; her plays, with respect to their presenting the subject, on the one hand dismantle the conventions of mimetic drama, introduce a whole new mode of representation, and on the other hand, adumbrate a notion of identity, a concept of subjectivity that bring together the fragments of multiple cultures, which do not necessarily embrace one another.

This study aims at exploring the way Kennedy presents the non-Western female subject who stands dramatically apart from the Aristotelian hero. Kennedy's subject stages an unconventional point of view in the sense that there are certain sensitivities in the subject's handling the matters, such as the sense of belonging, establishing (heterosexual) relationships, having a family and being an artist. In her plays, one can find the distinctive agendas of being an African-American and being a woman. Compared to the Aristotelian hero/ine³, Kennedy's subject is much more concerned with the way the dominant ideology determines her identity. Her main conflict is the inevitable outcome of the racist situation in which "any black person has to fight twice as hard to achieve anything." (Bryant-Jackson and Overbeck 1992: 7). In contradiction to this "othered" stance of the African-American subject, the Aristotelian subject is already an agent of the authoritarian ideology. The Aristotelian hero/ine sides with the audience whom s/he assumes to be abiding by the laws of the mainstream culture.

As to the staging of these disparate subjects, they are the ideological opposites. The audience can easily pinpoint the Aristotelian hero, and whatever s/he does, there is a logical reason for it. Identification with him/her is inevitable because s/he is on the stage as the representative of all humankind. The acting out of his/her experience leads to a disclosure of meaning. The authority of a certain point of view, which belongs to the hero/ine, in other words the playwright (that is to say, the dominant ideology) governs the characters as well as the audience. On the contrary, in Kennedy's plays, the subject resists being located and identification is impossible in that the character is incomprehensible, elusive, discursive and multiple. Logic, linearity, cause-and-effect relationship and disclosure of meaning never determine the

action. Rather, ambiguity, suggestions, repetitions and multiplicity of meaning characterize the presentation.

Adrienne Kennedy's treatment of the subject, while subverting the Aristotelian representation, displays a parallelism with a contemporary critical understanding of representation. This evaluation, mostly conveyed by feminist and multicultural critics, recognizes the conventional representation as an ideological strategy which organizes the audience in conformity with the dominant ideology. However, the contemporary audiences are to be offered ambiguities, multiple subject positions by which they will contemplate on the ranges of their own subjectivities.

Being the first play that she wrote, Funnyhouse of a Negro has a special place in Adrienne Kennedy's oeuvre. This particular play has altered her life in the sense that she achieved to bring out the sardonic artist hidden behind the young mother and housewife. Referring to the time she wrote the play, Kennedy comments as follows: "...I knew that a certain part of my life ended when... I had Funnyhouse. My life did change after that...[I] became a playwright, which is more difficult than I had ever anticipated (Diamond 1996: 132)." She not only established her writing career as a playwright, but also started writing plays one after another, which continued for a certain period of time. Upon being asked how she finds the courage to deal with and reveal "taboo" issues such as rape, incest and domestic violence Kennedy says:

"I wouldn't use the word *courage*. I got the *impetus* from Funnyhouse of a Negro. In the decade after, I wrote many one-act plays in rapid succession. It was a confident period...I felt confident because I knew I had revealed my obsessions in Funnyhouse...I'm not sure I could write those plays now. I was riding an emotional crest (Betsko and Koenig 1987: 254)."

The issues, similar to that of Funnyhouse of a Negro also dominate The Owl Answers—although this time they are somehow more intricately suggested. The two

plays share the same furious and dark tone. Actually on writing Funnyhouse of a Negro, Kennedy remembers that

“[i]t wasn’t until late July and the impetus of my son’s impending birth that the two works [Funnyhouse of a Negro and The Owl Answers] split apart and my character Sarah (with her selves Queen Victoria, Patrice Lumumba, Duchess of Hapsburg and Jesus) was born.”

These two plays, fierce in imagery and rich in symbol, similarly present a very complex style, which is quite hard to decipher and which, in Alisa Solomon’s words, “create a new, dangerous, and delirious dramaturgy (1992: ix).” Therefore, it will be most appropriate to study these two plays in relation with each other, as to their characterizations, plot structures and themes.

A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White, written nearly a decade after Funnyhouse of a Negro and The Owl Answers, may seem as being more easily accessible. However, the play’s exploration of the subject’s (as an African-American woman) assimilation through popular culture employs a scenic and fragmented presentation, no less decipherable than the other plays. As Elin Diamond comments, in this play

“...distinctions between subjectivity and social formation, foreground and background, history and fantasy, word and image are slippery or continually displaced; the texture of the text admits gaps, silences, refuses closure so that no unified reading... is possible, even desirable (1996: 126-127).”

In Kennedy’s later plays, which also continue to be improvisations on characterization and plot structure, “the violence is... more muted,” as Solomon points out (1992: xvii). Defining the early plays as “nightmarish journeys,” Solomon comments that

“[i]f in the early plays, Kennedy’s protagonists were hallucinators whose tortured psychosexual lives were being blasted open into a raw, relentless vision, in The Alexander Plays, the protagonist has stopped dreaming openly and started recounting (1992: xv).”

There is this shift in the tone of the plays Kennedy wrote at the beginning of her career. The three of the earlier plays, which will be analyzed in this study, are produced during the early 1960s, the era of political upheaval, and mid-1970s when the social problems have not been solved but only have been pushed aside. In Kennedy’s later works, the violence and the fury that characterized the early plays gave way to the more subdued forms of condemning racism and sexism. This may be the reason why the playwright states she is not sure she could write plays that aggressive again (Betsko and Koenig 1987: 254).

In addition, Funnyhouse of a Negro, The Owl Answers and A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White are chosen because they are the most radical experiments in her oeuvre as to their presenting the double consciousness of both the African-American people and women. The plays’ ability in breaking down the conventions of Aristotelian representation is due to Adrienne Kennedy’s employing the African-American woman as the subject, and her mastery in making use of theatrical devices, such as transformation. She uses the story and the characters metaphorically and builds up her scenes as if they are the sequences of a dream. As a result, the structures of her plays depart drastically from the model of Aristotelian tragedy. Kennedy inevitably moves toward the ritual form of theatre, unconsciously seeking a response from the audience on the subconscious level. Indirectly re/presenting the duality with which African-American women struggle to survive, she unveils the irrationality of socially constructed sexual and racial consciousnesses and proves how physically and psychologically ruinous those social constructions could be.

i. Female Subjectivity and the Representation in the Kennedy Plays

Although it is being altered gradually by the several unconventional presentations of female characters, traditionally, women were absent from the stage, both as characters, and as actors. Sue-Ellen Case points to an unrecorded tradition that the women have inevitably developed through the experience related to their condition as unresisting objects. Case defines this tradition generally as the “personal forms of dialogue,” and describes it as such:

“It is a dialogue built on mutuality and intersubjectivity, eliminating any sense of formal distance or representation. Personal dialogue is not removed from life, so it operates not by mimesis but by enactment... This is the dialogue of the present time, caught up in the moment of history and development without the secure fourth wall of formal closure (1988: 46).”

By articulating a narrative style which she attributes to "a new poetics," as different from the Poetics, Case attempts to give the idea of a female form: “[The feminine morphology] can be elliptical rather than illustrative, fragmentary rather than whole, ambiguous rather than clear, and interrupted rather than complete.” (1988: 129). She also recites her argument using the discourse of the feminists who have equated Aristotle’s beginning-middle-end structure with the male sexual experience as ‘foreplay-excitement-ejaculation.’ Her argument may be applied to the narrative, as well as the dramatic composition of the subject:

“A female form might embody her sexual mode, aligned with multiple orgasms, with no dramatic focus on ejaculation or necessity to build to a single climax. The contiguous organization would replace this ejaculatory form (1988: 129).”

Theatre practitioner and drama critic, Helene Keyssar theorizes this feminist dramatic composition in a more detailed manner. She makes a distinction between the

work of the women playwrights which fail to reveal the limits of the genre and which do not present the discourse of the marginalized, and the work of those which reveal and disrupt the dramatic conventions and which urge the audiences "to acknowledge the otherness of others." (1996: 132). To this end, she argues that the most accurate distinction between Aristotelian and feminist drama lies in the fact that the former relies on the recognition of one's self, whereas the latter focuses on recognition of others and the elusiveness of the self:

"In his key perception about Greek tragedy, Aristotle argued that drama achieved its effect on the audience by presenting a character who comes to know himself (or herself), and whose moment of self-recognition is revealed to others. Drama has thus traditionally urged us to know ourselves better, to search our histories and to *reveal* to ourselves and others who we 'really' are. In feminist drama, however, the impetus is not towards self-recognition and revelation of a 'true' self but towards recognition of others and a concomitant transformation of the self and the world (1984: xiii-xiv)."

Jeanie Forte handles the structure of Greek tragedy, which the feminist theory sees as a fundamental problem, from another point of view. Focusing on realism as an extension of Aristotle's mimesis, Forte intends to reveal the political implications of that structure. Therefore, she analyzes the relationship, which the realist text forms between itself and the reader (or the spectator):

"...[R]ealism...construct[s] the reader as a subject (or more correctly, an 'individual') within [the dominant] ideology. It poses an apparently objective or distanced viewpoint from which both the narrator and the reader can assess the action and ultimate meaning of the text, a pose which makes the operations of ideology covert, since the illusion is created for the reader that he or she is the source of meaning or understanding, unfettered by the structures of culture (1996: 19-20)."

She further argues that it is by constructing the reader as if s/he is the determiner of the meaning that realism supports the dominant social structure. Therefore, she argues, realism, whose intention is to conceal, cannot be made use of as a strategy for feminist drama, whose aim is to reveal the oppressive operations and to attack the authority of that structure. Similar to Case's female morphology, Forte suggests a "feminist writing practice":

"... [I]f a writer... aims to reveal and/or subvert the dominant ideology, as a feminist writer/text might, strategies must be found within the realm of discourse, particularly *vis à vis* narrative, which can operate to deconstruct the imbedded ideology: in other words, which might construct the reading subject differently... A subversive text... would open up the negotiation of meaning to contradictions, circularity, multiple viewpoints; for feminists this would relate particularly to gender, but also to the issues of class, race, age, sexuality and the insistence on an alternative articulation of female subjectivity (1996: 21)."

Seen in the light of these arguments, Adrienne Kennedy's plays can be attributed to the body of feminist work. Her discourse, reflected in the three plays, allows multiple points of view to be presented simultaneously, which also contribute to the ambiguity in meaning. This strategy has also a political side to it, as Forte argues, by urging the readers/audience to internalize the less established and less institutionalized subject positions, rather than positioning them within the dominant ideology. However close Kennedy is to the feminist discourse, in an interview, she honestly states what she feels about the women's movement in the 1960s: "First of all, I hate groups... Secondly, I'd been through all of those struggles ...alone." (Betsko and Koenig 1987: 255). Nevertheless in the same interview, she asserts that women can make a special contribution to theatre, and that she is bitter about the fact that the struggle for the white male playwright is an easier one:

“...as a black woman, or as a woman writer, or as a black writer, I don’t stand in the line for the income and the rewards, and that bothers me a lot. The white male writer can take steps... He does stand eighty percent more chance of getting his writing career to pay off. It’s that simple (1987: 258).”

Adrienne Kennedy bears a feminist point of view; however, in her interviews, she deliberately puts a distance between herself and political groups, which seems quite contradictory. Charlotte Canning makes this controversy clear by arguing that it is inaccurate to view Kennedy’s plays as written by a feminist or a product of the feminist movement. But she suggests that Kennedy’s statements do not imply hostility toward a feminist analysis of her work (1995: 191).

Adrienne Kennedy’s plays invite a critical discussion in which the female subjectivity is central, not only through their narrative styles but also through the representation of the subject. Representing the subject constitutes the major field of inquiry in feminist literary criticism. The feminist discourse, since the 1960s, has assumed that the personal is political. Although it has become a cliché over the years, it continues to be the fundamental belief that triggers the necessity of subverting the traditional thinking system, which excludes women from the public arena, dictating that she is domestic and not of value outside of the home. Cora Kaplan explains the notion of subjectivity from her point of view, without necessarily relating it to a feminist framework. However, it is obvious that her articulation resists the hierarchical organization and power structure which the conventional representation promotes:

“I would rather see subjectivity as always in process and contradiction, even female subjectivity, structured, divided and denigrated through the matrices of sexual difference. I see this understanding as a part of a...scenario...that can and ought to lead to a politics which will no longer overvalue control, rationality and individual power, ...instead, tries to understand human desire,

struggle and agency as they are mobilized through a more complicated, less finished and less heroic psychic schema (1986: 181).”

This rejection to assign a rigid and an authoritarian definition of the (female) subjectivity shows itself onstage by the representation of a singular character through several actors, or an actor’s constantly transforming selves/characters. Keyssar points to a common characteristic among the plays by women playwrights, which “is the relentless appearance...of the strategy of transformation, the theatrical manifestation of metamorphosis of contexts, actions, and most crucially, of characters.” (1984: xiii). Her main argument is that, as quoted earlier, in feminist drama the impetus is towards the recognition of the self and the world as in a permanent state of transformation (flux):

“Drama that embraces transformations inspires and asserts the possibility for change, roles and role-playing, not hidden essences, merit attention; we are what we do and what we become, and no one, neither woman nor man, is restricted from being other (1984: xiv).”

As if perfect embodiments of these arguments, Kennedy’s plays have an actor transformed from one character into another, or have a character presented by several actors. In Funnyhouse of a Negro, Sarah is multiple; apart from herself, her other selves are Duchess of Hapsburg, Queen Victoria Regina, Jesus and Patrice Lumumba. In The Owl Answers, all the characters are staged in the same manner as: SHE who is CLARA PASSMORE who is VIRGIN MARY who is the BASTARD who is the OWL. In A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White, the Hollywood stars speak for the “main” character Clara.

The subject’s having multiple positions, on the one hand, disrupts the audience’s already established modes of perception and/or reception, and on the other hand, opens up a field of exploration of multiplicity of meaning, which may be contradictory in nature. The switching of the subject’s positions through the live

theatre's strategy of transformation is to be analyzed in relation to the plays and also in relation to the politics it suggests.

ii. The Experience of the Diaspora and the African-American Identity

A discussion of Adrienne Kennedy's plays would be incomplete and misleading without any consideration of the African roots in her plays. It was not until Kennedy took a trip to West Africa, and lived in Accra, Ghana for a while that she was able to write Funnyhouse of a Negro and The Owl Answers. Although she completed the plays in Rome, they could only come into being through her African experience. In one of her interviews she tells of that period:

“In [that] fourteen months... my writing became sharper, more focused and powerful, and less imitative...almost every image in Funnyhouse took form while I was in West Africa where I became aware of masks. I lived in Ghana at a most fortunate time. Ghana had just won its freedom...I think the main thing was that I discovered a strength in being a black person and a connection to West Africa (Betsko and Koenig 1987: 248-249).”

This trip to Africa, on the ocean liner named *Queen Elizabeth*, was a huge breakthrough in the sense that the African landscape, together with its people, gave her an acute sense of racial identity and that it helped her enrich her imagery. After almost thirty years of living in the United States, she had the opportunity to explore the continent where her ancestors came from. The aesthetics of the white cultural productions that have influenced her heretofore encountered a whole new consciousness. Even the voyage itself provided an experience, which Kennedy would later combine with her new consciousness of being a member of one of the colonized races: “...besieged and surrounded by a myriad of real, astounding new imagery (ocean, staterooms, the decks, standing at the rail), my unconscious and conscious seemed to join in a new way.” (1996: 116) Although her recollection evokes the set of the Hollywood movie *Now, Voyager*, Africa has a distinctive role in the aesthetics of

her plays, particularly in her use of masks. In People Who Led to My Plays, she remembers buying a great mask “of a woman with a bird flying through her forehead,” which made her “totally break from realistic-looking characters,” and “soon create a character with a shattered, bludgeoned head.” (1996: 121).

Despite the fact that Kennedy’s process of becoming a playwright is actualized through this voyage, it is not possible to point out a privileged consciousness. Neither the African nor the American aspect has a priority over one another. The hybridity of culture, on the one hand requires the fusion of the fragments that belong to ideologically disparate frames of references, and on the other hand it provides the individual with an oppositional consciousness against the mainstream culture. Anchoring at this critical stance, the multicultural subject participates in the never-ending process of reconceptualizing his/her notion of cultural identity, and thus, displaying a standpoint far from essentialism. Essentialism, as Lavie and Swedenburg define, “is a process of appropriating the concept of fixity of form and content from the Eurocenter for the margin’s recovery and healing” (1996: 12), making the multicultural individual recognize “identity-as-essence” but not as “identity-as-conjuncture.” In Kennedy’s case, identity is acknowledged as a cultural terrain of convergences, in which the oppositional stance “is not only reactive but also creative and affirmative.” (Lavie and Swedenburg 1996: 13). Yet this stance does not promote a cultural fixity, it only evidences an oscillatory movement from one sphere of influence to the other. For the African-American, the two heritages are inseparable, although their distinctive characteristics are not always coherent. The two ancestries of the African-American identity encompass the ideological confrontations that can equally turn self-destructive or affirmative and creative. Chinosole provides an insight to the experience of possessing a mixture of cultures, particularly for the African-American, from a woman’s point of view:

“Forced displacement of Blacks resulted in a sense of self that is culturally contradictory and fragmented. The Black Diaspora experience required an acceptance of fragmentation and adaptation critical to survival... Based on the historical continuum of survival

through change, a premium is placed on the emotional immediacy of creative irreconcilability, which is a nonstatic, and nonthreatening affirmation difference. That difference may mean how a person is at odds with herself or her environment or the norms of femininity set up by the dominant culture (1990: 392).”

The significance of the diasporic experience is such that by juxtaposing the two symbolic and essentially contradictory systems of logic, it generates a terrain of “creative cultural creolization, ... where criss-crossed identities are forged out of the debris of corroded, formerly...homogeneous identities...” (Lavie and Swedenburg 1996: 15). Besides these productive instances of fruitful improvisations in dramatic, musical and poetic forms, this terrain of identity is also the home of “constant clashes with the Eurocenter’s imposition of cultural fixity,” compelling the individual “to experience the feeling of being trapped in an impossible in-between.” (Lavie and Swedenburg 1996: 15). Looking at Kennedy’s works, one can see that she has created speaking subjects who are trapped by the impossibility of claiming a definite heritage. However, as an African-American dramatist, she stands as the model signifying

“the new cultural politics of difference [that] consists of creative responses to the precise circumstances of...[the white ideology that] shun[s] degraded self-representations, articulating instead [its] sense of the flow of history in the light of the contemporary terrors, anxieties, and fears of highly commercialized North Atlantic capitalist cultures (West 1993: 204).”

For the discussion of “creative responses,” generated by the cultural politics of difference, Zora Neale Hurston’s exploration of the outstanding characteristics of African-American cultural productions is complementary. She clarifies the attitudes by which the African-American people have adopted themselves to the life in the white United States, thousands of miles away from their mother continent. Hurston meditates on the African-American’s notion of language, arguing that, for them, action came before speech, which is indeed a historical fact—the slaves did not have

any knowledge of English when their white masters communicated with them using this language. Hurston says that their interpretation of language is in terms of pictures: "...the speaker has in mind the picture of the object in use. Action. Everything illustrated. So we can say the white man thinks in a written language and the Negro thinks in hieroglyphics."⁴ (1990: 175). As an extension of the fact that action is prior to speech, mimicry and dramatization naturally come to be the inseparable parts of social life:

"Every phase of Negro life is highly dramatized. No matter how joyful or how sad the case there is sufficient poise for drama. Everything is acted out. Unconsciously for the most part of course. There is an impromptu ceremony always ready for every hour of life. No little moment passes unadorned (1990: 175)."

Asymmetry is another typical feature of African-American expression. Hurston's description is such that

"[t]here is always rhythm, but it is the rhythm of segments. Each unit has a rhythm of its own, but when the whole is assembled it is lacking in symmetry. But easily workable to a Negro who is accustomed to the break in going from one part to the other, so that he adjusts himself to the new tempo (1990: 179)."

Even though Hurston refers to dance and/or music performances, her insight can also be adapted to the dramatic structure of Adrienne Kennedy's plays. Every scene has a rhythm of its own; sometimes the actions are sudden and have a frequent pace, and sometimes they are performed as if in a dream, in a state of trance. Although Kennedy's instruments of rhythm are the most conventional dramatic elements, which are dialogue, monologue and pantomime, she combines them in such a way that the presentation of the subject's experience shifts away from the realistic and/or naturalistic circumstances toward an original theatrical expression that defines itself.

Hurston explains the originality of the Negro expression as “the modification of ideas.” (1990: 181). For her, African-Americans’ originality lies in their interpretation of the Euro-American materials, and expressing it in their own ways. They imbed their own cultural traits in these materials, which have become inseparable parts of the white civilization, such as language or religion. In other words, African-Americans’ idiomatic gestures are characterized by their habit of reconstructing the material, re-inventing, re-framing, re-forming the already established concept. In the context of a discussion on African-American theatrical tradition, in this sense, the focus will be on the re-evaluation of dramatic mimesis/representation. Still, for an insight to the religious issues in Kennedy’s plays, it is useful to see how the African-Americans in general and Kennedy in particular have interpreted Christianity.

Michael S. Weaver explores the performative traits of African culture that have survived in the new continent and are affirmed in the church. Similar to Hurston’s argument that “no little moment passes unadorned,” Weaver states that the style, as a characteristic of Afrocentric performance, manifests the cultural difference. It is a style in which “a moment-by-moment dynamic exists wherein there is a spontaneous interplay among... the various dramas of event.” (1991: 57). Weaver points out five elements of performance in a sermon, which he also calls “the ecstatic display.”

Preaching is the focal point of the sermon. Every preacher has a unique style in his/her usage of chanting, hollering, dancing, foot stomping, singing along with rhyme, metaphor and analogy. Singing incorporates bodily movements, gestures and even a holy dance (stomping the feet and throwing the head backwards successively). Both the choir and the congregation may sing, or a member can come forward and sing his/her own song, calling the rest to join in. During praying, individual styles are accentuated. A person singled out for his/her ability to beseech the Lord, leads the rest of the congregation. In testifying (for what the Lord has done for them), performance modes vary from vocal to gestural—arms waving in the air, shouts of “Yes,” “Lord,” “Jesus,” etc., and holy

dances. Offering includes a staccato walk up the aisle to the altar, with the accompaniment of music. African-Americans' modification of Christianity also conveys the point of view in which there are no sacred scriptures; instead, there are traditions, which are transmitted from generation to generation, and have their mark in the collective unconscious.

Adrienne Kennedy's interpretation of Christianity, as an African-American, is somehow different from the mode, and the mood, which Weaver explores. Her plays are full of religious symbols that are perturbing and destructive. Elinor Fuchs comments on the function of religion in her plays:

“Kennedy's view of the religious sign is...complex. It can turn punishing and vengeful, or its affirmative power may be exactly balanced by a sign from another culture—the Virgin Mary by the Owl, the pale Jesus by...Lumumba—leading to spiritual doubt and paralysis (1992: 82).”

In Funnyhouse of a Negro, Jesus is a hunchbacked, yellow skinned dwarf, about whom Sarah says: “A loving relationship exists between myself and Queen Victoria, a love between myself and Jesus but they are lies (1970: 258).” The religious symbols in The Owl Answers are far more complex: Virgin Mary picks up men on the subway; Reverend Passmore is simultaneously the Goddam Father who is the Richest White Man in the Town; God's Dove takes pleasure in watching She who is in pain; and the High Altar becomes the altar of Sarah's sacrifice. Similarly, in A Rat's Mass, the Biblical characters Jesus, Joseph, Mary, Two Wise Men and the Shepherd turn into a Nazi firing squad, and Rosemary, who symbolizes virginity and innocence, turns out to be the one who persuades Blake and Kay (Brother and Sister Rat) to have an incestuous affair.

Not surprisingly Kennedy, in People Who Led to My Plays, records unpleasant memories related to religion. She writes of a minister whom she remembers from childhood: “He was angry when he finished preaching, and the

congregation seemed angry. I was afraid of him. He had dark eyes and dressed in black robes. He seemed evil.” (1996: 20). And another minister inspired her to write: “He spoke the sermon in a way that said there was a rage inside religion.” (1996: 14).

However, it is also curious that Kennedy’s parents were not strict on religious issues and that she did not go to church more than an average person. Still, she states that she is conscious of the religious imagery in her work, relating it to the summers she spent in Georgia when she was a little girl (Betsko and Koenig 1987: 253). In this sense, Kennedy’s interpretation of Christianity is far more different than the ecstasy Weaver describes. Nevertheless, it is possible to argue that Hurston’s insight is also valid for Kennedy’s reading of Christianity, for the simple reason that the playwright has founded a whole new vocabulary for religion—this may be evaluated in the context of the originality of the African-American expression; “the manipulation of ideas.”

Spectator participation is essential in African-American art forms. Similar to the congregation’s joining in the drama of the sermon, the spectator becomes the participant in all sorts of Afrocentric performance, on the intuitive and subconscious levels. Hurston argues that African-American art is suggestive, and therefore requires the effort on the part of the audience to complete what has been implied:

“...the white dancer attempts to express fully; the Negro is restrained, but succeeds in gripping the beholder by forcing him to finish the action the performer suggests. Since no art can ever express all variations conceivable, the Negro must be considered the greater artist...(1990: 179-180)”

Hurston’s choice of the words ‘restrained,’ ‘gripping,’ and ‘forcing’ suggests that the spectator’s participation has a coercive, compelling nature, as if s/he does not have any alternative—S/He must participate in the performance by

completing what is left incomplete. For the eye indifferent and unresponsive to these nuances, the performance remains a cluster of nonsensical gestures, acts or meanings. Watching Adrienne Kennedy's plays, too, the audience is required to make the effort to fill in the gaps or to complete the picture. Every scene, every text and every image inspires so many ideas that it is left to the spectator to work his/her imagination. This kind of participation is not physical and thus not scientifically observable, but it is there, generating the senses.

Africans' sense of communality can be traced in Kennedy's expressions of her longing to belong to a cultural sphere. She writes in People Who Led to My Plays, "I learned that I belonged to a race of people who were in touch with a kingdom of spirituality and mystery beyond my visible sight." (1996: 14). As she matures, her sense of belonging develops into more definite assertions: "I learned from [Duke Ellington's] music that there was an immense poetry inside my life as an American Negro if I could find it." (1996: 106). She also states that James Baldwin is the author who sharpened her entire vision of America (1996: 99). It is apparent that Adrienne Kennedy feels a deep connection to the people of her race. Although her plays are not easily accessible, are open to misinterpretations and, as a natural extension, did not receive much affirmative response from the African-American community at the time they were first produced, they are the manifestations of Kennedy's strong devotion to her race.

The characteristics of the cultural productions pointed out by Hurston overlap and complement one another. African-Americans inherently have the ability of mimicry, which is the reason why they had been entertainers during most of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Due to the fact they have learned action, image or the idea before the English word for it, they express in an illustrative and dramatizing manner—the language as a whole develops on sensual qualities. The inherent ability of mimicry turns into a drama through language.

The presence and the response of the audience is essential, and as a result of this affirming or criticizing gesture, the sense of community is generated. The

active participation of the audience may well be understood as a “movement of sensibility,” or “an affective participation” (Benston 2000: 44). Such an engaging spectatorial response is also required by the asymmetrical rhythm of the African-American performance, since it does not conform to the linearity and the disclosure of the conventional representation. Therefore, the audience is invited to participate in the action “by carrying out the suggestions of the performer.” (Hurston 1990: 179). Hurston’s reflections on the general characteristics of African-American cultural productions, especially her argument that the originality springs from the stylization or manipulation of the first-hand idea and/or material supplies a background for a contemporary theory of African-American drama. This contemporary theory, while maintaining the 1960’s interest in the ritualistic form, contemplates more on the depiction of cultural identities, and the modes of presentation.

iii. The Notion of a Contemporary African-American Theater

The preliminary condition on which the contemporary perception of African-American drama expands is the notion of originality as pointed out by Hurston. The already established dramatic form and the nature of conventional representation, i.e. mimesis, is re-thought and re-formed within the context of African-American culture. In this respect, the ossified notion of dramatic theory is the foremost limitation for the Afrocentric theatrical presentation. Aristotle’s formulation of the Greek tragedy still lies as the basic framework of most of Western drama, as argued in length by Linda Kintz, in her book, The Subject’s Tragedy: The Political Poetics⁵. On the essential nature of tragedy Aristotle comments:

“Tragedy ... is a representation of an action which is serious, complete and of a certain magnitude... Since tragedy is a representation of an action, and is enacted by agents, who must be characterized in both their character and their thought (for it is through these that we can also judge the qualities of their actions, and it is in their actions that all

men either succeed or fail), we have the plot structure as the mimesis of the action (for by this term I mean the organization of events) while characterization is what allows us to judge the nature of the agents... (1987: 37).”

The plot structure as the mimesis of the action requires the sequence of events to arise fear and pity through reversal of fortune and/or recognition of some important knowledge that hitherto was hidden. The sequence of events should be in this manner:

“For every tragedy there is a complication and dénouement: the complication consists of events outside the play, and often some of those within it; the dénouement comprises the remainder. By ‘complication’ I mean everything from the beginning as far as the part which immediately precedes the transformation to prosperity or affliction; and by ‘dénouement’ I mean the section from the start of the transformation to the end (1987: 51).”

Aristotle’s theory requires of the tragedy to comprise the organization of events, the mimesis of action, which also determines the form, according to a rising and falling action. Since this theory constructs the spectator as the ultimate observer and judge of events, it is also necessary to portray individuals with a certain amount of psychological depth. It is apparent that mimetic, or representational, or realistic, spectacle is indispensable for Aristotle’s theory or for Greek tragedy.

On the contrary, in African-American drama, it is mimesis, in other words, conventional representation that stands at the core of the problem. It is an obstacle that hinders the expression to be articulated in its multiple suggestions, by fixing certain limitations. Mimesis determines not only the mode of the representation of the action (realistic) but also the organization of its representation (complication and dénouement, cause-and-effect relationship). The play, in other words, the

represented event, mostly conveys a comprehensible starting point which develops as a conflictual situation until it is dissolved. However, Afrocentric presentation, having ritualistic elements, does not focus on a central conflict.

Adrienne Kennedy's failure in sustaining the well-made form has already been mentioned. Another African-American woman playwright Ntozake Shange, in her article "unrecovered losses/black theatre traditions" comments on this form:

"...i am interested solely in the poetry of a moment/ the emotional & aesthetic impact of a character or a line. 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 efficiently for those of us from this hemisphere (1995: 327)."

Kimberly W. Benston also points to the problem of the mimetic nature of Western drama as an obstacle in the way of creating a "black cultural idiom." Benston, referring to Hurston's afore mentioned essay "Characteristics of Negro Expression," explains why an essentially African-American theory is belated:

"Considering the long observed *will to self-enactment* embedded in African-American life and traditional art—the "poise for drama" displayed in minstrelsy, the dozens, toasts, the call-and-response pattern of musical and religious performance, and the signifying improvisations of the street—we might have expected an untroubled flowering of dramatic innovation set in motion by contemporary political exigencies. However...the problem of form for the black dramatist is not so simple...[s/he] must still face the difficult task of creating a black theatrical idiom with the materials proffered by various dramatic conventions...(2000: 30)."

Apparently, Benston sees the problem in forming an African-American theatrical tradition in the fact that none of the already established conventions of

Western drama prepare the suitable grounds for the dramatization of the culture bound artistic expression, that is characterized by its rich suggestive potential (2000: 28-31). These conventions have their roots in the traditional representation, which holds the Euro-American subject as the only reliable center of meaning. Since this representation is based on socially constructed associations, it conveys a specific viewpoint which is assumed to be absolute and natural. The myriad of associations and/or suggestions of associations that do not conform to either sides of binary oppositions are avoided from the very beginning. For instance, in Western drama, “the hero” is almost always of Euro-American origin. In the cases when s/he is not, the cultural background is necessarily made distinct in order for the audience to recognize his/her “difference.” S/he is differentiated by his/her non-Western identity because s/he does not meet all the conventional heroic associations.

The hidden design of the realistic (mimetic) text, as Forte argued, is to support the authority of the dominant ideology by constructing the spectator (or receiver) as if s/he is the source of meaning. The coercive associations of such texts obscure the fact that the spectator is only a passive receiver, put under the spell of the text and parroting what the text dictates. Even in the case of dramatic irony, where the audience is the omnipotent and the omnipresent eye over the mimetic events, this passive state does not change. It is only through exposition that the dramatic irony has an impact and effect on the audience. Moreover, it is the playwright who arranges this impact. The spectator/passive receiver is not the center of meaning, but only a vehicle that confirms the authority of meaning.

As a reaction, the African-American theatre turns to its culturally inherent characteristics, such as the ritual, with the intention of, as Benston argues, the “shaping of uniquely African-American mythologies and symbolisms, [capturing] flexibility of dramatic form, and participatory theatre *within* the black community.” (2000: 28). In order to originate a theatrical idiom that would generate an authentic African-American mythology, Benston sees the answer in

transmuting or refiguring mimesis into some other form that would function as a means of remaking historical consciousness:

“Spiritually and technically, this movement is one from mimesis, or representation (whether of a condition, ideology, or character), to methexis, or communal “helping-out” of the action by all assembled. It is a process that could be alternatively described as a shift from display, the spectacle observed, to rite, the event which dissolves traditional divisions between actor and spectator, self and other, enacted text and material context. And through this process, the black beholder has been theoretically transformed from a detached individual whose private consciousness the playwright sought to reform, to a participatory member of a communal ceremony which affirms a shared vision (2000: 28-29).”

In this shift from mimesis to methexis is embedded certain theoretical activities that shape “the interdisciplinary nature of African-American modernism’s theory and practice,” as Benston argues (2000: 17). These activities are namely, a valorization of critique and change, privileging enactment and improvisation over particular artifacts, positions, or achievements; an aversion to discrete conventions and genres, leading to an incorporative logic of narrative experiment, and a critical engagement with tradition through acts of mimetic displacement. Although Benston considers these activities as enactments of a more general field of theory, they can also be seen as the strategies of the contemporary African-American drama theory in particular.

Exploring the strategies of this theory in its search for a cultural identity also invites a discussion of “ritual theatre,” in that the African-American theatrical expression resists the naturalistic representation of events. This mode of representation, visible to the eye, but not to the subconscious, remains a surface reality. However, for the African-American, reality is multidimensional, operating on the levels that are visible as well as on the levels that are not visible, only

sensed or felt, or intuitively comprehended. In the theatre, because the speaking subject of the presentation of the African-American experience would naturally depart from the white male subject of the Aristotelian drama, and because the modes of realistic representation would be erroneous for the African-American dramatic expression, it is insightful to note that the ritualistic elements still constitute a part of the contemporary African-American drama. Benston articulates how the form of the religious sermon has come to be considered “a fresh vehicle of black dramatic energy” (2000: 46) for the contemporary African-American drama, freed from the propagandistic requirements of the ‘Black theatre’ of the 1960s:

“Freed from the narrow didactic demands and aesthetic prescriptions by virtue of a more rigorous commitment to the generative ideal of communal liberation, theorists and playwrights together appropriately seized upon the form in which African-American conservatism and rebellion alike are rooted: religious ceremony (2000: 44-45).”

Benston’s insight into the African-American ritual drama, for the most part, generates from Paul Carter Harrison’s The Drama of Nommo, which Benston claims to be “the most intricately articulated dissertation on black drama yet recorded.”⁶ (2000: 46). Harrison assumes the African-American spectator as aware of the discrimination s/he is subjected to, on every layer of daily life. Therefore, he continues, the African-American spectator needs a “spiritual release.” According to Benston, the starting point of Harrison’s theory is “finding within all potential elements of the African-American theatre dynamic an essential manifestation... of an ancestral (African) ethos.” (2000: 46-47). The main concern for the Drama of Nommo or Kuntu Drama is to discover presentational means by which the African-American audience shall unmask where it belongs. These presentational means, as Benston points out, “signals a primary concern to forge an absolute theatrical idiom fusing body and utterance, space and narrative.” (2000: 47).

Having studied Paul Carter Harrison's The Drama of Nommo, another scholar Linda Kintz points to Harrison's emphasis on

"...the effects of an African memory on African-American culture as a part of 'the African continuum,' a ceremonial, collective narrativizing structure that works very differently from the linear, binary, logical structure that underlies Aristotelian tragedy. This ceremonial structure depends far more on cyclical and circular patterns of organization than linear ones (1992b: 146)."

Kintz continues that Harrison likens the ceremonial nature of African-American theatre to the sermon in the black church (the theatrical elements of which were cited earlier, within the framework of Michael S. Weaver's article):

"African-American dramatic form is best described, says Harrison, as 'secular ritual,' in which the formal ritualistic style of the black church [serves as a] paradigm for African-American dramaturgy (1992b: 147)."

This "secular ritual" also insists on the intermingling of sensuality and intellect, actor and spectator, self and other. Active participation, in other words, "the participating presence of the audience," (Kintz 1992b: 148) or the call-and-response pattern can only be realized through this form of theatre⁷. Adrienne Kennedy's dramatic works, when considered within this understanding of African-American drama, displays only a partial coherence, which is due to the ritualistic form and the use of ritualistic elements. As will be explored, her theatre exhausts the conventions of representation by the organization of the dramatic elements such as monologue, dialogue, and spectacle in peculiarly different manners. Moreover, by manipulating the sense of time and space through presentational strategies, such as theatrical transformation, her plays take on somehow a ritualistic form, unmistakably departing from the Aristotelian conventions of representation.

iv. Multiplicity of Contexts

Both generated within the context of the Civil Rights Movement, feminist and Black American liberation movements date back to the early 1960s. Corresponding to the social background afire with revolt, the two groups set out to establish themselves as radical voices, ceaselessly critiquing and challenging the authority of the white ideology. Nevertheless, the last voice to be heard was that of the African-American women.

No matter how ideologically close the two movements are, they never acted in unison. This is the primary reason why there are not as many African-American women playwrights as the ones who were nurtured by these movements. Disregarding “several women [who were] prominent in the Black Arts Movement [on the grounds that] their plays fit more comfortably within the prevailing ideology” (Wilkerson 1999: 146), two outstanding names appear as the voice of the African-American woman, who were Lorraine Hansberry and Alice Childress. Both of these playwrights achieved to have an established place within the movement and both started by writing plays for the American Negro Theatre (ANT), the most significant African-American group which was founded in Harlem in 1939. Their works had the opportunity to meet much of the public, although predominantly white. After her most well known play A Raisin in the Sun had opened on Broadway, Hansberry “became the first black playwright, the youngest person, and the fifth woman to win” the New York Drama Critics Circle Award in 1959 (Wilkerson 1999: 142). Despite her being a prolific writer, this specific play, on its own, provided a large catalogue of African-American characters, both male and female, and beyond stereotypes.

This was the period when Adrienne Kennedy, settled in New York, was trying to conform to her new life as a young wife and mother. However, underneath this fresh picture was the playwright Kennedy, burning inside with the idea of “artistic struggle.” She was taking courses on writing and working

individually. In her memoir, she remembers how Hansberry's success gave her the motive to continue with this struggle:

“I had abandoned playwriting by the time Lorraine Hansberry made her sensational entrance into the Broadway theater with the classic A Raisin in the Sun, because I thought there was no hope; but with [her] success, I felt reawakened... and took heart (1996:109).”

Hansberry's contemporary, Childress was the other strong voice in the “heavily male-dominated movement [which] offered limited roles for women in organizing as well as cultural portrayals.” (Wilkerson 1999: 145). Unlike Hansberry, Childress did not enjoy a Broadway success, however, she was influential in portraying independent, powerful women images, especially in her popular play Wine in the Wilderness. Her character Tommy is significant not only in the sense that she portrays a positive (nevertheless threatening for the white or the patriarchal ideology) role model, but because questions the preeminence of male attitudes within the movement. Another point of view to be emphasized about this particular play is that, as Wilkerson points out, it “reminds the audience of the pervasiveness of white male attitudes in the formation of black ideologies.” (1999: 147).

At the core of the Black Movement was the idea that artistic and political freedom on the part of the African-American is to be achieved “by any means necessary.” The notion of artistic freedom was shaped by the premise that “black is beautiful,” which was a reflection of aggressive nationalist feelings combined with revolutionary spirit. The concept of “black aesthetic,” which established a strong bond between artistic production and revolutionary politics, was ultimately put to practice as the subordination of arts to black ideology. Reflecting on that period, Hooks says “[c]haracterized by an inversion of the “us” and “them” dichotomy, [the Black aesthetic movement] inverted conventional ways of thinking about otherness...[suggesting] that everything black was good and everything white bad.” (1990: 107). The Black ideology, far from introducing a

viewpoint independent from what is being criticized, was entrapped in the binary logic, only reversing the direction of racist attitudes.

As an extension of this ideological stance, the Black Arts Movement asked for artistic and cultural productions that were easily accessible to the masses. Amiri Baraka, one of the most active names within the movement, recalls that the Black theatre in the 1960s “was another form of the Black Liberation Movement...reflecting [its] focus, vitality, and meaning (1986: 226).” As a spokesperson of the movement, he articulates the consciousness-raising nature of the Black aesthetic:

“We wanted an art that was oral, one meant to be listened to, one that could be performed on the backs of trucks, in playground and projects, right out on the sidewalks. A mass art, an anti-elitist art!... We wanted an art that was revolutionary, that was an expression of the black national revolutionary struggle for self-determination (1986: 232).”

Besides the male dominant nature of the movement, the nationalist Black ideology of the 1960s hampered the production of novel, unconventional and “creatively daring”⁸ forms of art, especially the ones that were coming from women. Referring to the reactionary artistic criteria, Hooks observes that

“the Black Arts Movement began to dismiss all forms of cultural production by African-Americans that did not conform to movement criteria. Often this lead to aesthetic judgments that did not allow for recognition of multiple black experience or the complexity of black life (1990: 107-108).”

Within this “disempowering” and “restrictive” understanding of art, it is clear why Adrienne Kennedy’s plays were not embraced by the African-American community. The work was ignored even by the eminent figures in the world of theatre, such as Amiri Baraka⁹, despite the fact that Kennedy’s plays opened the

path for the upcoming African-American playwrights to experiment with the dramatic form. The responses for particularly Funnyhouse of a Negro are on the extremes, mostly on the negative end. Recalling that period, Kennedy says

“[a] lot of blacks hated this particular play and said that it was pretentious and imitative. It was upsetting. People wanted me to be a part of the movement but, frankly, I was always at home with my children... apart from my temperament, the hours didn't exist (Betsko and Koenig 1987: 252).”

She also adds that she has built up a resistance against the kind of criticism that labeled her “an irrelevant black writer.” (Betsko and Koenig 1987: 252).

Many contemporary theater critics acknowledge this hostility against Kennedy's works as the unreceptive nature of American theater. For instance, referring to the past as well as the present, Solomon argues that “Kennedy suffers a fate common to most women or African-American writers: if their plays do not conform to conventional expectations of what “minority” playwrights do, they are passed over for more palatable and categorizable fare.” (1992: xi). Another critic, Claudia Barnett points to the ill-communication between the groups and the playwright by setting up a parallel between the Kennedy characters, who yearn for a “true union” with someone or something, and the playwright Kennedy: “[S]he finds herself excluded from the very communities she might logically expect to join—African American writers, feminist writers, and the theatre world in general.” (1996: 148-149).

Adrienne Kennedy's works cannot be evaluated free of racial consciousness and of ideology. There is certainly the critical opposition to the socially structured myths, and Kennedy's aesthetic attempts to subvert those symbolic systems are evident in her presentation techniques. The issues of culture, history and gender fuse in the viewpoint she stages, which is the source of the multidimensionality of her work. The contemporary critical eye should locate her

work within the African, American, African-American and European-American contexts, with regard to the distinctive viewpoint of female gender.

Kennedy's uncompromising experimental style, while creating new borders for the dramatic structure, seems to elicit certain difficulties related to theatrical production. For instance, Forte attempts to find an explanation for the difficulty in staging The Owl Answers:

“[I]f the play is never performed, because of its difficulty, is it simply due to a repressive culture, hostile to Blacks and women as well as non-realist theatre? Or does the play, in its intense anti-realism, defeat its own, apparently subversive, agenda? (1996: 31)”

Although Forte makes it clear that her argument is not that feminists should only write realistic plays to be produced, her conclusion is that “unfortunately,” Kennedy plays are to “survive only marginally.” (1996: 31). She further argues that subjectivity, writing and performance must be comprehended “within material conditions of power.” (1996: 32). In contrast to Forte's argument, Solomon attributes the source of the production problem to the mainstream American theater scene:

“[D]espite thirty years of off-off-Broadway, American directors and actors—much less African-American directors and actors—have had little opportunity to work on experimental plays and as a result, are ill-prepared for the dissenting demands of Kennedy's complex style (1992: xi).”

Beyond this controversy about how much the plays allow stage production, the evaluation of her plays invites a multiplicity of theoretical approaches as well as a multiplicity of cultural consciousnesses. The plays, while redefining the conventions of Western dramatic literature, depict the process in which the white culture imposes an identity on the non-Western woman. Racial

and sexual consciousnesses mark the complexity of her plays. The first, and currently the only, critical study on Adrienne Kennedy's work is the collection of essays called Intersecting Boundaries, its title reflecting her oeuvre's "intersections with traditions, theory and performance." (Bryant-Jackson and Overbeck 1992: xiv).

As affirmed by the diversity of critical essays on Kennedy's work, it is proper to look at her work from different points of view—never privileging one over the other. Such an approach would bring out the heterogeneity of cultural consciousness, never fixing the reader/critic/audience to a stable stance, never imposing an authoritarian ideology: "[O]ne feels always already estranged from any clear point of departure, though a plethora of intellectual, psychic, and political themes suggest themselves as equally plausible centering concerns." (Benston 1992: 113). In other words, the indeterminate and anti-authoritarian tone characterizing the plays is also replicated in the critical approach, leaving the reader/critic/member of the audience on a slippery ground with his/her evaluative attempts, which will never reach an ultimate conclusion.

NOTES

¹ The references to unidentified sources are from the Internet. They are respectively:

pages 1 and 4 : <<http://www.upress.umn.edu/misc/kennedy/quotes.html>>

page 6 : <<http://www.upress.umn.edu/misc/kennedy/funny.html>>

² Kennedy, in her interview printed in Kathleen Betsko and Rachel Koenig's book tells about her realization that she could not sustain the full length form, acknowledging it as one of the most important turning points in her life. After a very long period of struggle to become a writer, she says that this realization was worth those painful years (1987: 251).

It is also important to note that Kennedy has written the adaptations Electra and Orestes in the one-act form, as the director Michael Khan comments: "She really cut it all the way down... stripped it totally bare in her own particular way. So it read like a Kennedy play. Little sentences, repetitions." (Stein 1992: 194).

In his book Theory of the Modern Drama, Peter Szondi compares the one-act form to the well-made play as

"[there is] not only a quantitative but also a qualitative difference...—in the nature of the unfolding action and (in close relation to it) in the nature of the element of tension ...the one act no longer draws on interpersonal events for its tension, this tension must already be anchored in the situation...a situation verging on catastrophe...Catastrophe is a given, lurking in the future: gone is the tragic struggle with a destiny... (1987: 55-56)."

This perspective of the one-act at once invalidates Aristotle's definition of tragedy, and coincides with the form and the content of Adrienne Kennedy's plays.

³ Although in Poetics, Aristotle assumes the gender of the main character to be male, there also distinguished women characters in the history of Western drama. While some of these characters are openly misogynistic, some are the female versions of the Aristotelian hero—strong, intelligent and rebellious. For example, Antigone denies Creon's laws which leads her to death, Electra murders her husband, Nora leaves her family, shutting the door from behind, Hedda Gabler commits suicide because the life her husband promises does not satisfy her. However, these female characters neither present, nor at least suggest, an ideology which dismantles the binary logic of differentiation (between men and women), nor urge the audiences to criticize the dominant ideology which leads them to perceive and produce in terms of this logic. These female characters themselves are nurtured by this system of dualist thinking, practiced necessarily by the patriarchal culture. No matter how powerful and influential they are, their ultimate reference is to the male. They act in order to maintain an alternative to the dominant ideology, but they end up in forming or conforming to a variant of that ideology. However, Kennedy's subject stands for the perversity of the process in which the dominant ideology constructs an "othered" psyche.

⁴ Complementary with the argument that illustrative thinking is an inherent trait of the African-American, it may be useful to mention Michael Khan's experience of directing Funnyhouse of a Negro. He remembers that the way Adrienne Kennedy explained the play was by showing him lots of photographs and pictures. From that, Kahn says, he had understood the power of images for her, and, he continues, they did not feel the necessity to talk on the psychology of the characters at all (Stein 1992: 191).

⁵ In this particular work, Kintz argues that the requirements of the Greek tragedy still lie as the hidden structural model for theories of subjectivity as well as theories of drama in general (1992b: 1). Her primary concerns are how "the sociosymbolic effects of [Oedipus and Aristotle] continue to handicap both the production and the reception of feminist theory and theories of drama and performance," and the fact that "the parameters they set for concepts of subjectivity are still not recognized by many theorists." (1992b: 3). Although her statements prove that the mainstream notion of subjectivity is, for the most part,

understood in terms of Western aesthetics, at the end of her book, she suggests that the “dispersed” subjectivity in the postmodernist sense is gradually being recognized.

⁶ Paul Carter Harrison’s ritual theater is based on the terminology of Bantu cosmology. The elements of Bantu logic are Muntu (all intelligible life, including man), Kinto (all objective phenomena) and Hantu (the intersecting dimensions of time and space), which unite in harmony under the protection of the Pure Being (NTU). Kuntu (contextual origin of an image) and Nommo (the image) “are the forces by which man as Muntu brings himself into harmony with other enveloping forces.” (Benston 2000: 47).

⁷ In this respect, the work of Barbara Ann Teer, the founder and director of the National Black Theatre, can be insightful. They developed a ritual theater project, in which they formed five evolutionary cycles—that were the “nigger” cycle, the “Negro” cycle, the militant, nationalistic, and revolutionary cycles—to be analyzed from social, political, and religious points of view. Teer comments on the realization of the project as thus:

“We started touring college campuses and black studies programs performing *The Ritual to Regain Our Strength and Reclaim Our Power*. During the performances people would get so turned on they would spontaneously start running up and down the aisles just liberating themselves...By this time I had changed all the standard theatrical titles. I said we were no actors, we were liberators. Our theatre wasn’t a theatre—it was a temple. Our techniques were in a form called ritualistic revival...(1981: 44)”

⁸ “Creative daring” is the term by which Bell Hooks prefers to define Adrienne Kennedy’s playwriting (1992: 180-181).

⁹ Besides the fact that his Dutchman and Kennedy’s Funnyhouse of a Negro won the Obie Awards successively, the two plays are resembled to each other by many theater critics and practitioners.

Chapter 1. THEATRICALITY OF CULTURE AND GENDER

The politics of representation is embedded in the strategies of staging the subject. The theatrical subject has almost always been associated with only one gender (male) and with only one cultural background (that of Western). Aristotle in *Poetics* sets up the qualities of the subject: he should be ethically good, appropriate, consistent and he should be able to portray a character. However, by this definition, Aristotle automatically limits the culture and gender of the subject. Moreover, he literally asserts that, in relation to the issue of the subject's goodness, "there can be a good woman and a good slave, even though perhaps the former is an inferior type, and the latter a wholly base one." (1987: 47). It is not that the slaves were African in ancient Greece, but the main problem is that the concept of the subject is culturally and sexually reduced to the white (heterosexual) male agent. Aristotle also comments on the intelligence of the social, sexual and cultural others by claiming that "it is *possible* to have a woman manly in character, but it is not appropriate for a woman to be so manly or clever," without even mentioning the "wholly base one" as he calls the slave (1987: 47).

Aristotle assumes tragedy to be a mimesis of better men. Representation in classical Western drama, which he formulated, determines the cultural background and the gender of the subject, excluding and deeming the others as peripheral and therefore inferior: "Since tragedy is a mimesis of men better than ourselves, the example set by good portrait-painters should be followed: they, while rendering the individual's physique realistically, improve on their subject's beauty." (1987: 48). The more the male subject's "beauty" (heroism, intelligence, strength, etc.) is accentuated, the more the opposite traits are defined and attributed to the excluded ones.

In this respect, feminist and African-American theories of theater treat representation and/or mimesis as the crux of the problem. Since representation stages the stance of the Aristotelian subject as universal and objective, the

mainstream audiences are not receptive of extraordinary points of view, not empathical to racial and sexual consciousnesses. The two theories argue that representation is ideological because it erases the diversity of particular experiences from the stage (and from the public opinion) and confirms the priority and universality of the white male instead. This universalized, objectified and reified image of man deters 'other' subjects from entering into the staged experience.

These perspectives make themselves manifest in the theater as various attempts to dismantle the conventions of mimetic representation. Adrienne Kennedy's plays, too, should be evaluated in the light of this consciousness. The subjects in the three Kennedy plays are of mixed heritage, African-American and Euro-American, torn between binary oppositions of black and white, African and European. Their dramatic composition is an utter revolt against that of Aristotle's protagonist who is to be male, good, appropriate, consistent and representative of the universal man. On the other hand, Kennedy's approach redefines mimesis by disrupting the myths of objectivity and universality, along with the binary logic that is intrinsic to the Western culture. Carlton and Barbara Molette, in an effort to locate African-American drama, analyze the main principles of Western thought and explore their echoes on the Western/conventional drama. They make it clear what the fundamental principles, the myths of objectivity and universality, mean for the people who are excluded from the "elite group of white males":

"The myth of objectivity is embodied in the concept that all that is real is observable by members of an elite group of White males. Therefore they assert that phenomena which are not observable by them are not real. Further, most of the European Americans who do not belong to this elite group of White males believe this myth... (1992: 115)"

Although they speak from the standpoint of African-American consciousness, their discourse includes the position of all non-Western peoples, both male and female: "[O]bjectivity is a condition that is most common among

persons of Eurocentric culture and ethnic background...[and] particularly...among the males of the group.” (1992: 115). Asserting that the myth of objectivity alone would remain inadequate in explaining the dominance of Western thought, Molettes argue that “the accompanying myth of universality...enables this elite group to convince most of the rest of us that what they observe is observed by all who know how to observe well.” (1992: 116).

An inevitable outcome of these Eurocentric patriarchal myths is the belief that representation of the experiences and viewpoints of cultural “minorities” are not universal; in other words, they are specific, limited and therefore totally subjective, i.e. refracted, distorted and biased. Molettes’ critique is as such:

“They insist that the human qualities they perceive are universal while they virtually ignore the cultural traditions of three-fourths of the world’s population. And, of course, they will tell you that they are being objective in their analysis (1992: 116-117).”

Intrinsic to this discussion of objectivity and universality is the concept of Aristotelian representation, which is exclusionary and therefore ideological by nature. Since personal is political, and in all art is embedded ideology, i.e. an assertion of a certain political viewpoint of the world, it is the concern of the African-American and feminist theories of theater to handle mimesis in a critical and political manner. Jill Dolan explores the nature of representation in relation to feminist theater:

“...feminist criticism emphasizes the ideological nature of all cultural products. Dominant ideology has been naturalized as nonideology, since the perceptions of the more powerful have come to serve as standards for the less powerful, who do not have the same access to the media and artistic outlets that create public opinion (1994: 15).”

Aware of the fact that the discourse of feminism must embrace the viewpoint of all the oppressed, Dolan underscores the discrimination that the peoples of other cultures have to endure: "People of color, for instance, who do not have equal access to cultural production, are subject to dominant ideology as it appears in representation." (1994: 15). Her argument, then, also corresponds to Molettes' criticism of Euro-American myths of objectivity and universality, in that she acknowledges the biased nature of ideological representation, which denies the subjectivities of the non-Western people. Dolan articulates the intrinsic relationship between representation and ideology:

"Feminist theory suggests that representation offers or denies subjectivity by manipulating the terms of its discourse, images, and myths through ideology. As a system of representation, ideology is related to social structures not as a simple mimetic reflection, but as a force that participates in creating and maintaining social arrangements... The theatre... is not really a mirror of reality. A mirror implies passivity and noninvolvement... theatre has in fact been much more active as an ideological force (1994: 16)."

Dolan does not acknowledge "representation" and "mimesis" as synonyms, instead, she charges the term 'representation' with ideological implications. Nevertheless, her argument still corresponds to the contemporary discussion, which revolves around the problem that the Aristotelian representation does not provide the suitable spaces of perception for the multicultural and/or woman playwright to express his/her own stylization of reality. The reason is that the ideological conventions of representation have shaped the (mainstream) spectators' thinking system so that they automatically misperceive or dismiss the unconventional modes of presentation.

Linda Kintz also points to the ideological nature of representation and its effect on the unconventional theories and practices of theater. Although she speaks from the feminist stance, she also has recognition of other critical

viewpoints related to cultural identities. Developing her argument within the context of Aristotle's theory of tragedy and the representation of the subject in Sophocles' Oedipus the King, she, like Dolan and Forte, emphasizes the invisible quality of the ideology in representation:

“...the specific *generic* requirements of Greek tragedy continue to function as the hidden structural model for theories of subjectivity as well as for theories of drama in general... The generic features of tragedy produce a dramatic and theoretical discourse that in many ways requires that there be no female agency as it guarantees the masculinity of both the protagonist and the theorist (1992b: 1).”

According to Kintz, the conventional representation enables the hierarchies and binary oppositions to seem natural, rational, neutral and ungendered. However, it is clear from the feminist perspective that “[t]ragedy enforces its own privilege in a way made obvious by the gendered hierarchy...” (1992b: 6). It associates man with subjectivity (the grammatical “I,” the first person), universality, rationality, intellectuality, civilization, activity and authority, while associating woman with objectivity (the third person, a means to confirm to the subjectivity of man), specificity, emotionality, sensuality and passivity. These associations, on the other hand, form the binary oppositions. The binary logic, as Kintz suggests, privileges wholeness and inevitably inscribes mixtures as degraded (1992b: 144). Binary logic does not allow for flexible definitions, heterogeneity and fragmentation. On the deceptive nature of such opposition Richard Hornby comments that

“[t]he problem, however, is that while we easily recognize binary systems like Morse Code as abstract fabrications, when it comes to matters of language and culture, we tend to think of binary oppositions not as human constructions applied to reality, but rather as attributes of reality itself. Male and female...come to be seen as absolute categories, standing for more than just biological differences;

they become opposed in every conceivable way—in social, economic, political and personal contexts. Actually, however, a binary opposition may be inappropriate to the reality that it describes, leading to sterile, automatic thinking that obscures rather than reveals (1986: 14-15).”

Aristotelian representation is also in an interdependent relationship with binary logic, which, apart from creating discrepancies, privileges authority together with its associations of wholeness, perfection, completeness, and coherence. However, it is not possible to contemplate on the Western thinking system regardless of the Christian logic whose tenets revolve around the concepts of sin/evil and purity, which has its roots in the sexual activity of the human being. When the binary logic is intermingled with the symbols of Christianity, ‘black’ comes to symbolize evil, disease, filth, sin, and carnality in opposition to ‘white,’ which comes to symbolize purity, goodness and innocence.

In *Ain’t I A Woman*, Bell Hooks explores the myths of “blackness,” which are essentially the materializations of this Christian and binary systems of thought. The stereotypes that these myths generate, on the one hand, devalue the African-American man—but mostly women, and on the other hand, serves to obscure the “constitutionalized” rape of the woman slaves by white men. The two of the most common stereotypes are born from the myth of the slave woman as sexually loose, and the myth of the slave man as rapist. These myths are effective in the sense that they operate in the psyches of not only white women and men, but also African-American women and men.

After slavery, Hooks claims, there was an increase in interracial marriages, which “threatened the entire foundation of the apartheid.” (1981: 60). In order to preserve the purity of white Christendom, the dominant ideology established its authority by myth making, as Hooks explains:

“[The crime of rape justified by the myth of the promiscuous black woman] led to a devaluation of black womanhood that permeated the

psyches of all Americans and shaped the social status of all black women once slavery ended. One has only to look at American television twenty-four hours a day for an entire week to learn the way in which black women are perceived in the American society—the predominant image is that of the “fallen” woman, the whore, the slut, the prostitute (1981: 52).”

While this myth functioned to prevent interracial marriages (but not necessarily rape or intercourse), the myth of black man as rapist deterred the white woman’s relationship with the African-American man, as Hooks points out:

“By brainwashing white women to see black men as savage beasts, white supremacists were able to implant enough fear in the white female’s psyche so that she would avoid any contact with black men (1981: 61).”

Supporting Hooks’ insight, Craig Hansen Werner, argues that these stereotypes serve the white ideology “to obscure uncomfortable truths. The stereotype of the black beast obscures the historical reality that “miscegenation” originated primarily in the rape of the black women by white men, especially slave owners.” (1994: 115). According to these myths, the mulatto is the child of either the corrupt woman slave, who had intercourse with her white master, or the “black” man who raped a white woman. As Winona L. Fletcher ironically points out in her article,

“...no consensus can reveal an accurate account of mulattoes, since the process of tracking down racial mixture is about as nebulous as the genetic phenomenon that permits one drop of Black blood to make a person ‘colored’ (1981: 263).”

To turn back to the “universality” and “objectivity” of the Aristotelian subject, it is clear by now how his experience diverges from the experience of the

non-Western subject, either male or female. For this reason, the theatricality of Adrienne Kennedy's 'other' (as the non-Western woman) calls for a whole new point of view, a totally different consciousness and concept of subjectivity, whose staging is determined by an act of framing-up the established modes. In fact, this act of redeployment is what characterizes the presentation in the three Kennedy plays. Her characterization necessitates the transformation device in order to render the complexity of identity for the African-American woman. Since her culture is a hybrid one, she seeks an amalgam of diverse influences. Her process of inquiry, on the other hand, rejects the Aristotelian model because it needs theatrical forms that go beyond mimesis. It is her presenting gender and cultural identity as a "state of mind"¹ that dismantles the conventional dramatic structure.

1. 1. Re/Presenting the Subject

Recognizing that there is a close affinity between conventional representation, its binary logic and the limiting, coercive definitions of the self, contemporary scholars of culture tend to be all embracing in their theorizing. One of those scholars who has assumed a stance that is receptive of all nonessentialized notions of cultural identities, Bell Hooks improvises on a concept of cultural identity that is liberating:

"We turn to "identity" and "culture" for relocation, linked to political practice—identity that is not informed by a narrow cultural nationalism masking continued fascination with the power of the white hegemonic other. Instead identity is evoked as a stage in process wherein one constructs radical black subjectivity. Recent radical reflections on static notions of black identity urge transformation of our sense of who we can be and still be black. Assimilation, imitation, or assuming the role of rebellious exotic other are not the only available options and never have been. This is why it is crucial to radically revise notions of identity politics, to explore marginal locations as spaces where we can best become whatever we want to be

while remaining committed to liberatory black liberation struggle (1990: 20).”

The contemporary theater studies is involved with the issue of providing the audiences with fresh, re-framed, re-formed subjectivities, which also corresponds with the central motive of both feminist and the African-American theaters. On a very general level, their basic design is to construct the critical consciousness of the audience against the dominant ideology's operations of assimilation. Constructing the subjectivity of the members of its audience, these theaters provide their audiences with the subject positions from which they can be aware of the “invisible” underpinnings of the white ideological representation. In Adrienne Kennedy's case, the strategy to construct the subjectivity of the audience is to present ambiguity, in which no single character and/or viewpoint assumes authority, and no reality is given privilege over the other. This strategy, eliminating the formation of a definite subject position, urges the formation of a critical consciousness, a subjectivity exclusively belonging to the spectator.

The formation of a subjectivity is even more crucial for the doubly discriminated people because they belong to several cultures while at the same time they are being deliberately erased from the representative spheres of the white dominant culture. Helene Keyssar acknowledges the significance of being multicultural in the formation of a subjective consciousness, and points to the American experience in which several cultures interact: “[T]he doubleness of the consciousness of most Americans, including and perhaps especially the doubleness of being black and American and the bilingual experience of American culture is constitutive of the American experience (1996: 122).” Attributing the aforementioned theatrical strategy generally to the plays of multicultural women playwrights, Keyssar asserts that she hears in these plays “voices that are both in conflict with dominant ideological positions and resistant among themselves to the reductions of uniformity” (1996: 122), and thus, recognizes the heterogeneity among this group.

Funnyhouse of a Negro is about Sarah, an African-American woman in her late twenties, living in a brownstone in New York. She has a white Jewish poet lover, Raymond Mann—the funnyman of the funnyhouse, who “is very interested in Negroes.” (1970: 257). Another character of the play is the white landlady, Mrs. Conrad, who functions as the funnylady of Sarah’s funnyhouse. The only white characters of the play are inspired by the clown-like figures that guard an amusement park in Kennedy’s home city, Cleveland, as Susan Meigs points out (1990: 176).

All of Sarah’s friends are white, with whom she longs to be: “My friends will be white. I need them as an embankment from reflecting too much upon the fact that I am a Negro (1970: 257)”. As she tells in her monologue, Sarah’s dream is to live in rooms with European antiques, photographs of Roman ruins, walls of books, a piano, oriental carpets, and to eat her meals on a white glass table, just as her white friends do. Linda Kintz suggests that the lifestyle Sarah refers to is the lifestyle of the “petit bourgeoisie.” However, Kintz’s implication is that she will never become one:

“[The petit bourgeoisie] is a cultural construction that can only be mimicked by a mimicry that marks its actor as always already outside the charmed circle of those who were born with taste (1992b: 152).”

Sarah, through her monologues that are usually uttered by her other selves, tells that her mother is light skinned and her father is very dark. Although the mother is not portrayed through any stories of the past, the father has a story. When he was young, his mother tells her son: “I want you to be Jesus, to walk in Genesis and save the race. You must return to Africa, find revelation...and heal the race, heal the misery, take us off the cross.” (1970: 264). However, he marries the light skinned woman, before going to Africa to “erect a Christian mission,” against his mother’s wish. Marrying the woman who is going to give birth to Sarah, he takes her to Africa with him. Then, it is narrated that the light skinned woman’s hair starts to fall out.

According to Sarah's statements, her father rapes her mother when he is drunk, and the child from that union happens to be herself. After bearing Sarah, the mother loses all her hair, along with her mind, and is sent to an asylum. Sarah also tells that she has killed her father because he "haunted her conception, diseased her birth." Sarah kills her father by bludgeoning him with an ebony mask. There are, on the other hand, two additional implications about the father, which are never justified. One is that he committed suicide in a hotel room in Harlem, and the other is that he is a doctor and married to a white "whore," living in rooms with European antiques, photographs of Roman ruins, walls of books and Oriental carpets, as cited below.

At the end of the play Sarah commits suicide. However, the dialogue between the funnyman and funnylady, which closes the play, belies all that have been implied through Sarah's monologues:

“LANDLADY. The poor bitch has hung herself.

RAYMOND. (*observing her hanging figure*). She was a funny little liar.

LANDLADY. (*informing him*). Her father hung himself in a Harlem hotel when Patrice Lumumba died.

RAYMOND. She was a funny little liar.

LANDLADY. Her father hung himself in a Harlem hotel when Patrice Lumumba died.

RAYMOND. Her father never hung himself in a Harlem hotel when Patrice Lumumba was murdered. I know the man. He is a doctor, married to a white whore. He lives in the city in a room with European antiques, photographs of Roman ruins, walls of books and oriental carpets. Her father is a nigger who eats his meals on a white glass table (1970: 272).”

In this play, four characters, assuming the roles of Duchess of Hapsburg, Queen Victoria Regina, Jesus and Patrice Lumumba represent the “main” character Sarah, who is physically absent in the second half of the play. Kintz comments on Sarah’s fragments as such:

“Sarah in no way suggests a self-identical, closed, autonomous subject or character. Instead, it is a proper name that, with great difficulty, must hold past and present together in a space of character which finds its organization to be circular and repeating, rather than linear and distributing (1992b: 152-153).”

Kintz also interprets Sarah’s multi selves in terms of linguistics, defining Sarah as the ‘signifier’ and her other selves as ‘signifieds’: “Here the signifieds of the word Sarah only have in common the word Sarah, their “Sarahness,” its function only to provide a space of overlapping and crisscrossing.” (1992b: 153). Sarah’s selves speak as the mouthpiece of Sarah. Ironically, the predominant mode of speech is the monologue, which, normally, is a means of asserting the authority on the part of the speaker. However, in Sarah’s case, it is impossible to talk about the authority of the self, since she physically consists of four persons, each of whom move in a direction away from the center/Sarah.

The episodes and the aspects of the stories, which are told every time by different characters and most of the time repetitiously, built up a whole, however an ambiguous one, only in the mind of the spectator. As to this loose theatrical narration, Kennedy-as-Sarah warns the audience beforehand:

“The characters are myself... I try to give myself a logical relationship but that...is a lie. For relationships was one of my last religions. I clung loyally to the lie of relationships, again and again seeking to establish a connection between my characters...but they are lies. You will assume I am trifling with you, teasing your intellect... You are wrong. For the days are passed when there are places and

characters with connections with themes as in stories... Too, there is no theme. No statements...the statement is the characters and the characters are myself (1970: 257-258).”

This monologue, the second part of which was not published in In One Act (Kennedy 2000), not only constitutes almost the elementary part as to the meaning of the entire play, but also adumbrates the dramatic composition of the subject. Evaluating the subject’s representation solely from a feminist perspective, Deborah R. Geis comments that

“Kennedy’s works literalize the “splitting” of female subjectivity as her monologue speakers divide and subdivide their fractured utterances...such that character, like voice, is not a fixed construct (1996: 170): [it] is a series of poses or identities... The performing subject is split, like the endless series of mirrors in a funhouse, into multiple fictions (1996: 50).”

The impossibility of a coherent and unified sense of identity for Sarah is all the more emphasized by her other selves’ constantly examining themselves in the mirror. Generally speaking, the act of examining one’s self in the mirror implies the person’s confronting him/herself. However, in Funnyhouse of a Negro, Sarah looks in the mirror frantically to see if she has lost her hair, just like her mother did. Geis develops her analogy of funhouse mirrors in another article:

“[The] image of the mirror turns up repeatedly in Kennedy’s plays, most powerfully in Funnyhouse of a Negro, where the divided “selves” of “Sarah the Negro”...the Duchess, the Queen, Jesus and Patrice Lumumba examine their faces repeatedly in the mirror. In this case the “funnyhouse” suggests the ability of the funhouse mirror to distort, to reshape, and (as Herbert Blau points out) to entrap within an infinite series of replications. (1992: 173).”

The Owl Answers, as stated earlier, actually made up a single play together with Funnyhouse of a Negro. Concurrent with the playwright's giving birth to her second son, the two plays split apart. Unlike the former play, four of the characters in The Owl Answers, are subdivided into multiple personae: SHE who is CLARA PASSMORE who is VIRGIN MARY who is the BASTARD who is the OWL; BASTARD'S BLACK MOTHER who is the REVEREND'S WIFE who is ANNE BOLEYN; GODDAM FATHER who is the RICHEST WHITE MAN IN THE TOWN who is the DEAD WHITE FATHER who is REVEREND PASSMORE; and the personified animal THE WHITE BIRD who is REVEREND PASSMORE'S CANNARY who is GOD'S DOVE. The other characters are the Negro man who exists in the corporeality of the play; and Shakespeare, Chaucer and William the Conqueror who exist in Clara's inner reality.

The play opens in the New York subway, which, later, transforms into the Tower of London, a Harlem hotel room and St Peter's. Like Sarah in Funnyhouse of a Negro, Clara is of mixed heritage, being the child of the Bastard's Black Mother "who cooked for somebody" and the Richest White Man in the Town. She is a schoolteacher from Savannah, adopted by Reverend Passmore and his wife, and engaged to the principle of the school. There is no hint as to what has become of Clara's real mother; however, the mother figure (composed of three personalities, see above) is again highly disturbed. Bastard's Black Mother acknowledges herself as the stereotype of the prostitute, but Reverend Passmore's Wife cannot accept that she has lost her virginity and thus became an owl, by marrying the reverend who preached in the church at the top of the Holy Hill. The third component of the mother figure, Anne Boleyn whom Clara turns for help, only accentuates Clara's "owl-ness" by throwing her red rice.

It is narrated that when Clara is young, Bastard's Black Mother takes her to her father's (the Richest white Man in the Town) house in Jacksonville, Georgia. They enter the house from the back door. Clara learns from her "Black" mother "who cooked for somebody" that her father's family came from England.

Clara later finds out that England was the home of the Brontës, as well as Chaucer, Dickens and Shakespeare. And she falls in love with the landmarks of London, such as the Buckingham Palace, the Thames, Big Ben, Hyde Park and St. Paul's. However, she is unaware of the fact that her "Goddam Father" is only respected in Jacksonville but scorned in England. When the White Father dies Clara leaves Savannah to attend the funeral, against her colleagues', her fiancé's and her step mother's objections: "... who in the hell ever heard of anybody going to London?" (2000: 38).

The play is not the mimesis of these intermingled and multidimensional stories. Rather, the characters merge within themselves in Clara's nightmarish experience, in which the walls between reality and her psychic world collapse, and ultimately destroy Clara. She finds herself calling for the "wrong god." Finally she turns into an owl, which the mother figures have told her she was.

The "main" character "She who is" is another variation of Sarah of Funnyhouse of a Negro. The cast of The Owl Answers consists of fourteen characters (except for the Negro Man, Shakespeare, Chaucer and William the Conqueror) presented by four actors. Kennedy's instruction for the actors reads:

"The characters change slowly back and forth into and out of themselves, leaving some garment from their previous selves upon them always to remind us of the nature of She who is Clara Passmore who is the Virgin Mary who is the Bastard who is the Owl's world (Kennedy 2000: 25)."

The matching of the characters is illogical and impossible within the context of the white culture. In the Owl's world—as Kennedy names Clara's domain—She who is Clara Passmore equals Virgin Mary equals the Bastard equals the Owl, in the same manner as Bastard's Black Mother equals Reverend's Wife equals Anne Boleyn; Goddam Father equals the Richest White Man in the Town equals Reverend Passmore. Elinor Fuchs comments that in Kennedy's

construction of the character, the Christian symbol is “balanced” by a sign from African culture (1992: 82). However, it is more likely that these contrasting elements are at war with each other, inevitably bringing their frames of references with them.

No aspect of the white culture would confirm Kennedy’s pairing up Virgin Mary with the Bastard, or the Goddam Father with the Richest White Man in the Town. While Virgin Mary stands for innocence, Bastard is considered as the embodiment of sin and guilt. Both of the images are shaped around the concept of sexual intercourse: Mary, with her archaic association with virginity, symbolizes the immaculate birth, while the bastard, according to myths of blackness, is the child of either a black rapist father or a black promiscuous mother. The coupling of Goddam Father and the Richest White Man in the Town are not acceptable within the context of the white history, since their identification suggests the rape of the woman slave by the white landowner. Hence the reason why he is the Goddam Father from the viewpoint of the “Bastard.”

In Clara’s case the relative clause ‘who’ comes to serve also as the question word ‘who?.’ Jeanie Forte draws a similarity between the usage of this word and Sarah’s questing ‘who she is’:

“In this play of shifting subjectivities...there is no possibility of a fixed, stable identity, either for She or the reader; all the same, we follow the heroine (non-heroine, non-character) as she moves from place to place, person to person, in an effort to locate her identity. Note that the Owl traditionally asks ‘Who,’ that is, a question of identity; and Clara is the Owl, seeking to discover who she is (She who is) (1996: 25).”

However, her struggle to locate herself desperately in the figurations of Clara Passmore (the 34-year-old teacher), the Virgin Mary (who conceived and bore Jesus without losing her virginity), and the Bastard (the illegitimate daughter

of the Richest White Man in the Town) ultimately fails by turning into an owl. As Keyssar notes:

“No one will hear any of the voices in which “she” speaks, and in her wanderings through the sources of her “self,” Clara does not find the conventional dramatic moment of recognition. She does, however, find more dangerous knowledge to complicate further her understanding of herself... Unable to articulate the hybrid sound of virgin and whore, mother and child, black woman and white, “she” speaks in the end as an owl (1996: 235-236).”

The problem of identity, again, is the predominant issue in A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White. However, different from Funnyhouse of a Negro, and The Owl Answers, the story “takes place” in the Hollywood movies. The main character of the play is the namesake of the heroine² in The Owl Answers. Here, Clara is a playwright who is constantly working, “trying to do a page a day.” (2000: 83). She is married, pregnant and has just had a miscarriage. Her husband Eddie is away at war in Korea. Meanwhile, her brother Wallace has a car accident and is severely hospitalized. There is an implication that the accident is actually a suicide attempt: “He is separated from his wife and every night has been driving his car crazily around the street where she now lives. On one of these nights was when he had the accident.” (2000: 98). Also at the very end of the play, Clara-as-Jean Peters recalls Wallace’s indecisiveness as to what to do with his life. She also mentions an inarticulated crime in which Wallace was involved and which remains a mystery.

Clara’s divorced parents come together on this occasion but they are overtly hostile to each other. In the first scene, it is mentioned that the mother tried to kill the father with a shot gun, and in the last scene, they even attempt to fight physically. It turns out from the monologues and the bits and pieces of dialogues that in his youth, the father was a Negro leader, who planned to leave Georgia for Cleveland, which he thought was “a place of opportunity, leadership,

a progressive city, a place for education.” (2000: 85). Despite his enthusiasm and ambition to help the other black people, as he grows older, he becomes a bad-tempered man who drinks too much. Clara says of him: “My father once said his life has been nothing but hypocrisy and that’s why his photograph smiled.” (2000: 81). Clara-as-Bette Davis also remembers the day her father attempted to commit suicide.

The father’s going back to Georgia and the mother’s insistence to stay up North immediately evoke the same tension as the one between the mother and the father in *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, portraying the South as “a strange mesh of dark kinship between the races.” (Kennedy 1996: 98).

“FATHER. You ought to have gone back with me. It’s what I wanted to do.
 MOTHER. I never wanted to go back.
 FATHER. You yellow bastard. You’re a yellow bastard. That’s why you didn’t want to go back.
 MOTHER. You black nigger (2000: 96).”

Having her parents divorced, her brother on the deathbed, and her own family on the verge of breaking up; herself experiencing a troubled pregnancy immediately after a miscarriage, Clara is raided by the scenes from her familial past. Referring to their home, where the mother and the father have come together once more, Clara says: “There are so many memories in this house. The rooms besiege me.” (2000: 97).

However, it is not Clara who is presented as caught up in a web of memories; “[h]er movie stars speak for her. Clara lets her movie stars star in her life.” (2000: 87). The image of Hollywood is significant in that it sets up the norms of female beauty, which evolves around the white skin color, and represents the reality that belongs to a particular privileged group. What

Hollywood employs is a representation in which the subject is determined by excluding others. This act of exclusion is essentially a political act.

The ideological exclusion of representation makes itself manifest in the characterization of A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White. Geis points at Clara's desire to insert herself and her family into the context of the Hollywood narratives, "but [her] attempts at immersion in this pleasure are consistently undermined...by the extreme differences that characterize her "black" narrative...and her "white"...one." (1992: 175). Although Clara should be the starring actor of her life, the actors who look exactly like the movie stars, in their movie roles, play her parts. Consequently, Clara disappears, leaving the stage for her stars:

"The leading roles are played by Bette Davis, Paul Henreid, Jean Peters, Marlon Brando, Montgomery Clift and Shelley Winters. Supporting roles are played by the mother, the father, the husband. A bit role is played by Clara (2000: 81)."

Compared to Funnyhouse of a Negro, and The Owl Answers, A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White is Kennedy's most autobiographical play. Although the other two plays have muted family stories, they are rather metaphorical. In A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White, the events, which include Kennedy's forming her identity as a playwright, her parents' divorce, her brother's car accident and her separation from her husband during her troubled pregnancy, more or less have their roots in Kennedy's actual life. The play even includes some citations from The Owl Answers and there is a reference to A Lesson in Dead Language.

However, A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White is not about these stories, as much as it is about the enactment of these stories in the contexts of three Hollywood pictures *Now*, *Voyager*, *Viva Zapata* and *A Place in the Sun*, by the actors disguised as the leading stars. Having playwright-as-Clara anchored at

some corner of the stage, constantly writing her diary and her play, Kennedy's characterization becomes the focal point once more. March Robinson brings another insight to Kennedy's dispersed "main" character by arguing that such a fragmentation of identities ultimately leads to the predominance of Clara's self and mind:

"Clara's identity dilates so much that she nearly vanishes: Her body is rarely present, but her state of mind fills the stage, voiced by all the leading players. Clara escapes her world, but also presides over it. Only by scattering her identity around the stage, projecting herself onto others, is Clara able to see herself (1994: 138)."

In the light of this commentary, it turns out that Kennedy-as-Clara is always present as the subject. However, this is a rather troubled presence because she is not in control of the events—she is presented "as a spectator watching her life":

"Ever since I was twelve I have secretly dreamed of being a writer. Everyone says it's unrealistic for a Negro to want to write. Eddie says I've become shy and secretive and I can't accept the passage of time, and that my diaries consume me and that my diaries make me a spectator watching my life like watching a black and white movie. He thinks sometimes...to me life is one of my black and white movies that I love so...with me playing a bit part (2000: 99)."

These statements, uttered this time through her own mouth, suggests that there is a cause and effect relationship between being an African-American dramatist and being a spectator watching her own life. Since the ideology of representation excludes the realities and the subjects of the African-American culture "the only home available to Clara is writing—her *own* writing." (Robinson 1994: 140). Sue-Ellen Case articulates this ideology, evident, in this case, from the Hollywood movies:

“The high melodrama of the Hollywood movies conveys the strong emotions Clara feels about the members of her family, but this coupling also ironizes the cultural assimilation of such feelings by an all-white industry of the imagination such as Hollywood movies. The play demonstrates how the absence of black actors and black stories in the culture affects the ability of the black playwright to generate new narratives about their life (1988: 101-102).”

The strategies of characterization in the three plays which are reflexive of each other, do not conform to the Aristotelian concept of characterization, which centers on a heroic, consistent and logical female. Kennedy has originated a novel mode of representation and/or mimesis that parallels Kimberly Benston’s conceptualization of a contemporary African-American drama, evolving around the notion of *methexis*, that is, transmuted mimesis. He argues that “modern black theater, considered as a collective endeavor, seeks ultimately not to jettison but to transmute mimesis, liberating it from its association with coercive reproduction (2000:29).” The coercive reproduction he refers to is the binary logic and the static relationship it establishes between the word/image and its meaning. He observes that in the plays by African-American dramatists, there is a general departure from the conventional representation of a surface reality toward the presentation of “novel images of theatrical space, expression, and perception.” (2000: 30).

The act of erasing the subject by fragmenting it into several identities, and thus accentuating its presence is contradictory, however, it is an effective strategy to urge the audience to contemplate on the operations of the dominant culture in its ignoring the cultural self. In Benston’s words Kennedy, with her particular method of treating the African-American female subject “explores a new mode of self-representation by discrediting the available models for staging the marginalized self seeking position in public discourse.” (2000: 232). Kennedy’s representing the self is the manifestation of her claim to be included in the public sphere. She ignores neither the African nor the Euro-American heritage by “always

juxtaposing [her] obsessive interest in white culture with her keen awareness of imperialisms of racism.” (Hooks 1992: 183).

Kennedy’s presentation of the subject requires that the reader or the spectator turn back to the notion of a nonessentialized identity, as Bell Hooks and the other feminist critics discuss. In this sense, March Robinson’s comment is complementary for this notion of cultural identity, in which she argues that Kennedy, in her writer’s identity, has managed to converge the discrepant fragments of her two ideologically opposite ancestries:

“By writing Funnyhouse, Kennedy...learned she didn’t have to choose one aspect of her identity over another—the student enthralled by Jane Eyre or the woman transfixed by the mysteries of African masks. Ambivalence was not just an option; it would become a necessity if Kennedy was to mature as a playwright (1994: 132).”

1. 2. Rehearsing the Experience of the “Other”

The conventional (Aristotelian) plot structure, hidden under the story line, consciously constructs the reader as the absolute observer to whom the enigma of the story should be demystified at the very end. This attempt can only be possible by a narrative structure that depends on the cause-and-effect relationship, i.e. “the unfolding of events” which follows the patterns of complication and dénouement. This hierarchical and seemingly invisible structure (beginning-middle-end, rising and falling actions), by revealing all that is unknown, confines the audience to the position of the passive receiver, though the audience is led to believe that it had an active role in the making of the judgment.

However, as argued earlier, the false assumption that the audience is an active participant on the intellectual level is the strategy of the conventional (i.e. mimetic, representational) theater in order to subordinate the spectators to a docile position. Asking questions, criticizing the dramatic composition of the “heroic” subject, contemplating on the meaning are spectatorial acts, relevant only to the

experimental theater. Representational drama, by creating the illusion that the spectator is omnipotent and omnipresent, implies that s/he is the ultimate subject. Nevertheless this is its most effective design to fix him/her in a consenting position. Catherine Belsey, in order to locate the text and develop the readers' ability in critical thinking and reading, explores the text's ways of addressing the subject (the receiver/reader/audience). What is called representational drama in this dissertation coincides with Belsey's term "classic realism," which she uses regardless of genres. She argues that classic realism (and/or representational drama) "is characterized by *illusionism*, narrative which leads to *closure*, and a *hierarchy of discourses* which establishes the truth of the story." (1986: 70).

The terms in italics are the key concepts, the first of which is the argument that has hitherto been explored. To emphasize it once more, *illusionism* is the maneuvering of the mimetic drama to assign a submissive role to the audience. Belsey describes closure as "the point at which events of the story become fully intelligible..." (1987: 70). However, the audiences of the experimental theater and especially of Kennedy's plays are always denied the comfort of being in an intelligible state. For the Adrienne Kennedy spectator, none of the dramatic elements become obvious during the course of the plays. On the contrary, the narrative takes on different meanings and proceeds to an even more complex pattern of presentation at almost every step further. The implications drive the presentation to a point where an immediate crystallization of understanding is impossible.

This indeterminacy of the narrative is strictly tied to the absence of an authoritarian point of view that belongs either to the protagonist or to the playwright. The characters Sarah and Clara, or Kennedy-as-Sarah/Clara lose their authorities by being subdivided into several contradictory and/or oppositional personalities, such as Queen Victoria and Patrice Lumumba, or Bastard's Black Mother and Anne Boleyn, or Clara and Bette Davis. Belsey's comment on the 'hierarchy of discourse' is complementary in this sense because she confirms the argument by saying

“a high degree of intelligibility is sustained throughout the narrative as a result of the hierarchy of discourse in the text. The hierarchy works above all by means of a privileged discourse which places as subordinate all the discourses that are literally and figuratively between inverted commas (1986: 70).”

Adrienne Kennedy’s plays, on the other hand, are characterized by the absence of this privileged discourse that establishes the hierarchy, and thus helps determine the close-ended meaning. Herbert Blau comments on Kennedy’s narrative that it is

“secretive, splitting, elusive, fading in and out of each other, apparitions rather than characters who all tell the same story, over and over, sometimes in unison... compulsive, paradoxical, asking nothing but anonymity, yet confessionally direct (1987: 60).”

The narrative structure of her plays, as suggested by some feminist and African-American drama critics, is incomparable to the narrative structure of the representational drama. The conventional narrative, because it is hierarchical and revealing, deters the working of the imagination and prevents the audience from getting intellectually and critically involved in the staged experience. This narrative grasps the entire consciousness of the spectator through identification, and as a result, the spectator experiences the same fears and frustrations that the main character undergoes. This impact on the audience is the emotional involvement which results from the audience’s identification with the hero, who is necessarily a representative of the society. The emotional involvement that Kennedy’s plays require, however, is in a different sense. Audience’s emotion does not stem from identification, since Kennedy’s subject is not a representative, and therefore resists identification. This emotion is a natural result of the audience’s effort to understand the social, political and personal circumstances which drive the subject toward suicide or madness. Additionally, because the authoritarian tone in the Kennedy plays is disrupted, the conflicts are not meant “to

be resolved and unified but to be acknowledged and exploited as a source for personal and cultural transformation.” (Keyssar 1989: 234).

Since Kennedy does not intend to resolve these contradictions or to drive them to a satisfactory and unifying end, it is not her concern to represent the logical explanations of the actions. Therefore, the structure of the narrative is cyclical, evocative, suggestive, ambiguous and even contradictory—nonetheless productive and creative. Such a narrative inevitably provides no static point of view, in other words, no authority of a privileged consciousness, encouraging indeterminacy and embracing the multiplicity of meaning. Since, as Carlton and Barbara Molette argue, African-American drama does not aim at representing a surface reality, “the dramatic event is not obligated to create an illusion of time and place other than its own.” (1992: 150). The presentation has its own laws that contradict with the conventional linear and hierarchical narrative.

This reformed narrative, by its description, entails a new mode of plot structure—a structure that does not depend on reversals and recognitions, which Aristotle theorizes as the core of drama. He defines recognition as “a change from ignorance to knowledge, bringing the characters into either a closed bond or enmity, with one another, and concerning matters, which bear on their prosperity or affliction.” (1987: 43). According to Aristotle, the best recognition type is “through a probable sequence of action.” (1987: 50). From this perspective, the conventional plot structure depends on the heroic subject’s recognition of a hitherto unseen truth, by way of the unfolding action. After that, he is either saved from ruin/death/loss or doomed to suffer.

On the other hand, African-American drama, bearing the traces of the oral traditions of Africa and having been influenced by the literary traditions of Europe, overvalues the visual and sensual characteristics of presentation. In this sense, Molettes argue, this theater is not “an arrangement of cognitive information conveyed primarily through the use of language.” (1992: 37). Giving the secondary significance to the plot, theme and character, which conventionally

center on language, African-American drama accentuates dialogue (but in a different way), music and spectacle. In dialogue, not the choice of the words, but the manner in which these words are presented takes on effect. Music is not treated as an element to create mood and atmosphere (as in Western drama), but is a direct expression of feelings, germane to the dramatic presentation. Creative and asymmetrical combination of color and movement come to dominate the spectacle. Together, these dramatic elements constitute the rhythm of the Afrocentric presentation. The intensity of rhythm is crucial to the African-American drama, just as the patterns of complication and dénouement to the conventional drama. But, unlike the latter, the former struggles to preserve symmetry for the sake of being intelligible. Molettes put it this way:

“The Afrocentric [theatre] is almost totally dependent upon tempo and rhythm as the means of ordering the presentation into a beginning, a middle and an end. The tempo builds in rate and intensity, and the volume usually builds to a climax and then recedes. In the process, the rhythmic ideals to be aimed for is asymmetry (1992: 139).”

In the light of Molettes’ theorizing, it is possible to argue that Afrocentric theater does not totally break from the conventions of Eurocentric drama—rather, it imposes the emphasis on different elements. Indeed, a thorough departure from the traditions of representational drama is impossible since the African-American playwright improvises on its devices. As Tejumola Olaniyan reminds, “...it is all too clear that [African-American dramatists] are indebted to Western categories of knowing. Language is the most obvious manifestation of this debt...” (1995: 140). However, the main point he intends to emphasize is that these dramatists “*rediscovered* themselves and their different cultures through engagements with the [Western] tradition.” (1995: 140).

In this sense, it is more appropriate to suggest that these theatrical devices are altered to accommodate the presentation of the African-American artistic expression. This parallels Hurston’s argument that the originality of the African-

American people lies in their manipulation of ideas—in this case, it is the manipulation of Aristotle’s theory of mimesis. The result is neither an imitation of Eurocentric forms of representation, nor the original models of African rituals—it is a unique combination of both. Molettes’ straightforward comment is that

“African-American aesthetic priorities are different; as a result African-American theatre is different from European-American theatre. An aesthetic that grows out of an oral traditional and that regards rhythm as the central factor in presentation must necessarily place a higher value upon texture and a lower value upon structure in its aesthetic priorities (1992: 135).”

Contemporary critics of feminism do not acknowledge the gender subjectivity as essential and stable. Rather, it is considered as being relational, contextual and subject to change. Since this subjectivity does not conform to a definitive shape and maintains only its amorphous state, a recognition of the self, as suggested by Aristotle, is impossible in feminist drama. Instead, this theater provides the field of exploring the multiplicity of meaning by presenting several points of view. Making use of the theater’s transformational device characters become other characters, places become other places—the performance of transformation helps the actor present the possibilities of a character as well as manipulating the context in which the character is presented. Helene Keyssar reveals that the plays of feminist and African-American theaters inspired her to change her mind as to the central characteristic of drama, which she hitherto thought was the kind of change represented in the recognition scenes. Keyssar continues by arguing

“...drama offers another possibility, that of presenting and urging the transformation of persons and our images of each other. This...requires...that we imagine men and women in a continual process of becoming other...it is becoming other, not finding oneself, that is the crux of drama; the performance of transformation of

persons, not the revelation of a core identity, focuses the drama (1996: 119).”

Although, in this quotation, Keyssar refers only to the transformation of characters, this theatrical technique is also applicable to the other elements of the plot, such as time, place and the relationship between the characters. Theatrical transformation is by definition “jumping from one set of circumstances to another.” Therefore, besides identity (the who), the place of action (the where), the clock time or epoch (the when), and the relationship between the actor and his/her partner (the what) are also subject to change (Robert Passoli, as quoted in Geis 1996: 43). Theatrical transformation functions to disrupt the authority of the character and/or the predominant point of view of the text. This disruption of authority is directly connected with undermining the plot structure of representational theater. To use Catherine Belsey’s words, it interferes with the illusion of the text by inserting contradictions and ambiguity and thus breaking down the hierarchy of discourses.

In Kennedy’s plays, too, the transformational technique is used to manipulate the conventional dramatic narrative. As examined earlier, it is possible to draw out a background story from each of the plays. These stories make sense in themselves, however, as Robert Scanlan points out, they are “never *dramatized*,” what the audience experiences “is structured on an action differing substantially from the ‘background’ story.” (1992: 95). The narrative that follows the course from ‘the unknown’ to ‘the known,’ from conflict to resolution is impossible to detect in Kennedy’s presentations. Rather, her plays are “anachronistic, collagelike, and filled with lacunae or ellipses” (Geis 1992: 175) and they “move in and out of focus in a memory flux.” (Blau 1987: 61).

The characterization in Funnyhouse of a Negro, as examined earlier, required four actors to present the main character Sarah: the Duchess of Hapsburg, Queen Victoria Regina, Jesus and Patrice Lumumba. The concomitant condition of such a characterization is an elusive sense of place and time, which transforms in

relation to the characters. Sarah, in her monologue, at the very beginning explains her world in her unusually plain manner:

“Part of the time I live with Raymond, part of the time with God, Prince Charles and Albert Saxe Coburg.... The rooms are my rooms; a Hapsburg chamber, a chamber in a Victorian castle, the hotel where I killed my father, the jungle. These are the places myself exist in (1970: 255-257).”

The presentation of this transformational space is achieved through the use of different corners of the stage, accentuating the scene-in-action with the spotlight, leaving the others in darkness. The center of the stage serves as Sarah’s room, “allowing the rest of the stage as the place for herself.” (2000: 1). To the right of the stage is a suspended ladder that climbs to the landlady’s place. The funnyman Raymond’s room is suggested as being above Sarah’s room. During the scene that takes place in Raymond’s room, he constantly opens and closes the blinds, behind which are the mirrors, evocative of the ones in the funhouses. The free spaces of the stage are used as the Queen’s chamber, the Hapsburg chamber, and the nonidentified spaces are spared for the monologue scenes in which the characters speak before a suspended wall, their faces to the audience. Actually Kennedy, in her note tells “[w]hen [Sarah] is placed in her room with her belongings, then the director is free to let the rest of the play happen around her.” (2000: 2). Similar to the transformational characterization in which Sarah is replicated in four actors, her room is replicated on several parts of the stage.

The stage of The Owl Answers, too, is transformational, however, in a different manner. Just as the characters change back and forth into and out of themselves always leaving some garment to remind the previous self, the stage metamorphoses into scenes, preserving their suggestive props:

“The scene is a New York subway is the Tower of London, is a Harlem hotel room is St. Peter’s. The sound are subway sounds and

the main props of a subway are visible—poles... The gates, the High Altar, the ceiling and the Dome are like St. Peter's, the wall are like the Tower of London... The Tower Gate should be black, yet slam like a subway door (Kennedy 2000: 25-26)."

This multidimensional stage allows the "actual" reality to make itself manifest only through the noise of the train and the flashing lights. But the sound of the slamming, on one hand, implies the movements of the subway car doors, and on the other hand, the shutting of the Tower Gates. Blau argues that Kennedy's transformations ultimately lead to a point where the black and white images/scenes melt into each other, never to dissolve again:

"[W]hen [Kennedy] says... that the Tower Gate should be *black*, yet slam like a subway door, there is an animism in the Tower, an aboriginal impulse in the stagecraft, black magic, that causes us to wonder whether even subways, built by whites in an industrial world, came out of the jungle, too... (1987: 60)."

Kennedy's transformational presentation requires the stage to transcend its limitations, to move, to revolve around its axis. For unlike the staging of Funnyhouse of a Negro, The Owl Answers does not allow for the dispersal of scenes; they—like the characters SHE who is CLARA PASSMORE who is VIRGIN MARY who is the BASTARD who is the OWL, personified in one body—should be compressed into a single locale. In this single locale, intersect the multiple realities of Clara—the bastard, the adopted daughter, the black schoolteacher from Savannah tracing her heritage in England—and the reality in which the Negro Man exists. The interruptions such as stopping of the subway, slamming of doors/gates, revolving of the scene and Haydn's *Concerto for Horn D*, which Clara hears "at the most violent times of her experience" (2000: 26) function to indicate transition between the scenes, in the same manner as the blackouts marked the scenes in Funnyhouse of a Negro.

On the other hand, the scenes of A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White are somehow quite different as to their contexts when compared to the claustrophobic jungles, towers, subways and rooms of the other two plays. They take place in the critical scenes of the three Hollywood movies. The scenes are:

- I. Hospital lobby and *Now Voyager*³
- II. Brother's room and *Viva Zapata*⁴
- III. Clara's old room and *A Place in the Sun*⁵.

In her notes for the production, Kennedy makes clear that “the ship, the deck, the railings and the dark boat can all be done with lights and silhouettes,” and that “all colors are shades of black and white.” (2000: 80). The play opens with Clara-as-Columbia Pictures Lady's prologue. Immediately after she fades, Clara, the “main” character, appears in a distance in the dim light uttering the sentences that reflect the central tensions and the nonlinear narrative of the play:

“My brother is the same...my father is coming...very depressed. Before I left New York I got my typewriter from the pawnshop. I'm terribly tired, trying to do a page a day, yet my play is coming together. Each day I wonder with what or with whom I can co-exist in a true union? (Kennedy 2000: 82)”

Scene I is played on the deck of the ocean liner from the Now Voyager—simultaneously the hospital lobby—and takes place in June through July of the year 1955, in Cleveland. The ship is suggested by the lights roughly covering the poles. The movie's original romantic atmosphere is created with the use of light and music. Yet the first sentences Bette Davis utters (after stating the date) are: “When I have the baby I wonder will I turn to a river of blood and die? My mother almost died when I was born” (2000: 83), interrupting the original fantasy of the scene⁶. Meanwhile, the “supporting” characters of the mother, the father and the husband, dressed in the 1950s fashion, wander on the deck of the ship/hospital lobby. So, on the stage are the mother, father and husband as in June 1955 (as

Davis states), together with Bette Davis and Paul Henreid. While Davis articulates Clara's recollections and disappointments, the mother tells of the segregated Georgia, and the father, of his plans of going up North. Throughout the scene, Davis functions as Clara's agent—she answers the questions which are actually asked of Clara:

“Eddie. Clara, please tell me everything the doctor said about the delivery and how many days you'll be in the hospital...

Davis. *(very remote)* I get very jealous of you Eddie, you are doing something with your life.

(He tries to kiss Clara. She moves away and walks along the deck and writes in her notebook.)

Davis. *(to Eddie)* Eddie, do you think I have floating anxiety? You said everyone in Korea had floating anxiety. I think I might have it. *(Pause.)* Do you think I'm catatonic?

Eddie. *(Staring at Clara)* I'm late to class now. We'll talk when I come home... (2000: 88).”

The indirect structure of this narration, which continues on one hand in Clara's imagination, and on the other, on the level of linear reality, also dominate the other two scenes of the play. The transition between scenes I and II is rather mild with the slowly dimming light and the movie music. During this transition the light stays on Davis, Henreid and Clara. Leaving the other two behind, Clara talks about her memory of watching Viva Zapata and prepares the audience for Scene II, which takes place in Marlon Brando and Jean Peters' bedroom as well as in the brother's room.

Since Kennedy has chosen the wedding scene from *Viva Zapata*, the lights brighten. The scene takes place on the same space as Scene I; it is only the lights that imply the scene has changed. Peters, like Davis, starts by stating the date, July 11. She not only cites from Clara's diary/headpiece, but also enacts her troubled pregnancy—she lies on the bed and Brando changes the blood stained sheets.

While the background action is being carried on by the “supporting” actors, Peters “stars.” When the background action is carried on to the foreground, such as Clara’s talking to her mother, Peters draws back, joining Brando to enact the *Viva Zapata* scene. The transition to the third scene is rather an abrupt one, since the last monologue of the second scene is that of the mother, telling how she learned about her son’s tragic accident.

The spectacle at the beginning of the last scene holds the traces of *Viva Zapata* and *Now Voyager*. With the appearance of the boat, in which sit Montgomery Clift, Shelley Winters and behind her, Clara, writing in her diary, the play shifts to the third scene. It is still possible to see Peters and Brando, changing the sheets and enacting the *Viva Zapata* scene. This third scene witnesses only the citations from Kennedy’s previous play The Owl Answers, and Winters’ giving voice to Clara’s diary and memories. This is interrupted only by the husband’s insensitive questions to Clara related to her writing: “Are you sure you want to go on with this...obsession of yours?” (2000: 98-99). The audience is reminded of Peters and Brando one last time, in bed, struggling with the stained, black sheets. At the same time the boat scene of *A Place in the Sun* starts to be enacted. Winters falls into the water, calling silently for help. Meanwhile, Clara narrates the moment the doctor informs her and her mother that Wallace will be brain damaged and paralyzed: “After he told us, my mother cried in my arms outside the hospital. We were standing on the steps, and she shook so that I thought both of us were going to fall headlong down the steps.” (2000: 103). Simultaneously, Winters drowns and the light goes down on Clift, staring at her expressionless, then Clara and finally, very briefly and dazzlingly on Columbia Pictures Lady. Kintz’s interpretation is that “[t]he slow, sure inevitability of her drowning, her brother’s paralysis, and her mother’s loss are sealed by a transcendental pure, white female figure.” (1992a: 79).

The analysis of the technical presentation is significant in that it enables a crystallization in understanding how the stories relate to the plot structures. Each of the plays, somehow, has a story that naturally follows a chronological order.

However, it is through the presentation of their aftereffects that they become complex clusters of suggestions, states of mind, recollections, never to be revealed whether they took place in the 'actual' reality or in Sarah/Clara-as-Kennedy's imagination. Although Scanlan emphasizes the necessity to retain a strict distinction between the plot structure and the story, he argues that in Kennedy's plays the plot structure is almost a natural extension of the story and the theme:

"The material [of Kennedy's plays] is so potent—especially in the overall historical context in which [they] emerged—that it is often difficult to keep a strict attention to form alone...her themes are embedded in a "background" story, and a theatrical plot is created as a formal structure rising out of this matrix of story and theme (1992:94)."

The carrying-out of this "matrix of story and theme" on the stage is possible only through transformations and simultaneity of action. Transformation, to an extent, enables a concurrence of events, however, this simultaneity can only be grasped in the mind of the spectator, in an abstract manner. The perfect embodiment of such transformation is exercised in The Owl Answers where the characters change into and out of themselves before the eyes of the audience. On the other hand, it can be argued that Adrienne Kennedy has dissected the theatrical device of transformation: several actors simultaneously play a single character, and several scenes are simultaneously enacted on the separate spaces on the same stage.

By means of such improvisations on theatrical possibilities is Kennedy able to stage her memories, the acts of her psyche. Claudia Barnett comments on Kennedy's presentations that they are memory plays which are neither replayed nor represented: "[the] memories occur in the present tense, where they are simultaneously invented and recalled." (1996: 150). Relating the narrative structure to the "present-ness" of the Kennedy plays, Barnett argues that because Kennedy "focuses...on states of mind and being—womanhood, fragmentation,

longing—... [she] problematizes the very nature of narrative, diminishing its power by undermining its authority.” (1996: 150)

In Adrienne Kennedy’s scenes, the audience does not “witness” the mimesis of action; rather, a background story is implied throughout the play, from the points of view of different characters. However, the most immediate concern of Kennedy’s presentation is to stage “the unstagable,” to capture the feeling, the consciousness, the state of mind. Scanlan’s suggestion is that “[w]hat is dramatized in the performance is something that is done *as a result of the story*.” (1992: 95). This presentation resists theorization because it lacks a regular form, an order, hierarchy, causality and authority. However, transformational technique is crucial since it provides the presentation of the time, the place and the characters in a state of flux. Referring to Kennedy’s narrative and/or composition of the plot, Jeanie Forte comments that

“[t]he [plays’] ambiguity and near incomprehensibility articulate the impossibility of identification with a narrative position, least of all one which might provide closure, or the fiction of a coherent self. [Sarah/]Clara...traverses narrative, zig-zagging across various systems of signification, seeking herself in the gaps, the spaces of unnarrated silence wherein her persistently elusive subjectivity might be found (1996: 26).”

The narrative Forte articulates is also directly related to the political stance which rejects the socially constructed gender and cultural identities. From the feminist perspective, this construction must be continually redefined in order to free the minds of the authority of meaning, hierarchies, binary oppositions, categorizations, conservatism and oppressive ideologies. The reflection of this stance on the stage coincides with the playwright’s—such as Kennedy’s—impulse to re-define, re-shape, and re-form the conventions of representational drama.

1.3. Redeployment of the Aristotelian Form

There are several means by which Adrienne Kennedy disrupts the flow of the Aristotelian dramatic structure. She not only engages her readers/audiences in seeking the possibilities of meaning, but also interferes with the authoritarian ideology that is advocated by the Aristotelian subject. Her indeterminate narrative does not provide (to use Catherine Belsey's terms) a hierarchy of discourses and a closure of events, and for this reason she does not have the authority to construct the audience with a privileged consciousness. The only impact the plays have on the audience is a subconscious response which constantly mystifies, demystifies and re-mystifies the possible meanings.

One of the most effective devices Kennedy employs, to undermine the conventional dramatic structure is the use of monologue. As mentioned earlier, this form of speech has an authoritarian tone since it functions to express only the speaker's or the writer's consciousness. However, in Funnyhouse of a Negro, Raymond and Mrs. Conrad together with Sarah's other selves are also given voice; they have **their** versions of the stories to tell. Similarly, in The Owl Answers, although the predominant voice belongs to "the main character," just like her name 'She who is' suggests, it is characterized by indeterminacy, and not by a privileged consciousness. A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White, too, is dominated by the inner speeches of the main character—an authority, this time, disrupted by the character's absence from the stage, together with her indecisiveness in her utterances. The use of monologue masks the fact that the plays lack a privileged point of view.

Another aspect of this relationship between monologue and authority is the impact the monologue has on the audience. Since it suggests, in Geis' terms, "hypothetical points of view" (1996: 12), it functions to confuse the audience as to where the speaking subject and the dramatist conjoin and where they split. In the case of Kennedy's three plays, it is all the more difficult to decide through whose

consciousness the characters are talking since there are multiple points of view and versions of narration:

“[T]he speaker of the monologue tends to take on an “authorial” or “authoritative” role, especially if he or she plays the part of a narrator. Yet this very “authority” can serve as an opportunity for the playwright to manipulate the audience’s judgment, especially if the dramatist chooses to offer monologues by more than one character that compete for the spectator’s sense of whom to trust (Geis 1996: 13).”

The theatrical monologue, on the other hand, is a device that problematizes the character’s relation to both time and space. It is as if the character is cut off from the immediate conditions of his/her environment by way of creating a new present or a new reality for him/herself. Since the corporeality of the play does not act upon the lacuna that is created by the monologue, Geis suggests that it “has the power to travel through time and space.” (1996: 43). In fact, this lacuna itself takes over the action and becomes the “ongoing present” of the play, to which the audience is compelled to accommodate. Geis puts it this way: “[T]he monologue does not have to fit within the traditional narrative sense that the audience “paces” the performance according to “real time”...since the monologue *becomes* that ongoing present, members of the audience fall into its rhythm rather than trying to adapt it to their own (1996: 41-42).”

In the light of this approach to the monologue, it can further be suggested that Kennedy’s three plays are distinguished by the monologic time and space. The action is subordinate to the monologue, since past and present events, however ambiguous they are, are rendered through monologic speech. Corresponding this suggestion is Geis’ argument that monologue “achieves a dramatic resonance and potential for creative manipulation all its own.” (1996: 15).

This train of thought again leads to the (Aristotelian) representation and presentation discrepancy. Hornby affirms that in the (conventional) theater, dramatic illusion is holistic, coherent, unified and therefore comprehensible, which is the reason why people enjoy it: “We know that everything we see on the stage is there to contribute to our understanding, and nothing that we need to know is left out.” (1986: 111). He then compares dramatic illusion to real life, whose fabrication corresponds so much to the quality of Kennedy plays:

“In real life, our perception of things and events is always fragmentary; whatever we are perceiving always has further aspects of itself that at a given time are unavailable, backgrounds, causes, ramifications, and effects that we do not know about. This does not mean that we are not perceiving things wholistically; on the contrary we are *constantly* forming integrated wholes out of what we perceive, but these wholes are in turn constantly being broken up, expanded, contracted, or displaced. Meaning continually competes with confusion (1987: 111).”

In this sense, what Kennedy puts on the stage is closer to the core of life itself with all its inconceivable aspects, conflicts, multiplicity of associations, simultaneity of events, historical backgrounds, future reflections and possibilities. Kennedy does not dramatize these qualities—the presentation of her subject and her subject’s experience as a non-Western female necessitates a complex plot structure, which is re-ordered so as to create its own space. Jacques Derrida articulates his vision on the presentational drama, which also corresponds to Kennedy’s theater, structuring his arguments on Antonin Artaud’s *the Theatre of Cruelty*:

“[N]onrepresentation is...original representation; if [it] signifies...the unfolding of a volume, a multidimensional milieu, an experience which produces its own space...[which] no speech could condense or

comprehend...thereby appeals to a time that is no longer that of so-called phony linearity...(1978: 237).”

The underlying stories of the plays were given in the previous section of this chapter. Kennedy, apart from suggesting a background story through the monologues, uses the monologic language in a repetitious style so that the ambiguity increases and other possible meanings find their way. An instance for installing ambiguity in meaning would be the part of Negro Sarah’s first monologue, in Funnyhouse of a Negro: “I need [my white friends] as an embankment to keep me from reflecting too much upon the fact that I am a Negro.” (2000: 6). Later in the play when the same sentence is uttered by one of Sarah’s other selves, Patrice Lumumba, it becomes: “I need them as an embankment to keep me from reflecting too much upon the fact that I am Patrice Lumumba who haunted my mother’s conception.” (2000: 6). As the former reflects only the feeling of self-hatred generated by the internalized racism, the latter substitutes the word ‘Negro’ with the name of the African leader Patrice Lumumba “who haunted [his] mother’s conception,” suggesting rape, incest and an uncertain ancestry. The latter is also a more detailed modification of the African-American cultural identity in which is embedded the white racist myths (see the introductory section of this chapter). The view that reduces Patrice Lumumba to an anonymous African man and implies incest and rape in the familial history of the African-American “may occur in a white American cultural consciousness and become internalized even by individuals who try constantly to resist it.” (Thompson 28).

Another slight, nevertheless, crucial deviation in meaning can also be traced between: “I will...waver in [my white friends’] opinion of me, as I waver in the opinion of myself. But if I hadn’t wavered in my opinion of myself, then my hair would never have fallen out.” (2000: 6). And: “I will despise [my white friends] as I do myself. For if I did not despise myself then my hair wouldn’t have fallen...” (2000: 13). In the former version, the verb ‘to waver,’ meaning to fluctuate in opinion takes on a more acute expression in the second version,

meaning to feel extreme dislike and disrespect. The fact that there are other utterances between these expressions may make it difficult to point out the differences, especially if the play is read or seen only once.

However, there are also the instances in which successive sentences revise the meaning of the original one, such as the Duchess' short monologue:

“He is an African who lives in the jungle. He is an African who has always lived in the jungle. Yes, he is a nigger who is an African who is a missionary teacher and is now dedicating his life to the erection of a Christian mission in the middle of the jungle. He is a black man (2000: 9).”

This piece manifests how the Duchess (Negro Sarah) sees her father—as the impossible coexistence of African/nigger/missionary teacher. Deborah Thompson argues that such slip in the repetition, or the variations around a statement in this play are deliberate in that they serve as a strategy “for presenting the way race and racism are internalized, while simultaneously externalizing such an internalization.” (27).

Resembling the repetitive and monologic narrative in the Funnyhouse of a Negro, The Owl Answers opens with the lines uttered by the historical figures of Shakespeare, William the Conqueror, Chaucer and Anne Boleyn, who are also the guards of the London Tower: “You are not his ancestor. Keep her locked there, guard. Bastard.” (2000: 27). Reappearing throughout the play, these lines not only contribute in creating a dream atmosphere on the stage but also mystify the meaning of the word ‘ancestor.’ She Who Is uses this word appropriately at the beginning: “We were visiting the place of our ancestors, my father and I” (2000: 27), however the boundary between ‘ancestor’ and ‘descendant’ blurs as the play proceeds: “I who am the ancestor of Shakespeare, Chaucer and William the Conqueror, I went to London” (2000: 36), which, after a while, is refracted as: “I am Clara Passmore. I am not His ancestor.” (2000: 37). Adding to this confusion is

the disturbing question, asked Clara, several times by a number of characters: “Are you confused?” (2000: 35) The reply comes from the Bastard’s Black Mother in a way that seems to put an end to this oblique issue of parentage (but fails to do so): “Why be confused? The Owl was your beginning, Mary.” (2000: 35).

Another slippage in meaning can be observed in the laconic dialogues between Clara and the Negro Man. The deviation is caused because she communicates with him by answering the voices in her head loudly (Negro Man is abbreviated as NM):

“BIRD. If you are the Virgin, what are you doing with this Negro in a Harlem hotel room? Mary?

SHE. My name is Clara Passmore.

BIRD. Mary... (*WHITE BIRD laughs like the MOTHER...*)

NM. (*Going to her.*) What is it?

SHE. Call me Mary, God.

NM. Mary?

SHE. God, do you remember the loveliness?

... [He tries to initiate her for the intercourse, when he undresses her, a black body is revealed. Clara struggles get away from the Negro Man.]

NM. What is wrong?

SHE. Wrong, God?

NM. God?

SHE. Wrong, God?

NM. God? (2000: 41-44)”

She is indecisive as to who she is—Mary or Clara. At the end of her frustrating affair with the Negro Man, it turns out that she has tried to find solace in the “wrong God.”

Kennedy's manipulating the meaning of this particular word is a reflection of She who is the Bastard's struggle to locate herself within the white heritage. According to the myths of blackness generated by the dominant ideology, Clara Passmore who is the daughter of a woman who cooked for somebody can only have a "colored" family line. Kennedy, in a very subtle manner, attacks this coercive generalization by subverting the meaning of 'ancestry.'

Apart from these manipulative repetitions are the pieces of narrative that have an incantatory effect such as "How dare he enter the castle, he who is the darkest of them all, the darkest one?" (2000: 3) or "Black man, black man, I never should have let a black man put his hands on me" (2000: 4) from Funnyhouse of a Negro. Their correspondents in The Owl Answers could be, for example, "He came to me in the outhouse, he came to me under the porch, in the garden, in the fig tree. He told me you are an owl, ow; oww, I am your beginning, ow" (2000: 35), or the mother figures' lamentation, which is uttered in several versions: "Clara...you're an owl... That's why when I see you, Mary, I cry. I cry when I see Marys, cry for their deaths." (2000: 30).

Blau defines the language that Kennedy's characters use as "obsessional narratives," and argues that, rather than a communicative function; these "monologic, semichoral, autistic" speeches have "the effect of ritual and incantation." (1987: 61). As to Adrienne Kennedy, she is aware of—what she calls—the "hypnotic value" of her monologues, whose tone, she thinks, she has inherited from her mother's storytelling: "I feel that all my writing has the same tone as the stories she told about her childhood...they always had this terror in them, a blackness" (Betsko and Koenig 1987: 249). Also in another interview⁷, she attributes the repetition in her plays to her Latin teacher who read them the same passages over and over again. Kennedy also points to her mother's storytelling, as mentioned, and Negro spirituals as the sources of influence:

"My mother...told the same stories over and over again. And I think I realized the hypnotic value of that...She would always vary [the

story] a little. I also think I've been trying to imitate Negro spirituals in my plays. I love the repetition... the emotional language."

A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White, however, is governed by Clara's narratives, rather than repetitious speech. The complexity of the language in this play is that speech is hardly directed to the addressee. Clara's Hollywood stars (but only the female ones) intervene in her personal communications, and there is no actual interaction, neither verbal nor physical, between the rest of the characters. The members of her family cannot speak directly to Clara, and Clara prefers to communicate with them through the movie stars Bette Davis, Jean Peters and Shelley Winters. An example of such indirect communication would be:

BETTE DAVIS. *(Very passionate.)* I'd give anything in the world if I could just once talk to Jesus.

Sometimes he walks through my room but he doesn't stop long enough for us to talk...he has an aureole. *(Then to the FATHER who is almost out of sight on the deck whistling.)* Why did you marry the girl who talked to willow trees? *(To PAUL HENREID.)* He left us to marry a girl who talked to willow trees (2000: 85)."

Just as the monologues interfere with the audience's perception of the actual time, so does the theatrical transformation, which is the act of playing with the circumstances, peculiar to a certain situation, as examined in the previous section. Another distinctive characteristic of the Kennedy plays is the significance of the spectacle, the visual aspect of the presentation. Actually, the plays' readability depends substantially on the staging, which requires the visual and aural instruments to be made use of effectively. Lois Overbeck, depending on the interviews with directors and actors, observes that "Kennedy's plays are open to a directorial hand," and argues further that "dramaturgical improvisation brings the nuances and the suggestive possibility of images and nonlinear structures to life in performance." (1992: 22). In accordance with Molettes' argument that the two outstanding dramatic elements in Afrocentric performance are music and

spectacle, Kennedy's productions call for a diligent dramaturgy. Michael Kahn, whose direction of Funnyhouse of a Negro won the Obie Award in 1964, did not stage the jungle scene in either of his two productions, because, as he remembers, he "didn't see how that could be done physically." (Stein 1992: 193). The last scene, which Khan later saw performed (by the Juilliard School of Music) and was highly effected by, takes place:

"[i]n the jungle [with] RED SUN, FLYING THINGS, wild black grass. The effect of the jungle is that it, unlike the other scenes, is over the entire stage. In time this is the longest scene in the play and is played the slowest, as the slow, almost standstill stages of a dream. By lighting the desired effect would be—suddenly the jungle has overgrown the chambers and the other places with a violence and a dark brightness, a grim yellowness (2000: 20)."

Kennedy's three plays are commonly dominated by black and white. In Funnyhouse of a Negro, Sarah's room/jungle "is set in the middle of the Stage in a strong white LIGHT, while the rest of the stage is in unnatural BLACKNESS." (2000: 2). "Victoria always wants me to tell her of her whiteness... of a royal world where everything and everyone is white and there are no unfortunate black ones. For as we of royal blood know, black is evil and has been from the beginning" (Kennedy 2000: 5) are the lines, in which Sarah parodies the phobic nature of the cultural logic of purity. Contradictorily, a few sentences before, she remarks that the whiteness of the huge statue of Queen Victoria is suggestive of death, possessing a nightmarish quality. The Owl Answers, too, is governed by the very colors. The white and black colors of wigs, robes and masks take on the desired effect when considered within the context of racial identity. White silky hair and dark kinky hair function as cultural markers. When the Dead White Father is Reverend Passmore, he puts on the "Negro hair" and the white church robe, juxtaposing the colors, and thus the cultural contexts. Another instance of juxtaposition is when the audience is exposed the "blacker" body of the "bastard pale" Clara. Building her argument on the references to the act of writing that

reappear in each play, March Robinson also draws attention to the black and white imagery of ink and paper (1994: 142). She thus extends the metaphor of the colors to the issue of being and/or becoming a writer, and of self-expression.

Bearing the names of these predominant colors in its title, A Movie Star has to Star in Black and White generates the atmosphere of the three early Hollywood movies. Kennedy subverts the principles of the Aristotelian representation by juxtaposing the binary logic of the cultural contexts that these colors embody. The white American movie stars are on the stage to act out or utter Clara's, an African-American woman's, thoughts and memories. On seeing Kennedy, who was dressed in black and white, looking like Bette Davis, at a public interview, Elin Diamond interprets that the playwright has created the sub-text of her play, "[purloining Davis'] cinematic image for her fantasy life as a way of telling [the audience] about her life." (1992: 132). Kennedy's work, Diamond implies, serves to reveal that racism is embedded in mimesis, because "not only [does] the subject of enunciation [Kennedy and/or Clara] not resemble her model or object, Bette Davis, but also it [is] unacceptable in the cultural discourses through which we think, speak, and see that she could represent her." (1992: 132).

Having the stage imbued in the colors black and white, and her characters assuming different degrees of "blackness," Kennedy blurs the boundaries that stand between two culturally binary associations, as she does the semantic difference between the words 'ancestor' and 'descendant.' She makes effective use of the spectacle by painting the stage with culturally charged colors; in other words, she gets the stage to correspond to the fundamental racial confusion in her plays.

Music in The Owl Answers and A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White is integral for the productions, although in different senses. In The Owl Answers, "[t]he music which SHE WHO IS hears at the most violent times of her experience should be HAYDN's "Concerto for Horn D" (Third Movement)." (2000: 26). This specific stage direction serve as the audial aspect of the state she

is in. On the other hand, in A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White, “[t]he movie music throughout is romantic,” (2000: 80) just like the attitudes of the movie stars. Apparent from her directions, Kennedy desires to evoke the movie’s original atmosphere as perfectly as possible. Far from contributing to the dramatic illusion, music separates the Hollywood world and the world in which the actual subjects of the story reside. Kennedy makes it clear that “[t]hese movie stars are romantic and moving, never camp or farcical, and the attitudes of the supporting players...is deadly serious,” in an attempt to juxtapose these two spheres: the glamorized one and the one that is deliberately erased from the public eye. The romantic movie music, then, different from the classical piece in The Owl Answers, is used to accentuate the distance between the Hollywood norms of beauty and romance, and the tensions that are germane to the African-American woman’s self-expression and self-conception.

Kennedy’s plays, while challenging the directors with their elaborate instructions, also allow for interpretation and improvisation. For example, Michael Khan, directing The Owl Answers, remembers that instead of masks he had the actors made up so that one side of their faces were white, and the other, black. Again, about the directions, which he thought were too cinematic, he “found a kind of symbolic version of them.” (Stein 1992: 193). An actor-director, Gaby Rodgers, who did A Lesson in Dead Language and An Evening with Dead Essex, agrees that the productions allow collaborations and interpretations without which “[the] plays are not quite accessible to an audience.” (Stein 1992: 199-200). Obie Award winner and a well-known director of the American theater scene, Gerald Freedman describes Kennedy as a poet writing in play form, and says that “[she] makes me work harder, think harder, and go into another part of myself...I use less, I think, of my intellect, in some way, and more of my instinct.” (Bryant-Jackson 1992: 207). Conscious of their position as a bridge between the Kennedy text and the audience, these directors, without getting too far, slightly manipulate it in order for “the audience [to] keep track of the ideas, to discover what the [plays] [are] all about.” (Bryant-Jackson 1992: 212). Once Sarah of Funnyhouse of a

Negro, and about twenty years later, the director of the same play, Billie Allen remembers her acting experience:

“Creating the role of Sarah...I wore my hair long—brushed back and clamped tightly. At a certain point in the play I unleashed it...gushing...like a fountain, alive and visible to the public. Many black women and men were ashamed of my doing this and wondered what “possessed” me. I was possessed by the rhythm, the ancient rituals called up from the depths by Adrienne. I began to love my hair: for me this was a catharsis for life (Overbeck and Bryant-Jackson 1992: 223).”

The audiences of the 1960s were not receptive to Kennedy’s works, particularly Funnyhouse of a Negro, as stated earlier. Freedman, arguing that in that period Kennedy was artistically ahead of them, remembers the critical response to the performance of Cities in Bezique (The Owl Answers and A Beast’s Story):

“I think a lot of people did not know what they were seeing. Nor did they really realize what they were watching was something which heretofore had no definition. Therefore...the journalists...were either very guarded in their response or they dismissed it (Bryant-Jackson 1992: 213).”

To emphasize the response of the African-American audience, Khan’s memory gives an insight from the back of the stage: “I went to the revival of The Owl Answers that Joe Papp put on...and talked a lot of the actors who were very angry about being in the play because they felt it was not presenting a positive image of blackness.” (Stein 1992: 1992).

However, on a theoretical level, Kennedy’s plays in general, and these three plays in particular, require an affirming response, especially from the

African-American audience. Because they have the power to reveal how deep the institutionalized rape is buried in the minds of the people—the colonizer as well as the colonized—and how damaging the “Anglo aesthetic and standard of beauty” are (Overbeck and Bryant-Jackson 1992: 223). Kennedy’s plays call for the response on a subconscious and intuitive level, both in the sense that the audience is to follow the recurrent signs and ideas to draw out meaning (however multidimensional), and in the sense that it is to confirm the portrayal of confusion that Kennedy pictures and to relate it to its own cultural experience.

At this point, it would be vital to remember that certain theatrical productions attract certain audiences, and particular issues take on deeper meaning depending on the cultural experience of the audience: “[E]stablished cultural markers are important in pre-activating a certain anticipation, a horizon of expectations, in the audience drawn to any [theatrical] event.” (Benett 1990: 114). If the issues in the play challenge the audience’s established values, this interaction results in either the reformation of those values or the dismissal of that theatrical work. Susan Benett, distinguishing the audience of the Aristotelian drama, which is positioned by the discourse of the dominant ideology, from the other audiences, whose systems of thought are challenged, states: “Where audiences are...encouraged to translate their reading of that event into action then their role no longer maintains the fixity that dominant culture practice assumes.” (1990: 180). The action that Kennedy’s plays encourage, then, is the redefinition of the African-American self as well as the African-American female self by dismantling the internalized racism and the norms of femininity imposed by the white culture. Benett puts it this way:

“Cultural systems, individual horizons of expectations, and accepted theatrical conventions all activate the decoding process for a specific production, but, in turn, the direct experience of that production feeds back to revise a spectator’s expectations, to establish or challenge conventions, and, occasionally, to reform the boundaries of culture (1990: 180).”

One of the most significant urges for the culturally aware readers/audiences is to be critical of the position in which the subject gives her allegiance to the ideology of the male dominated culture. The feminist literary/artistic works, or the cultural productions that convey a feminist point of view, the readers/audiences are urged to revise the boundaries of their own subjectivities. Limiting her field of interest with theater and drama, Helene Keyssar argues that “[i]n its initial explorations, feminist drama has invited the risk and challenged its audiences to have a similar courage to re-imagine itself as individuals and as a community.” (1984: 184).

The response of the audience has an exceptional emphasis in Afrocentric performance, the kind of reception, which is originated in the religious practices. It is called the act of call and response, ‘call’ referring to the cultural production, which, in turn, attracts the audience’s ‘response.’ The call of this production is meaningful to the audience, who feels the need to call back, since the original call is related to the shared history. By way of these calls and responses, the vision of culture and the notions of identity are constantly constructed, deconstructed and revised. However, this process, by its discursive and critical nature, remains in opposition to the cultural conventions of the dominant ideology. Articulating the practices of the process of call and response, Craig Hansen Werner states that

“[r]ich in political implications, this cultural form [i.e. call and response] enables both the individual and the community to define themselves, to validate their experiences in opposition to dominant social forces. When working most effectively, this process requires individuals not to seek a synthesis, to deny the extreme aspects of their own experiences, but to assert their subjectivity in response to other, equally personal and equally extreme, assertions of experience. Call and response, then, is African-American analysis: a process that, by admitting diverse voices and diverse experiences, supports a more inclusive critique than any individual analysis (1994: xviii).”

From an overall perspective, in three distinct aspects, Kennedy's theater drastically differs from the Aristotelian representative drama—time, place and plot structure. Through her monologues, Kennedy creates a theatrical space whose conditions of time and location are determined by these interior speeches, in which are embedded the confusions of the character (as playwright). The dramatic composition of the subject resists definition, logic, cause-and-effect relationship, rationality, morality, wisdom, goodness, dignity; in short, the qualities that are traditionally associated with the Aristotelian subject. Kennedy's subject does not go through a complication and resolution of events, generated by a conflict that is possible to be settled in the course of the action, nor the organization of plot allows revelation of certain facts about the subject's idiosyncrasies.

Richard Hornby argues that when the essential elements of a plot, which are those that involve change (reversal and recognition; complication and unraveling) weaken, “the result is precisely the kind of play that we call ‘ceremonial’ or ‘ritualistic.’ (1986: 54).” Although this argument is applicable to the structure of Kennedy's three plays, Robert Scanlan thinks that “Funnyhouse of a Negro follows a pattern of accumulating sense that is highly traditional, and in fact, from a purely formal point of view, can be seen as a straightforward act of mimesis.” (1992: 93). Drawing out ten segments of the play, he argues that “[n]either the bold and surreal images nor the background “story” should obscure the formal pattern of an artifact consisting of ten distinct, graspable pieces.” (1992: 108). However, he contradicts himself in the same article by arguing that the indefinite story that lies in the background is never dramatized. Scanlan also ignores the fact that Kennedy's organization of the plot, in the order of the sequences he points out, neither stages a material conflict nor conveys a beginning-middle-end pattern. The circularity or the nonlinearity of the narrative is caused by the repetitious monologues (bearing slight variations) and recurrent themes, ideas, images and actions. His argument is relevant, however, when considered that Kennedy has control over the plot, which means, neither replacement nor omission of any of the scenes are desirable. Nevertheless, this

“unity of plot” contributes only to the complexity and the unconventionality of Kennedy’s dramatic structure.

It is left to her audience to show some effort to get to the meanings that the structures of the plays veil. Unlike the receivers of the Aristotelian tragedy, the audience of Kennedy’s tragedies is never provided with a satisfactory resolution, a conclusion in which the enigma is demystified and the events are moralized. On the contrary, the audience is left with ambiguities, confusions and unborn meanings. For Kimberly Benston, the subconscious spectatorial process that Kennedy’s plays initiate in the audience is such that

“[h]er plays allow the spectator to close the gap between herself and the spectacle by an act of nervous decoding...an interpretive movement that engages emotive response. In that sense the [plays] [invade] the spectator’s mind, putting her in an intimate contact with the inner visions she and the playwright share. Yet she is denied a means for authentication of interpretation and, in addition, is offered no heuristic image of her own participation, or even implication, in the event itself (2000: 83).”

Benston’s comment makes it clear that for the Kennedy audience, the feelings of uneasiness, confusion, and obscurity are familiar, because the plays resist any attempt to produce an ultimate, a conclusive interpretation on the part of the audience. Nor does the characterization of Sarah/Clara allow for the audience’s habit to identify—first of all, the character is not a representative; her experience is an abstract reflection that is produced by the hostility of her social environment. Yet Kennedy’s staging the racial confusion, doubly perplexed by the involvement of the female viewpoint, asks for the audience’s confirmation since what is staged is related to the racist operations of a society which, conflictingly, promotes democracy.

NOTES

¹ Adrienne Kennedy in her autobiographical article “A Growth of Images,” published in the Drama Review 21 (December 1977) describes her plays as “states of mind.”

² Kennedy tells in her memoir People Who Led to My Plays that her characters in the three plays Sarah and Clara are based on an actual person. Kennedy recalls Sarah Clara, a sixteen-year-old pretty girl, living in the neighborhood of Kennedy’s Aunt Mary Lee. Her immediate remark after telling Sarah Clara’s memory is that “[h]ow could I know that years later...I would create two heroines, and one’s name would be Sarah and the other...Clara.” (1996: 35). Another figure who resembles Kennedy’s bewildered characters is her great-aunt Ella, about whom Kennedy’s parents said she was “touched in the head.” They also commented that Kennedy was “the spitting image of her,” who actually died as a young girl (1996: 22). Tracing these people from Kennedy’s memoir helps to witness the process in which she splits her characters and then superimpose them on one another.

³ *Now, Voyager* is the story of a mentally disturbed woman (Bette Davis) who, during the course of a voyage, transforms into an independent and admirable female figure. The film depicts her finding her true love on the voyage, and finally settling down as a young wife and a mother to her husband’s teenage daughter. The movie appeals to Kennedy firstly in its focus on the transformation of the self during a voyage, and secondly due to the presence of Bette Davis. Kennedy, remembering her teenage years, says of Davis: “The heroines in her movies were reflective and independent and had opinions. They also dressed beautifully and were adored by men. I wanted to be like that.” (1996: 47). Also, as a mature woman, a writer-to-be, she records that “...here I was at twenty-nine compulsively trying to make myself a twin of Bette Davis in *Now, Voyager*.” (1996:116). It was the time when Kennedy was sailing to Africa and wrote her first short story which was published in the journal Black Orpheus.

⁴ *Viva Zapata*, the story of the Mexican revolution, is the adaptation of John Steinbeck’s namesake novel, in Kintz’s words, “an anticommunist film with a

message about the dangers of politics.” (1992a: 77). Kennedy’s particular interest may be due to her admiration for Elia Kazan about whom she writes: “[H]e was Michelangelo to me. The pictures he painted on the screen...made me crazy and restless.” (1996: 95).

Kennedy, in this play, employs the scene in which Jean Peters teaches Marlon Brando as Zapata (the Mexican revolutionary) how to read by using the Bible, on their wedding night, in the honeymoon bedroom. Linda Kintz draws the attention to the appearance of the beds in the play. The first one is Peters and Brando’s nuptial bed “that seems completely purified of all female sexuality” (1992a: 77), the second one is the bed on which Clara bleeds, and the last one is the bed on which Wallace lies hospitalized. Kintz’s argument is that the image of the bed suggests two types of injury, physical and psychic. When analyzed closely, it turns out that underlying the physical injuries are the agonies that were suppressed, such as unhappiness, miscarriage, divorce and separation.

⁵ *A Place in the Sun* is an adaptation of Theodor Dreiser’s book, originally named An American Tragedy. Montgomery Clift and Shelley Winters are working class people who date. As Winters becomes pregnant, which is not a very pleasing incident for Clift, a beautiful and rich woman Elizabeth Taylor falls in love with her lover. Now that Clift is an upwardly mobile man, he has to get rid of the pregnant lover, which he does by taking her on a boat ride—the scene in the play. Winters falls into the water, and Clift simply watches her drown, the moment accentuated in the play. Kennedy may have chosen this particular scene because it is a murder scene yet so silent and so serene. It is likely that Kennedy is implying a similarity between Clift’s attitude towards her pregnant lover, and Eddie’s (the husband) indifference towards Clara’s troubles in her delivery and in her struggle to be a writer.

⁶ Kennedy fragments the conventional plot structure not only by presenting the story through a nonlinear and disordered manner but also by interfering with the relationship which the spectator establishes between him/her and the particular Hollywood star/movie. By giving voice to Clara’s state of mind and/or memories through public figures such as Bette Davis/Jean Peters/Shelley Winters, Kennedy,

as Geis puts it, “prevent[s] the spectators from entering into the same specular relationships as they would with characters visible on a screen.” (1992: 176).

⁷ This interview is available on the Internet address:

<http://www.amrep.org/past/ohio/ohio2.html>



Chapter 2. SELF-ENACTMENTS: IMPLOSIONS OF THE “ORIGIN”

Kennedy’s images are charged with diverse concepts, the conflicting auras of multiple eras and cultures. The dramatic composition of her subject requires the superimposition of, for instance, Jesus, Patrice Lumumba, Queen Victoria Regina and the Duchess of Hapsburg, in order to express the problematic notion of identity for the African-American woman. In this sense, the term ‘origin’ is used in quotations to indicate the doubleness in its meaning. On one hand the Queen, the Duchess, Jesus and Lumumba signify a certain “origin,” but on the other hand, because Negro-Sarah assumes all these personalities as embodied within her character, the meaning of the word ‘origin’ is disseminated, none, including Sarah, is given the priority. The dissemination of the “origin” is theatricalized through the use of (both the literal and the conceptual) masks. The false appearances that each mask displays parodies the binary opposition of the two cultures. Moreover, they are used in such an obsessive and exaggerated manner that the binary quality they are expected to signify is dismantled to reveal a confusion even more complex than the mere juxtaposition of these systems. This confusion is generated by the fusion of these two opposing forces.

The subject’s self-enactments from under these masks also share the same ultimate end, which is the reason why the physical actualization of such a confusion turns out to be either death or madness. “Each day I wonder with what or with whom can I co-exist in a true union?” asks Clara in *A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White* (2000: 82). Forming the context for this question, all the three plays manifest the impossibility of unions—unions of cultures, of people, of families. Barnett’s ultimate comment is that “in the seemingly impossible... worlds of Adrienne Kennedy’s plays, true unions are desirable but deadly, and truths contradict rather than corroborate...falsely contextualizing one another within their destabilized universe.” (1996: 155).

Although thematically the plays present the fragments of cultures as intermingled, Kennedy achieves a unity of discrepancies through the dramatic

composition of the subject, dismantling the cultural binary oppositions in the minds of the readers and audiences. What she presents as the cultural identity of a woman is a process, a terrain of confrontations. Although in the plays the subject is defeated—either committed suicide or lost her sanity—the audiences are left with the amalgamated black and white masks, a condition in which all the associations confirm and deny one another at once.

Apparent from her memoir, Kennedy resists any privileging of the elements that belong to the diverse cultures, African, American, European, and the permutation and combination of the three. Paul Bryant-Jackson, in an effort to locate Kennedy's characters on a comprehensible plane, contemplates on their relationship to the transcendentalists and the absurdists. While preferring to evaluate the work in an African context, he concludes that

“Kennedy's characters, ... true product[s] of multiculturalism *and* cultural pluralism, are created to resist [determinacy and absolute categorizations] and ... the characters, the images *and* Kennedy are continually joined matrilineally (1992: 56).”

The cultural images, none of which is given the priority to claim a hierarchy of authority, saturate Kennedy's plays. It is apparent that the playwright herself is also conscious of this fact, since she states:

“I'd often stare at the statue of Beethoven I kept on the left-hand side of my desk. I felt it contained a “secret.” I'd do the same with the photograph of Queen Hatshepsut that was on the wall. I did *not* then understand that I felt torn between these forces of my ancestry...European and African...a fact that would one day explode in my work (1996: 96).”

It is in this sense that the word “origin” loses its original meaning, which refers to a certain starting point, a fixed location, and transforms into a protean and

situational term, signifying the possible connections and associations all at once. Deborah Thompson's argument confirms this sense of "origin" as she writes "Kennedy offers the possibility of a different kind of textual criticism: that of racially ambiguous, multiple, [and] painfully contradictory identifications which never settle." (36). Kimberly Benston also offers an insight for reading Kennedy's (de)construction of the concept of ancestry: "For the Afro-American...self-creation and reformation of a fragmented familial past are endlessly interwoven." Generally defining the African-American literature as "one vast genealogical poem," he argues that it seeks to "restore continuity to the ruptures or discontinuities imposed by the history of black presence in America." (1984: 152). Kennedy's contribution to this poem would be, then, an indeterminate text which dismantles the binary logic of white racist discourse, obfuscating the borders between what is traditionally signified by "blackness" and "whiteness."

2.1. Apparitions of the African-American Self

"I want not to be. I ask nothing except anonymity." (Kennedy 2000: 5)

Adrienne Kennedy's three plays are filled with assertions of self-hatred. The African-American woman subject finds solace sometimes in the figurations of Queen Victoria, the Duchess of Hapsburg, Jesus or the Hollywood stars, and sometimes transforms into "the daughter of a black woman who cooked for somebody", the "bastard" and consequently the owl. Funnyhouse of a Negro and The Owl Answers are equally charged with African and Euro-American images: jungle, wilderness and ebony masks are juxtaposed with royalty, the Tower of London and the New York subway, which, in the mind of the audience, as Herbert Blau has suggested, merge within each other. The clash of these images might have been interpreted as the antagonism between the colonizer and the colonized; however, Sarah/Clara's struggle to erase her African features, which are innate both on her physical appearance and her familial background, adds another level of consciousness to the play. Underneath this baffling attitude toward her own cultural identity lies internalized racism.

Operating on an unconscious level, internalized racism forces Sarah/Clara to seek her white heritage, ignoring her African ancestry, which is close to her as her breath. Since her religion dictates the privilege of white purity, she is not able to acknowledge her cultural hybridity, the inseparability of her two cultural consciousnesses. Mixed ancestry, mixed cultures and consciousnesses are not desirable within Christianity, nevertheless, the African-American woman subject's cultural reality points to the two intermingled backgrounds.

Adrienne Kennedy grew up in a culturally mixed neighborhood, her childhood friends—just like the fictional ones—coming from a multiplicity of geographies¹. Living in this cultural harmony all her childhood and adolescent years, Kennedy goes through a wounding experience when she attends the segregated Ohio State University. About her roommates, who were often from southern Ohio towns, Kennedy tells that “they were determined to subjugate the Negro girls...to make you feel that it was a great inequity that they had to live in the same dorm with you...an injustice.” (1996: 69). This is the time when Kennedy acquired a sharp sense of what it meant to be an African-American in white America. In People Who Led to My Plays, under the title “Negroes,” she writes “[w]e were underdogs and underdogs must fight in life.” (1996: 11).

Kennedy's memoir also comprises plenty of entries about Montezuma, Georgia, the hometown of her parents. Kennedy remembers her mother telling that most of the white people living in Montezuma were from England, which indirectly meant that some of their ancestors were also from England. One of those stories about the South, which is related to her matrilineal grandfather, reads as follows: “He was rich. He owned acres and acres of peach orchards in Georgia. He had a chauffeur who wore a black uniform and hat and he lived in a sprawling, charming house with a sun porch and a garden...” (1996: 29). These remembrances, buried in her unconscious, have later found their expression in her works, most explicitly in the image of the light-skinned mother in Funnyhouse of a Negro, and in the image of the ‘Goddam Father who is the Richest White Man in the Town who is the Dead White Father’ in The Owl Answers.

In these plays, Euro-American and African heritages are depicted not as separate but as hybridized, amalgamated. However, the outcome of this fusion is dubious and apocalyptic: Sarah commits suicide, Clara Passmore turns into an owl, and the playwright Clara seeks in vain to have her voice heard through the Hollywood stars. Deborah Thompson puts this in other words: “Kennedy writes from ethnically mixed heritages and from points of breakdown of racial classifications, as well as from multiple points within operating structures of racial classification, but claims no position as final.” (14). Kennedy’s notion of culture rejects classifications, rigid outlines, hierarchy of consciousnesses, totality and completeness. In the final analysis, it turns out that she rather prefers to embrace the multiple cultural qualities that shape her identity, no matter how discrete they are.

Her memoir is a manifestation of the possibility of such a cultural mosaic. In her preface, she reveals that by writing this book, she will attempt to answer the most frequently asked question of who influenced her work. In an interview, conducted by Elin Diamond, Kennedy is highly surprised by the critic’s comment that she has not answered the question as she promised in her preface. The critic’s argument is that “[t]he book doesn’t answer the question of influence; it provides a context for the question... [Kennedy] give[s] us an immediate sense of a certain kind of cultural experience; [she] make[s] culture real for us.” (1996: 130)

The cultural images and symbols have such a power over the African-American subject that, for the audience/readers, it becomes possible to grasp the state of being caught up in the web of cultures and to see how the subject responds to this situation. In the plays studied in this thesis, the celebrities, all of whom belong to the Euro-American ancestry—except for Patrice Lumumba—appear as the extensions of Kennedy’s characters². In Funnyhouse of a Negro, the main character’s other selves are Queen Victoria Regina, the Duchess of Hapsburg, Jesus and Patrice Lumumba; in The Owl Answers, the historical people, who are simultaneously the anonymous passengers and guards, are Anne Boleyn, Shakespeare, Chaucer and William the Conqueror; and in A Movie Star Has to

Star in Black and White, the Hollywood celebrities Clara speaks through are Bette Davis, Jean Peters and Shelley Winters.

Kennedy asserts in her interview (Betsko and Koenig 1987) that she is drawn to these famous people; however, this attraction has its own intricacies in respect to their historical contexts. In People Who Led to My Plays, Kennedy, whose fascination with royalty has arrested the curiosity of most critics, writes of the English Elizabeths that they are the “[w]omen who had whole epochs named after them,” making a comparison between their achievements and her own: “...I must keep trying to rise above shopping at the supermarket, gossiping with other young mothers.” (1996: 87). With Queen Victoria’s reign, apart from the establishment of a certain morality that dominated the age, Great Britain reached the peak of her power, which depended substantially on colonialism, that is, the talent of the English monarchy to abuse the resources of the Eastern and African countries. The British also made use of Christianity as an instrument for assimilationist ends—to erase the heterogeneity of religion and of culture in those geographies, and in order to turn the independent people into the servants of monarchy.

When the historical figures of Queen Victoria, the Duchess of Hapsburg and Jesus are transmitted into Funnyhouse of a Negro, they carry with them their associations of colonialism, assimilationism and the belief system which privileges the white race over the “colored” ones. This attitude is evident from the lines that are uttered by the three historical figures of the Western civilization (the Queen, the Duchess and Jesus). When one considers the facts that these historical characters are also Sarah’s other selves, and that the same hateful lines also belong to the African leader Patrice Lumumba, the issue of racism acquires another level of complexity. In the scene, which Sarah and her white Jewish boyfriend Raymond, the funnyman of the funnyhouse, are about to initiate sexual affair and are talking about Sarah’s father, Sarah, who assumes the role of the Duchess in her mind, says: “Ever since I can remember he’s been in a nigger pose of agony. He is the wilderness. He speaks niggerly groveling about wanting to touch me with his

black hand.” (2000: 10). These lines, interpreted as belonging to this particular historical figuration of the character, reflect an extreme feeling of disgust, together with the paranoia of having any physical interaction with the “black” man. The pages of American history are full of the lynching of African-American men, who were accused of raping white women. Pointing to the ubiquitous rape references in the play, Rosemary Curb comments that the image of the black rapist father “is a distortion fabricated by phobic white racists to imagine that the darker the man the more likely he is to rape and the lighter the woman the more likely she is to be the victim.” (1992: 145).

In another scene of Funnyhouse of a Negro, the part of the monologue, uttered by Jesus, is:

“I am going to Africa and kill this black man named Patrice Lumumba. Why? Because all my life I believed my Holy Father to be God, but now I know that my father is a black man. I have no fear for whatever I do, I will do in the name of God, I will do in the name of Albert Saxe Coburg, in the name of Victoria, Queen Victoria Regina, the monarch of England, I will (2000: 19-20).”

This speech, on the one hand establishes the relationship between colonialism and Christianity, and on the other, reflects Sarah’s hatred toward her African heritage, suggesting an identification of Lumumba, the African-American father and Holy Father (God) as the same person. It is also significant to note that Kennedy, in a very subtle manner, plays a trick on the meanings of ‘ancestor’ and ‘descendant,’ as she does more explicitly in The Owl Answers.

Kennedy’s personal reflection on Jesus Christ is dependent upon the unity and happiness of her family. In People Who Led to My Plays, Kennedy remembers the Jesus of her childhood as the protector of the weak and the symbol for endurance, full of love. In her late twenties, Kennedy’s parents separate, her father

leaving Ohio for Georgia, his hometown. Kennedy records the time when she learned about the separation and the impact of this event on her image of Jesus:

“I remembered how so long ago when we all took drives, when we had sat at the campfire together or listened to Jack Benny, I had seen Jesus as sweet, docile. I had believed “what a friend we have in Jesus.” But that spring, sitting in the Pensione Sabrina, I went on creating a cruel Jesus Christ. (1996: 123).”

Jesus is depicted as “ a hunchback, yellow-skinned dwarf, dressed in white rags and sandals” (2000: 7), as opposed to his yellow-haired and blue-eyed portrayal in the Western mythology. Seen as an extension of Kennedy’s experience, the Jesus of Sarah’s funnyhouse suggests disillusionment, disappointment, unhappiness and, most probably, the impossibility of unities. However, Kennedy’s reflection, which stems from a personal event, is never free of political overtones, since it is the ideology of the dominant culture that promotes the portrayal of Jesus as the savior, the protector and the symbol of pure love and harmony.

To turn back to the issue of royalty, and thus colonization, in The Owl Answers, the representatives of the British power are William the Conqueror, Anne Boleyn, and the two most well-known English literary figures, Chaucer and Shakespeare. None of these personalities, except for Anne Boleyn, are the extensions of the characters. They are at once the guards in the Tower (London), in which Clara is imprisoned, and the strangers on the subway car (New York), in which Clara is looking for men. They act in unison against the African-American female subject, most of the time reminding of Clara her “bastard”ness, and at other times, behaving in an indifferently cruel way that is strictly in opposition to her feverish manner.

Although sometimes she joins Shakespeare, Chaucer and William the Conqueror, Anne Boleyn is actually one of the aspects of the mother figure, who is

the Bastard's Black Mother who is the Reverend's Wife. Clara's attitude toward Boleyn is sympathetic; she is eager to have Boleyn talk to her, as the mother changes back and forth into and out of herself. Throughout her nightmarish experience, Clara manages to address Boleyn only once. The fact that Clara is imprisoned in the Tower of London parallels Anne Boleyn's history.

In Kennedy's play, *She Who Is* cries to Anne Boleyn for help: "Anne, you know so much of love, won't you help me?" (2000: 29). However, this cry is in vain, since Anne Boleyn, who never talks as herself, constantly throws red rice at Clara as a reminder of her "owl"ness. Boleyn appears also in People Who Led to My Plays, where Kennedy writes that she was fascinated by the thought of the Queen's imprisonment, her walking the tower at nights, and her execution. Referring to the very quotation above, Kennedy states that Boleyn "would become... a confidante whom a character would discuss love and sorrow with." (1996: 118).

Kennedy's interest in the English monarchs stems both from her mother's stories related to the white people in Montezuma (Georgia), and from the history of the African race in the United States. These two aspects, personal and political, come to generate a two faceted attitude on the part of Kennedy. On the one hand, she possesses an acute consciousness of being a member of one of the colonized races, and on the other hand, she feels an affinity for the white culture whose representatives appear in her writing. It is evident from People Who Led to My Plays that her approach toward American and European culture is not totally censorious. In the Theatre Journal, which is sort of a preliminary text for her memoir, Kennedy reflects on the impact of London where she lived for three years:

"The city in February, the early darkness, walks in the rain excited me. It made feel that just beyond that darkness was a completed person, a completed writer, a completed life. I felt the city held a key to my psyche. And apart from literature and my constant interest in

British writers I felt too these were the people who had colonized my West African ancestors. What were these people like? (1990: 105)”

Among her works, this passage is the most revealing of her fascination with Britain and with royalty, although she elsewhere makes statements such as: “Despite the enchantment, there was a subplot to England that I couldn’t perceive.” (1990: 124). Also, as she hints in an interview, she was impressed by the film Juarez, which was about the Duchess of Hapsburg, starring Bette Davis as the Duchess: “Like most people, I have always been fascinated by royalty. Why are people royal?... [T]hat used to drive me out of my mind...” (Bryant-Jackson and Overbeck 1992: 4). Bell Hooks sees Kennedy’s treatment of the white cultural productions as her unique quality as an African-American writer: “[S]he acknowledges this obsessive fascination with Europe, with white people on the one hand, but on the other, she is politically aware... of the importance of antiracist struggle, of black tradition...” (1992: 182).

Seen from this perspective, the appearance of the English royalty in her three plays is indeed a reflection of Kennedy’s search for the African-American identity, in its fullest sense, that is, in relation to the colonizing forces. This notion of cultural identity promotes a way of looking at culture that resists hierarchies, privileges, and artificial divisions between the races. This is apparent by her attraction to, for instance, Bette Davis, or Anne Boleyn, while being conscious of the pervasive racist attitude against the African-Americans. Writing about People Who Led to My Plays, Werner Sollors also pays attention to the ideological discrepancies that have come to intermingle in Kennedy’s psyche:

“It is noteworthy that Kennedy did not perceive the imaginary world of popular culture and the harsh social reality of American race relations in the World War II period as if they were necessarily at odds with each other... Different from authors like LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka, ... Kennedy writes how her whole family had the happiest times listening to the Jack Benny show (1992: 17).”

The impact of the white popular culture is most obvious in *A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White*, in which Clara performs through the three Hollywood stars. On the one hand, there is the Hollywood industry, which resists representing the narratives of the non-Western female subjects, and on the other hand, there is the Kennedy play, marked by the autobiographical subjectivity of Clara's narrative. While the latter chooses to make the attempt of joining this representation, the former deliberately determines its subjects with whom an African-American woman, Clara, is unable to empathize. Deborah Geis' interpretation is in terms of psychoanalysis, focusing on the cinema screen as the mirror. Within the light of Kennedy's memories Geis identifies Kennedy as Clara, suggesting: "...Kennedy/Clara turns to the symbolic realm of the movies to find a mirror, and instead sees the reminder of her Otherness." (1992: 173). While arguing that Clara's "becoming" her Davis/Peters/Shelley persona is an unlikely possibility (1992: 174), Geis acknowledges in her final analysis that "the play's narrative structure and Clara's status as playwright provide indications that Kennedy does indeed participate in undermining [the white] ideological structures "from within" (1992: 175)." Despite the near impossibility of subverting the ideology of Hollywood industry—and by extension, that of the white (popular) culture—in setting up the exclusionary standards of beauty and romance, Kennedy is creating images and/or characters that are equally bound to their white and black heritages.

Unconsciously forming such an intricate attitude toward the white culture, Kennedy, in the three plays, hides her African-American subject behind the representatives of this oppressive and exclusionary ideology: Queen Victoria Regina, Jesus, Virgin Mary, Bette Davis, to name a few. Although such personification is impossible within the Western Christian system of logic, Kennedy, as an African-American woman dramatist, superimposes, for instance, Bette Davis, Jean Peters and Shelley Winters onto her subject Clara to present what culture is to her—Kennedy does not acknowledge them as being ideologically irreconcilable.

It is also insightful to note that in People Who Led to My Plays, Kennedy sometimes uses the terms “white people” and “Negroes” in quotation marks. In her interview with Diamond, Kennedy asserts that her use of the quotation marks is completely unconscious, reminding that what she writes “comes out of the dark.” (1996: 134). While such usage implies that in Kennedy’s writing, there is a clear-cut division between “white” and “Negro” people, her conception of the word “Negro” frustrates this implication:

“I think...there are meanings of which I’m not definitely aware. Negro is the word [I grew up with]; we referred to ourselves as Negroes. I think that probably someone could analyze how I’m using it at any given moment—sarcasm, darkness, pride. It has many meanings (1996: 136).”

Within the light of Kennedy’s statements, it becomes even less possible to identify the shades of meaning that are embedded in the cultural vocabulary of the plays. The state of being definite about any concept or any point of view is continually denied. Rather, the concepts of, for example, blackness/whiteness, or the points of view of theatrical perception are everlastingly mystified and presented as melting into each other. Thompson articulates the cultural question particularly in Funnyhouse of a Negro, which, nevertheless, can also be argued for the other two plays:

“...Funnyhouse asks “what is black?” “what is white?”...looking [not] at the black-white binary system operating in full force,...[but] at sites where the system breaks down, especially in the figure of the mulatto or “yellow-skinned” individual, or the individual of “mixed ancestry” (17).”

Thompson draws the attention to the masks in Funnyhouse of a Negro. Arguing that the notions of “black” and “white” are themselves masks, she identifies between actual and conceptual masks. She points out that the actual ones

are not gender specific and that Sarah's other selves, who also wear white masks under which their black skin is accentuated, function to mask Sarah. By way of the similar theatricalization of the subject, 'character-as-mask' argument also corresponds to the cultural identities of *She Who Is* and the playwright Clara. In these plays, but somehow more understated in *A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White*, the whiter the mask, the more blackness it covers. *Funnyhouse of a Negro* opens with the Mother's, who "looked like a white woman, hair as straight as any white woman's," walking across the stage, as if in a trance, carrying a bald head, about which Kennedy gives no clue as to its race and gender. This "prelude," unidentified piece of performance, Thompson argues, "acts as a mask to the play...reif[ying] surface/depth or outside/inside or appearance/reality or falsehood/truth binaries." (18).

Playing with the perception of the audience from the very beginning, Kennedy presents all the extensions of Sarah with white masks, making the audience unconsciously recognize Sarah's dark skin underneath. Kennedy describes the identical masks that the Queen and the Duchess wear: "It is an alabaster face, the skin drawn tightly over the high cheekbones, great dark eyes that seem gouged out of the head, a high forehead, a full red mouth and a head of frizzy hair." (2000: 3). The white masks, duplicated by the colossal statue of the Queen, "...a thing of astonishing whiteness... of terror, possessing the quality of nightmares, suggesting large and probable deaths" (2000: 5), far from repressing the subject's blackness, highlight it the more.

Although in *The Owl Answers*, Kennedy does not give such a specifying instruction for the masks, they, together with the wigs and the robes, are used in such an everyday manner that the attention shifts from the physical appearance of these props to the theatrical transformation of the actors, who, themselves, serve as the masks for the characters they assume. They can be described as conceptual masks for the reason that they obscure the otherwise clearly defined boundaries between disparate concepts, such as Virgin Mary and the Bastard, or Goddam Father who is the Richest White Man in the Town and Reverend Passmore.

The movie stars, each of whom are the beauty icons of Hollywood, are also the masks that Clara puts on. Upsetting the conventions of Aristotelian representation, Kennedy has Clara employ these white Hollywood celebrities as her agents of self-expression. They function to “hide” Clara’s African-American physicality, in the same manner as the Queen and the Duchess do Sarah’s “blackness.” However, it can also be argued that Clara **has to** put on these masks, since she cannot articulate her narrative otherwise. The only choice left to her, if she desires to confirm her existence, is to ignore, or to “mask,” the part of her identity, which does not conform to the standards of the discourse in whose terms the dominant culture perceives, thinks, and speaks.

The shared fact about these masks, either conceptual or actual, is that they subvert the binary concepts of black and white and their cultural associations. The characters are presented as “white” outside and “black” inside, a blackness that is surrounded by the sense of bestiality and evil. Contradictorily, the move away from “blackness” entails the loss of hair, loss of sanity and death. Yet, the African-American woman subject seeks shelter under these white masks, which, she assumes to function as an embankment to keep her from reflecting too much upon the fact that she is a “Negro.”³ But, again, this shelter does not function as “embankment” or empowerment or a means to escape from self. Susan Meigs’ interpretation is that, as opposed to the mask’s being the traditional symbol of power, “Kennedy... transforms [it] into an image of imprisonment and terror... her characters become trapped in the mask’s freakish impersonality and are unable to... escape from the horrifying selves they do discover.” (1990: 173).

The exceptions, however, among these white masks, are Patrice Lumumba and the black masks that the father carries. Lumumba’s figuration is acutely dissimilar to the dispositions of the other historical characters. He is the political leader, the first Prime Minister of Congo, who did his utmost to make all the peoples of Africa join hands. Kennedy, in her interview with Bryant-Jackson and Overbeck, confirms that his personality drastically differs from Sarah’s other selves: “There are negative qualities about all Sarah’s personas, except

Lumumba.” (1992: 4). He remains distinct among the Queen, the Duchess and Jesus, both by conveying an anti-colonialist stance, and by being the one and only African self. Although his utterances do not break up the discourse of internalized racism, his presence is one of the most powerful evidences of the African heritage. To comprehend the significance of his macabre appearance in the play, it is insightful to remember that he was assassinated by a firing squad, after hours of torture⁴. Kennedy’s instruction for Lumumba reads: “His head appears to be split into two with blood and tissue in eyes.” (2000: 7).

The black masks that only the male characters (except for Jesus) carry tie the images of the father, the unidentified man and Patrice Lumumba. The combination of these images is the persona who “keeps returning forever, coming back ever and keeps coming back forever.” (2000: 4). However, being one of Sarah’s selves, it is mystifying that Lumumba should pair up with the mythic figure of the black rapist father. If this association holds true, then it turns out that what Sarah runs away from, and/or desires to “kill with an ebony mask” resides within her. On this characterization that perpetually defies all the possible associations, Thompson’s comment is that “the “Negro” is figured as an un-decode-able combination of contradictory racial signs of indeterminate priority or supremacy...(20).” As a manifestation of this argument, Kennedy, in People Who Led to My Plays, writes “I remembered my father’s fine stirring speeches on the Negro cause...and Du Bois’ articles in *Crisis* which my father had quoted.... There was no doubt that Lumumba, this murdered hero, was merged in my mind with my father (1996: 119-120).”

Reading her memoir still gives additional insight to the father figure in the plays, presenting the refracted image of the actual father. Kennedy recalls how he drove the family around the town, and how he read the prominent voices of the African-American poetry to her before she went to bed. Her father was also a social worker, very conscious of the race issues, and participated in various kinds of organizations to help improve the living conditions of the African-American community. He later became the assistant head of the Race Relations in Cleveland,

about which Kennedy remembers how proud she was (1996: 79). However, the way she sees him is conflictingly altered throughout time, especially after, having divorced from her mother, he had wanted to return to the South and marry again:

“My father had by now changed from an outgoing gregarious man to a Hamlet...a Willy Loman. He reflected, pondered constantly the meaning of his past life. So now I had “two fathers”—my heroic father of the ’30s and ’40s and now my Hamlet-Will Loman father of the ’50s. I tried to reconcile them...but it tormented me (1996: 83).”

In all the three plays, but most obviously in Funnyhouse of a Negro, the father figure is presented as attached to the African lineage, ceaselessly pursuing the mother figure in order to take sexual advantage. “He is my father. I am tied to the black Negro. He came when I was a child in the south, before I was born he haunted my conception, diseased my birth” (2000: 4) are the lines that are echoed all through Funnyhouse of a Negro. The father, who is said to have raped the mother when drunk, is always presented with the ebony skull, “[w]herever he goes, he carries black masks and heads.” (2000: 8). The father is presented with the props that underscore his (and Sarah’s) “blackness,” and identified as the black figure which has come to be a substitute for wilderness, jungle and carnality⁵.

In The Owl Answers, the father has four appearances, one of which is of African ancestry—Reverend Passmore. His wife, a persona of Clara Passmore’s mother, resembles the mother in Funnyhouse of a Negro, in that she despises her “black” husband. In the scene which foregrounds the mother’s stabbing herself, Reverend’s Wife says:

“I told the Reverend if he ever came near me again... *(She turns the butcher knife around.)* Does he not know I am Mary, Christ’s bride? ...Does he think I am like your black mother who was the biggest whore in town? He must know I am Mary. Only Mary would marry the Reverend Passmore of the church on the top of the Holy Hill (2000: 41).”

Being the reverend of the church “on the top of the hill,” Reverend Passmore resembles Sarah’s father who went to Africa to erect a Christian mission and save the race. His wife, not to turn into an owl (because “a black man has put his hands on her”) prefers to commit suicide, the act of entering into the state of nonbeing, as the only “way from owldom,” the only “way to the St. Paul’s Chapel.” (2000: 43). Besides his association with the mythical black rapist, through the persona of the bird—he White Bird who is Reverend Passmore’s Canary who is God’s Dove—there is also an understated link between the Reverend and God, as is the fact with the representation of the traditional father figure. From this perspective, it can additionally be argued that Kennedy is subverting the traditional representation of the father as God.

The father in A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White seems somehow more tangible, and less bound up with the mythical image of the black rapist. His voice is heard twice in the play; the first is when reveals his plans about going to the North and working for the welfare of the “Negroes.” However, the second time the audience sees him speak is through a verbal fight with the mother (quoted earlier on page 46), all of a sudden juxtaposing the image of the African-American intellectual with the rapist figure that the mythology of the South nurtures. In this way, the cultural images come to belie one another, lampooning the socially determined stereotypes.

The enigmatic pairings and juxtapositions, apart from obscuring the boundaries between the cultural concepts, parody the cultural implications of bestiality. Throughout Funnyhouse of a Negro, Sarah and her other selves refer to the father as “the wild black beast” and “the black ugly thing” so that the expressions of wilderness, jungle and Africa, as well as the terms “black” and “Negro,” have come to be associated with bestiality. Curb also notices the several allusions to the father, whose racial features are equated with the nonhuman, urging the readers to “[n]ote the cultural overdeterminism and redundancy of the term “black beast” in this context, where to be black carries the cultural weight of bestiality.” (1992: 144).

The nonhuman images in The Owl Answers revolve around the several types of birds, each with its own corresponding cultural implications. Conveying Christian associations, the White Bird and God's Dove are related to whiteness, innocence, purity and peace. Reverend's Canary is a caged, domesticated bird that sometimes transforms into its other selves, constantly mocking Clara Passmore's confusion and agony. The bird persona, like the funnyman and the funnywoman of Sarah's funnyhouse, laugh madly. Curb, referring to the incantatory line of "[h]e came to me in the outhouse, he came to me under the porch, in the garden, in the fig tree" (2000: 35), comments that it recalls Leda's rape by Zeus in the form of a swan. The swan, having similar connotations as Kennedy's white birds, functions as a cover for rape in Greek mythology. Such an insight reinforces the suggestion that the white bird trilogy may not be necessarily free of infamy.

However, more central to the issue of bestiality as a cultural implication is the imagery of the owl. Both in this play, and in Funnyhouse of a Negro, as the female figures are involved in the sexual interaction with the African-American man, they recognize themselves as owls. Although the imagery is not as obvious as in The Owl Answers, through the monologues, it is rendered that Sarah's light-skinned mother has also entered into "owldom":

"She...spoke of herself trapped in blackness. She preferred the company of night owls. Only at night did she rise, walking in the garden among the trees with the owls. When I spoke to her she saw I was a black man's child and she preferred speaking to owls (2000: 15)."

Ultimately, in the play that bears the name of the very bird in its title, Clara Passmore metamorphoses into the owl, which, throughout the play, is equated with being the product of two discrepant races: "its feathers are blowing against the cell wall, speckled in the garden, on the fig tree, it comes feathered, great hollow-eyed with yellow skin and yellow eyes, the flying bastard. (2000: 43)."

When compared to the bestiality of the “black man,” who is identified with the beast and the “ugly thing,” the woman is presented as transforming into an owl. This suggests that the owl imagery may be female gender specific. In an attempt to distinguish the image of the owl in the female context, both Curb and Forte refer to Lilith in the Old Testament, “the Great Mother, who was suppressed and supplanted by the Great Father of the Hebrew tribes,” and who, “except for a passing reference...as a screech owl in Isaiah,” is edited out of the sacred book (Forte 1996: 33). Curb’s comment is that “owls retain a remnant of women’s ancient psychic oracular power to draw out secrets and signify the untamed powers of the banished Lilith who refused to submit to patriarchal authority.” (1992: 153).

However, this argument has its limitation because in Kennedy’s three plays, the matrilineal heritage is interrupted and enervated. Committing suicide and retreating from sanity are the recurring events on the part of the mothers and the daughters. This vicious circle is evident if the two generations of the women in the three plays are considered. In Funnyhouse of a Negro the mother starts speaking to night owls and the daughter commits suicide; in The Owl Answers the mother stabs herself to death and the daughter turns into an owl; and in A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White, both the mother and the daughter lose their families—this parallelism is symbolically dramatized by the closing action of the play, which is their almost tumbling down the steps outside the hospital, holding each other (2000: 103). In this context, Forte sees it “deeply ironic that Clara’s totem is the owl—the last trace of the lost mother, the vestigial possibility of a matrilineal heritage.” (1996: 33). The owl, far from signifying a matrilineal power, stands for the powerlessness of the subject. Yet it generates intertextuality and functions to tie the African-American female figures over the generations.

One outstanding cultural signifier is the hair, which is accentuated through the use of wigs in Funnyhouse of a Negro and The Owl Answers. In these two plays, as Forte confirms, “hair is a signifier for mulattanness, for the inescapable black “blood,” the visible marker of race, hence locator within a specific network of relationships with black and white communities.” (1992: 166). In the former

play, the Queen, the Duchess and Negro-Sarah has the “wild kinky hair” as opposed to the mother’s wild, straight and black hair that falls to her waist. According to Sarah, her only “defect” is that she has “a head of frizzy hair, unmistakably Negro kinky hair, and it is indistinguishable.” (2000: 6). Through the monologues it is revealed that the mother began to lose her hair after her being raped by the father. The idea of the loss of hair is obsessively actualized by Sarah and her other selves’ continuously gazing in the mirror, examining the hair left on their scalps, the recurrent image of a handful of black hair on the white pillow and the red paper bag that the characters fill with the fallen piles. The visibility of hair loss is such that, as the Duchess explains, “although my hair remained on both sides, clearly on the crown and at my temples my scalp was bare.” (2000: 10). This is stressed even more by the pantomimes repeated, with variations, three times throughout the play (2000: 12, 16 and 17). Loss of hair has been traditionally associated with loss of health and of power, even since the Biblical times, through the story of Samson. In this play, the more the subject is confused and the more she struggles to escape from her racial identity, the more her and her other selves’ hair falls out.

The Owl Answers, on the other hand, does not present hair loss as an issue, rather, the hyperbolic wigs are used in abundance to convey the artificiality of the divisions between the races, to highlight the illogicality of classifying human beings depending on their physical features. The characters deliberately put the wigs on in an awry manner, using somehow crude body language. This is crucial for the staging of the play, since the audience should be able to recognize the transforming characters from their wigs and masks. Kennedy, defines, for example, the Dead White Father as “[t]he most noticeable thing about him is his hair, long, silky, white hair ...”, which, a few minutes later, will be taken off to reveal a wig of “dark Negro hair.” (2000: 28).

From an overall perspective, Kennedy’s plays cannot be read nor staged regardless of the special emphasis she imposes on the cultural signifiers. Her work must be approached with a full knowledge of the history of racism, and

colonialism and the experience of the diaspora, that is, the state of having a hybrid culture. Although her subject is theatricalized as a ghost-like character, leaving the stage to the extensions of herself, her perplexing cultural identity—a fusion of African and American (and European)—is revealed every time she makes the attempt to escape. Robinson asks the question that is central for Sarah's, and also the other two subjects', cultural disposition:

“Who is Sarah[/Clara] without borrowed images from white and black culture? Kennedy deliberately doesn't give [her] the chance to have an identity of her own; instead Sarah[/Clara] must rely on “herselves” to speak for her. Neither does she have a context, a place she alone defines (1994: 131).”

Thus, the “main” character's presentation, by way of other personalities, each of whom pre-exist for the audience, is similar to the apparition of a ghost, whose presence is felt even though it is absent. Describing A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White as “a portrait of Kennedy in flight from herself,” Robinson also contributes to the central tendency of the subject in the other two plays, and provides a richer dimension to the argument of ‘apparitions of the African-American self.’ The more the subject flies from herself, the more her cultural features are evinced. Through such presentation of the subject, Kennedy displays a notion of cultural identity that seeks to integrate the fragments of contradictory ideologies. However, this notion of identity is itself a process, which is endless and inconclusive, as suggested by the multidimensional signifiers whose meanings are protean, discursively confirming and denying one another.

2.2. The Specificity of the Female Gender

Adrienne Kennedy's writing can securely be specified as belonging to a woman, first of all, for the simple reason that the speaking subject is an African-American woman. There are the specific gestures that mark the woman's viewpoint and shape the female experience such as reproduction, and

matrilineality, as Blau confirms: "...the problem of sexuality is caught up in her drama in a confusion of gender with all the desiring shades of gray between black and white." (1987: 43). In her plays, there are also the issues that have come to be special points of interest for feminism. Construction of the woman's identity as an artist (or as an author) requires an improvement in the definition of the traditional gender roles, which is the utmost project of feminism. If the woman subject criticises the patriarchal status quo and insists on struggling to go on with what she wants to do with her life, she first has to overcome the countervailing culture. Very closely related to this is the issue of madness, which is the inevitable outcome of being constantly treated as insignificant, irrelevant and trifling, in other words, as not "objective" and not "universal," to describe it in terms of theatrical representation.

Kennedy's three plays can be considered as matrilineal cycles, since there is the muted plot of the mother which is repeated in the daughter's case. In the three plays, the mother is presented as an unstable and elusive figure about whom the daughter Negro-Sarah "dreamed of a day when [her] mother smiled at [her]." (2000: 14). Clara Passmore (who is the Bastard who is the Owl) also yearns for speaking to Anne Boleyn, who is one of the three aspects of the mother figure. As opposed to the almost silenced father in A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White, the mother involves in a dialogue with her daughter, although only for once throughout the play, and they exchange their candid feelings as to the issues of marriage and happiness:

"MOTHER. What did I do? What did I do?

CLARA. What do you mean?

MOTHER. I don't know what I did to make my children so unhappy.

CLARA. I'm not unhappy mother.

...

MOTHER. When you grow up in boarding school like I did, the thing you dream of most is to see your children together with their families.

CLARA. Mother you mustn't think I'm unhappy because I am, I really am, very happy.

MOTHER. I just pray you'll soon get yourself together and make some decisions about your life. I pray for you every night. Shouldn't you go back to Eddie since you're pregnant?...

CLARA. Mother, Eddie doesn't understand me (2000: 92-93)."

This short dialogue is especially significant in that it is the sole moment that the two really communicate, get in touch with each other. The case is contrary in the other two plays, for the audience witnesses their interrupted relationship, each one struggling to make her voice heard when the other is not responding. Moreover, it is also doubtful that they possess their own voices, that is, the audience is denied the certainty to recognize to what extent the mother talks through her own consciousness, her own identity. Cultural stereotypes interfere with the development of the character's consciousness, and the racist discourse merges in their idiolect. However, in this case, one senses the mutual acknowledgement between the mother and daughter.

In Funnyhouse of a Negro, the mother is a light-skinned woman, who retreats into insanity, preferring to live at nights speaking to the night owls. In the play she is depicted in a white nightgown, as opposed to the presentation of the father as a "large dark faceless man" always carrying black masks and heads (2000:11). The daughter, Negro-Sarah, is also a duplication of the mother except the fact that her hair is unmistakably "Negro." She depicts herself as such: "In appearance I am good-looking in a boring way; no glaring Negroid features, medium nose, medium mouth and pale yellow skin." (2000: 6). Clara Passmore another variation of Sarah by being "*a plain, pallid NEGRO WOMAN.*" (2000: 26). However, the mother in this play appears in different shades of "blackness." Anne Boleyn, naturally, wears the white mask, while Reverend's Wife evokes the

mother in Funnyhouse of a Negro by her “yellow skin,” and the Bastard’s Black Mother (who cooked for somebody) is the “blackest of them all,” wearing the kinky hair and the rose-colored cheap lace dress. The latter’s transformation into the Reverend’s wife is such that she “*takes off rose lace dress and black face [beneath her black face is a more pallid Negro face], pulls down her hair, longer dark hair, and puts on a white dress.*” (2000: 30). The Owl Answers has all the possible mother figures (“white,” “mulatta” and “black”) that may appear in the mixed heritage of the subject, each one parodying the cultural myths that are weaved by the stories of the “black rapist” and sexually permissive woman slave.

In these two plays, the African-American female subject “searches for but never locates the desired mother.” (Curb 1992: 152). The narratives of the two mothers in these plays have the similar rhythm, starting from their conception, by being born into the cradle of two separate cultures. These women turn away from the human world after having been deflowered by the “black man,” either by going insane or by committing suicide. The mother’s detestation of the men of her race, which is an outcome of the brainwashedly racist mythologies of the white ideology, is also insinuated in the character of the mother in A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White (Kennedy 2000: 96), also quoted earlier. The daughters in the other two plays end up in repeating the narratives of their mothers, and submit to madness by metamorphosing into the owl, or give up living, as Curb points out by asserting “Kennedy’s characters escape either into a nonhuman world or into nonbeing itself.” (1992: 147). Like Negro Sarah, the mother in The Owl Answers commits suicide, and repeating the narrative of the mother in Funnyhouse of a Negro, Clara Passmore “passes” into the realm of nonhuman instead of “passing as” a white woman as the adopted daughter of Reverend Passmore, who has assimilated into the system.

Glenda Dickerson’s insight sheds a light on, and corresponds to the discussion of mother and daughter’s having similar narratives. Experiencing childbirth, she confesses: “I have discovered the miracle of the blood rite that binds ancestors and heirs, mothers and daughters. I saw that every woman extends

backwards into her mother and forward into her daughter.” (1990: 112). While Dickerson’s discovery of the continuum is celebratory, the continuum of Kennedy’s mothers and daughters is rather tormented, even suggestive of curse that perpetuates over generations. Nevertheless, echoing Dickerson in her statement that distinguishes ancestry as specifically belonging to the woman, Kennedy’s obsessively emphasized recurrent themes of death and madness also imply a strong connection between mothers and daughters.

The common image of the mother in Funnyhouse of a Negro and The Owl Answers, characterized by psychological disorder and suicidal tendencies, corresponds neither to playwright Clara’s (A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White) nor to the playwright Adrienne Kennedy’s mother. Evident from her interviews and People Who Led to My Plays, Kennedy’s mother is an extremely powerful figure in her life, and intrinsically influential in the shaping of her work, somehow paralleling Dickerson’s articulation. Kennedy has two sons, however, the bond between her and her mother is exclusively sound. In the interview with Diamond, Kennedy tells that as a girl, she was not eager to go to the kindergarten because she did not want to be separated from her mother, who, until Kennedy was eleven did not go to work, always holding her hand and telling her stories (1996: 136).

Kennedy in her memoir talks about her mother’s “red scrapbook” filled with the photographs of the people whom Kennedy yearned to know (1996: 17). A beloved object of childhood, this photograph album came to serve as a medium of perceiving life; past, present and future: “Sometimes I think I see life as like my mother’s red scrapbook which...is a constant reminder of the elusive nature of life.” (1996: 91). People Who Led to My Plays also should be seen as a version of this album which she wrote with the consciousness that she “couldn’t linger too long on anyone.” (Diamond 1996: 131).

The playwright’s (un)conscious desire to be like her mother is especially echoed in the resemblance of the mother and daughter in Funnyhouse of a

Negro—they look alike except for their hair; the mother has long and straight hair while the daughter's is wild and kinky. Kennedy's memoir is filled with the expressions of admiration for her mother, the most noticeable examples of which are:

“...everyone said we looked nothing alike. I was often unhappy about this fact that when I grew up...I would never look like this beautiful woman with brown curly hair, pale luminous skin and keen elegant features....My face as an adult will always seem to be lacking because it is not my mother's face (1996: 51).”

Given her personal accounts about the way she felt about her mother, it is not appropriate to equate the two with the fictionalized images of the mother and daughter. However, there are similarities between, for instance, Sarah's admiration of her mother's beauty in Funnyhouse of a Negro. But at the roots of Sarah's admiration for this beauty lies the standards that the white (popular) culture sets up; the paler the woman, the more beautiful she is likely to be. Kennedy's plays proves that the conception of one's appearance, the notion of beauty, and even the relationship between daughter and mother are bound up with the culture's ideological impositions.

Reproductivity is almost exclusively a female issue about which Kennedy is so sensitive. In Funnyhouse of a Negro and The Owl Answers, the issue of birth revolves around the act of rape, which in Kennedy's plays are never free of racist mythology, as Kintz confirms by saying that “[b]astard imagery always refers, in Kennedy's plays, to [Sarah]/Clara's self-representation as the child of a light-skinned, beautiful, educated mother and a dark Southern father.” (1992a: 76). Sarah narrates:

“She would not let him touch her in their wedding bed and called him black. He is black of skin with dark eyes and a great dark square brow. Then in Africa he started to drink and came home drunk one

night and raped my mother. The child from the union is me (2000: 14).”

In Funnyhouse of a Negro the connection between rape and birth are articulated rather more openly than The Owl Answers, in which these events, related to each other by the cause-and-effect relationship, are rendered in a highly concealed way. It is implied that Clara Passmore is the illicit child of the Goddam Father who is the Richest White Man in the Town, and the Bastard's Black Mother who cooked for somebody. According to the mythology of slavery, it is the “sexually permissive” woman slave who is likely to initiate the intercourse, as a result of which the child is born, or, it is that the slave man has raped the white woman. However, the contemporary critical eye is perceptive of the institutionalized rape which functioned as a “natural” means of increasing the number of slaves (apart from the sexual abuse of the African-American woman).

Birth, as the follow-up to rape (for the most cases), appears in these two plays, generating an antagonism about the issue of reproduction and pregnancy. Considering that Clara Passmore and Sarah are born as a result of sexual violation, which led the mothers either to commit suicide or to lose their minds, and Clara's assertion that her mother almost died when she was born, it can be seen that Kennedy is obscuring the conventional associations of birth, such as vitality, fertility, beginning, and genesis. In her plays, especially in these two, birth has come to be misfortunes, torments for the subject who wants to possess no moral value, especially as to her being, who wants not to be, and who asks nothing except anonymity (as adopted from Sarah's utterance, Kennedy 2000: 5). Quite differently, in A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White, Clara is not “a child of torment,” however, she holds herself responsible for her parents' unhappiness: “I've always felt sad that I couldn't have been an angel of mercy to my father and mother and saved them from their torment...When I came among them it seems to me I did not bring them peace...but made them more disconsolate.” (2000: 83). Claudia Barnett confirms that “Kennedy presents pregnancy and motherhood not as traditional symbols of life and growth, but as signs of madness and death”

(1996: 142), and argues that the “characters fall prey not to tangible, culpable oppressors, but to the hazy, consuming, uncontrollable forces birth. Their dooms are often self-inflicted, and then self-perpetuated by the reproductive cycle.” (1996: 146).

It may be revealing to know that when Kennedy was six years old, she went through a traumatic experience, which she later learned was related to her mother’s pregnancy. She remembers that she was told to stay in her room when she heard the loud siren. Then she saw her father running through the house, and the neighbor, waiting inside her mother’s bedroom. She remembers seeing her mother lying on the bed, her skin wet and almost purple from pain. The last sight Kennedy catches that day is the men, lifting her mother onto a stretcher, and into the ambulance. Kennedy’s belated discovery of that mysterious and alarming event is such that “[i]t was years before I learned my mother had lost a child and had almost died.” (Kennedy 1996: 16). It is no doubt that Kennedy’s notion of childbirth is shaped by this early memory, and coupled with her own troubled pregnancy during which she was with her husband in Ghana.

The association of birth with destruction is also repeated in Clara’s pregnancies. It is narrated that the first pregnancy was highly troubled: “When I have the baby I wonder will I turn into a river of blood and die?” (2000: 83) and “...I was a virgin when we married. A virgin who was to bleed and bleed...” (2000: 87) are the expressions that forcefully incorporate morbidity into the concept of birth. This pregnancy results in the death of the baby, upon which Eddie could only send a letter saying he was sorry: “The Red Cross... says I cannot call you and I cannot come. For a soldier to come there has to be death in the family.” (2000: 96). It is all the more bitter for the lonely mother Clara that her miscarriage is underestimated by such means.

The imagery of blood is further accentuated by the scene in which the actors who look exactly like Marlon Brando and Jean Peters from the film *Viva Zapata* enact the wedding night (‘teach me to read’) scene. But this enactment is

such that “JEAN PETERS *stands up. She is bleeding. She falls back on the bed. MARLON BRANDO pulls a sheet out from under her. The sheets are black.*” (2000: 91). Starting as the second scene opens, the changing of the sheets continues through the last scene, until the end of the play. While the blackness of the sheets suggests the blood stains, Clara, in the very scene, refers to one of Kennedy’s early one-act plays entitled A Lesson in Dead Language, whose “main image is a girl in a white organdy dress covered with menstrual blood.” (2000:94).

Blood, either as the natural outcome of menstruation—the state of being able to give birth—or as the result of difficulties in pregnancy, appear in the three plays through symbols. In Funnyhouse of a Negro, Sarah first appears as “*a faceless, dark character with a hangman’s rope around her neck and red blood on the part of that would be her face*” (2000: 4), foretelling her suicide (Curb 1981: 56). Curb, in another article, also resembles the Negro’s appearance to that of the lynch victim (1992: 148). Sarah’s other selves carry red paperbags that are filled with the fallen strands of hair. Curb’s analysis is that the color of the bags suggests “menstrual blood and the blood of deflowering,” while the loss of hair stands for “the main symbol of impotence and death.” (1981: 56). In The Owl Answers, apart from the mother’s stabbing herself with a butcher’s knife, blood imagery is conveyed through the vial that the Reverend’s Wife carry about her, constantly reminding Clara how the Reverend (Clara’s step father) deflowered her, “took her maidenhead.” Curb’s ultimate explanation as to the imagery of blood is that it is “the sign of the guilt connected with being a woman” (1981: 51), to which Geis objects in that such an analysis oversees

“the powerful association Kennedy establishes between bleeding and artistic creation, especially in A Movie Star: the sheets...are covered with black blood and link imagistically to the sheets of writing paper that Clara/Kennedy attempts to fill as she writes her play. The ink, like blood, is black—a source of pain in the sense that Clara/Kennedy is “writing her wounds,” but a source of power in the sense that she is

creating, in black, something that comes from inside of her (1992: 177).”

The interview in which Kennedy talks about A Lesson in a Dead Language, is revealing as to her reflections on menstruation: “To me, menstrual periods, no matter how long you’ve been having them, are traumatic—simply the fact that you bleed once a month. I wanted to write about the fear.... that you will get blood on your clothes.” (Betsko and Koenig 1987: 254). Additionally, as to the recurrent imagery of blood, it is also insightful to note that Kennedy emphasizes that she finds solace in symbolism, and is drawn to it “as a way of surviving,” resembling “the way that writers took anguish and turned it into symbolism.” (Betsko and Koenig 1987: 252-253).

The animal symbolism, was examined in the previous section, within the framework of bestiality as a cultural implication, as an aspect of the racist historical vision of African-American identity. Although Kennedy gives evidences that the owl imagery is related to being of mixed ancestry, there are also suggestions that associate this imagery with madness and a means of escaping rape and thus with the female figures. But, again as argued earlier, this association does not imply empowerment on the part of the matrilineal heritage; it is far more complex and ambiguous. In this sense, the most inclusive insight into the imagery of the owl and its multileveled signification belongs to Kintz, as she articulates: “The owl is a profoundly disturbing, camouflaged totem figure that links some sort of unsignifiable signification to mothers, night, childbirth, and Africa.” (1992a: 76).

Although the owl appears more clearly in Funnyhouse of a Negro and The Owl Answers, A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White lets this bird imagery leak into its context, which is actually dominated by the Hollywood movies. In this play, preoccupied with Clara’s and her mother’s troubled pregnancies, the subtle presence of the owl is felt through the citations from The Owl Answers, creating a subtext or a complementary context for the interpretation of this image. Kennedy,

in her memoir, articulates the experience of her second pregnancy, which is revealing as to the process in which the owl has acquired its weave of associations in Kennedy's psyche:

"The owls in the trees outside the Achimote Guest House were close, and at night, because we slept under gigantic mosquito nets, I felt enclosed in their sound. In the mornings I would try to find the owls in the trees but could never see them. Yet, at night in the shuttered room, under the huge white canopied nets, the owls sounded as if they were in the very center of the room.... I was pregnant again and there were difficulties. I had to stay in bed for a week, as I bled. I listened to the owl sounds afraid (1996: 121-122)."

In the light of this knowledge, it is as inappropriate to attribute the owl solely to the African environment, as it is to the female gender. This imagery embraces the two, together with their subsidiary issues of pregnancy, cultural identity, motherhood, madness, and bleeding. However, an additional interpretation can also be taken into account on the grounds that the owl, being a solitary bird—as emphasized by most critics (Blau 1987: 57; Forte 1996: 25)—corresponds to the isolated image of the writer, especially since it is also associated with madness. This point of view necessitates the elucidation of Kennedy's reflections on the construction of her identity as a writer. This issue, also central to feminism, finds its expressions both in Kennedy's personal accounts and in her three plays.

Having parents who had strong personalities in both the social and the personal spheres, Kennedy was brought up with the consciousness that "[y]ou're supposed to try to make an imprint with your life," from the very beginning (1996: 27). Hearing of "artistic struggle" at young ages, she acquired the curiosity for the deeper and puzzling meanings in events as well as in aesthetic creations. It is evident from her accounts that her process of becoming a playwright took some ten years of struggle, filled with disillusionment caused by rejection. However, she

always tells that her divorced husband was a vital support for her in that, in Kennedy's words, "[h]e never laughed at me and he read every word I wrote." (McKittrick, see the internet sources).

In her memoir, the section she entitled 'Marriage and Motherhood' appears to be the period in which the process of maturation related to being an author is almost completed. Because these are the years when she got married and gave birth to Joe, her elder son, and had to surrender to the limiting conditions of being a housewife and a mother. She remembers how the social environment of Columbia University, where her husband attended the post graduate studies in Social Psychology, reduced her to a housewife with a baby. While they asked how the baby was, and how her husband was accomplishing his studies, Kennedy "resolved to work harder at...writing and to take courses." (1996: 81). Her recollection of her first years in New York is rather sharp in the interview with McKittrick: "...I would stay up all night long and write. I had circles under my eyes. People laughed at me—I'm still...bitter about that. People thought it was funny that this little housewife, the wife of a successful student, wanted to be a writer."

Various expressions of this experience appears as a recurrent theme in the body of feminist literary work. Having been caught up in the traditional sex role demands, while on the other hand struggling to accomplish herself as a writer, the subject, in some cases, cannot manage to continue with this suffocating position, either through death or madness—the issues that Kennedy's mother and daughter figures are bound up with. Bell Hooks draws the attention to Kennedy's voicing the difficulties that obstructed the fulfilment of her writer's identity and emphasizes that "it must have been all the more difficult as a black woman who wanted to do something different in the world of theatre." (1992: 183). Hooks also points to the reflection of Kennedy's experience in her plays: "Much of Kennedy's work highlights the struggle of females, often daughters, to be fully self actualized." (1992: 184).

Sarah reveals in her opening monologue that she is working on writing poetry. However, she articulates this in such a way that diminishes her effort, as if her attempt is to make fun of herself: "...mostly [I] spend my days preoccupied with the placement and geometric position of words on paper. I write poetry filling white page after white page with imitations of Sitwell." (2000: 6). Clara Passmore, too, is not far away from the world of the "written word." She struggles to take hold of the papers in her notebook, which, nevertheless, fall throughout the play. No matter how hard she tries and piles them in a disorderly way, she continues to drop them. Her notebook consists of the correspondences with the figures of her imagination (God, the King, the Queen). Actually some of her monologues begin in the form of the address conventional to letter writing. The figures of her desired ancestry become her acquaintances by means of these letters:

"Communications, all communications to get you the proper burial, the one you deserve in St. Paul's Chapel, they are letting you rot my Goddam Father who was the Richest White Man in the Town—they are letting you rot in that town in Georgia. I haven't been able to see the king. I'll speak again to Anne Boleyn. She knows so much of love (2000: 31)."

The variations of undefined and indeterminate writing—Clara's letters to her "ancestors," and Sarah's filling white page after white page—finally develop into references to a completed and a concrete play in A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White, together with the hints of Clara's getting the play produced and winning an award. Actually the play, as a whole, is an allusion to Kennedy's identity as the dramatist, by way of Clara's constantly writing in her diary and her uttering quotations from Kennedy's previous play.

The plays also contain references to poets who are all English, some well and some rarely known. Apart from Chaucer and Shakespeare in The Owl Answers, Edith Sitwell appears as a dissident and an eccentric figure in the history of English poetry, especially since she bears a feminist stance and declares

dissociation from her aristocratic background. In contrast to the literary points of reference in these two plays, the author, who Kennedy alludes to in *A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White*, is herself as an established playwright, who has won an award and is having her plays produced. While Kennedy refers to the three British poets in the former plays, the third real-life reference turns out to be herself; the playwright Adrienne Kennedy-as-Clara. These successive real-life references suggest a development of a writer. In this sense, Hooks' interpretation illuminates the way Kennedy incorporates the feminist issues in her plays that are actually based on cultural confrontations seen from the viewpoint of the woman: "...there is an emergent perspective on woman's identity—on her quest to create literature...to establish a writer's identity." (1992: 182).

Insisting throughout her interviews that she majored in elementary education and was going to be a schoolteacher, the slight traces of which can be traced in the self-narratives of Sarah and Clara Passmore, Kennedy points to the discrepancy between her introvert appearance and the dark issues about which she writes: "I had a certain image—even my friends thought of me as quiet and shy, and...I was labeled "sweet" from the time when I was a kid. My writing, quite naturally, turned out to be just the opposite." (Betsko and Koenig 1987: 250). Audre Lorde's reflection of herself while her consciousness as a poet was formed is comparable to Kennedy's isolation in that Lorde, too, remarks a hidden self, which is in opposition to her appearance and which desires to frustrate people by doing what she really wanted to do: "...there was usually some part of me guaranteed to offend everybody's prejudices of who I should be. That is how I learned that if I didn't define myself for myself, I would be crunched into other people's fantasies and eaten alive (1994: 457)."

Because Kennedy herself was surprised at what she wrote, as she declares, she censored her work all the time. Even after she had joined Edward Albee's workshop at Circle in the Square, and her play had been chosen for production, Kennedy was quite hesitant about getting it staged in its original version for she worried about her use of the word "nigger," and the hostile characterization of her

parents. She had already decided to withdraw the first version when Albee told her that “[i]f a playwright has a play on, it should be his guts on that stage...” and left her by herself to think. Kennedy’s response to Albee’s intervention was to make the effort on her part to get the play produced. However, she also feels the need to add that she “was the only black person in the workshop” (Betsko and Koenig 1987: 251), evoking Clara Passmore’s account of her breakdown during her visit to the Tower: “I was the only Negro there.” (2000: 39).

Although having been alienated from the social environment which persistently acknowledged her as a subsidiary of her husband, and experiencing the challenge that the world of theater necessitated in order for her to become a playwright, Kennedy accomplishes to break up the vicious circle of madness and death that determined the fates of the mothers and daughters in her plays, by becoming a writer. In Hooks’ words, Kennedy thus “finds a way to unproblematically ascend her identity as a writer and clearly lets readers/audiences know that creating plays is life sustaining for her.” (1992: 184).

However, at the background of the accomplishment of becoming an artist, an author, death and madness and estrangement are still buried. People Who Led to My Plays is filled with the solitary images of writers. Considering Kennedy’s statement that “[w]omen writers do affect me differently than male writers... Jane Eyre is my favorite novel. I’m glad that Charlotte Brontë was a woman” (Betsko and Koenig 1987: 257), it is possible to elicit a subtle association between the owl imagery and the concept of the isolated women writer, who, like Virginia Woolf committed suicide, or led a secluded life like Emily Dickinson. It is evident that Kennedy was also interested in the personalities of the writers and also fictitious characters. For example, a nonconformist character, Edith Sitwell appears as a model to be looked up to in Funnyhouse of a Negro. Emma Bovary and Anna Karenina, both of whom felt unhappy, restless and unfulfilled (and also have committed suicide) lead Kennedy to empathize with them: “They were in an inexplicable turmoil, as I was.” (1996: 84). Virginia Woolf, who illuminated Kennedy to “capture the elusive” in her writing, left her imprint on Kennedy’s

consciousness, about which she writes: "She drowned herself in a pond. How haunted by that I was." (1996: 103). Such reflections on the distinctive voices of the literary women are the expressions of the extreme sense of alienation that Kennedy felt. The impact of her unsuccessful initiations, together with her stable status as a housewife drove her to misery, making her think that "[c]areers connected with great destiny all seemed to be for men." (1996: 94).

The construction of Kennedy's consciousness as a playwright is shaped by the implosions of cultural as well as the specifically female issues. Never tearing Kennedy's subjects off from their specific contexts, Blau defines the playwright's expression as "a plaintive, eccentric, and dramatically exquisite voice, recessive and stricken with horror, grave, not so much crying out as crying within." (1987: 57). The consciousness that specifically belongs to the African-American woman subject elucidates the cultural sensitivities that are otherwise left behind the veil. Kennedy presents the confusion of this subject together with the recurrent themes of pregnancy, rape, bleeding, madness, miscarriage, childbirth, motherhood, death, unhappiness, unfulfillment, and mixed ancestry. The inseparability of the cultural and gender related aspects of Kennedy's (and her subjects') discourse contributes to the articulation of the heterogeneity of African-American experience, opening the way to perceive cultural identity as a terrain of confrontations, amalgamations, and fragmentations. However, this articulation of the heterogeneity of experience, in Kennedy's case, is actualized not through explosions, but as implosions, in that the exclusive—and thus damaging—norms of Anglo aesthetics turn against the subject's self, mentally and physically paralyzing her.

NOTES

¹ In People Who Led to My Plays, Kennedy talks about her Italian classmates (1996: 16) and remembers her social environment when she was at the Empire Junior High School: “Like the kids at Lafayette, [my classmates] had parents who had been born in Europe, but in our new neighborhood (Glenville) it was not Italy... but Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Russia (1996: 43-44).”

² In the interview “Adrienne Kennedy,” the playwright asserts that the unconventional characterization, examined in the section entitled ‘Re/Presenting the Subject’ of this dissertation, was one of her biggest realizations in playwriting:

“It was a huge breakthrough for me when my main characters began to have other personas—it was in fact my biggest breakthrough as a writer, something I really sweated over, pondered...I can remember the room I was sitting when I said to myself: “You are very drawn to all these historical people, they are very powerful in your imagination, yet you are not interested in writing about them historically.” That’s when I decided to use historical people as an extension of the main character...(1987: 251).”

³ This expression is adopted from one of Sarah’s recurring utterances.

⁴ It is known that the secret agencies of a number of European countries, together with the United States have played role, directly and indirectly, in the assassination of Patrice Lumumba. However, it is demystified only recently that the Belgian operatives directed and carried out the murder in January 17, 1961, and helped dispose of the body. In the US News article, Kevin Whitelaw says that the account of the book, written by the Belgium sociologist Ludo de Witte, entitled The Assassination of Lumumba is accepted as accurate. He also gives the name of the CIA officer, who is said to have been informed about the plot. It is also known that Lumumba suffered from severe beating just before the extermination. Moreover, his body was cut up to its parts and dissolved in sulphuric acid by the two Belgian police commissioners.

⁵ Such substitution and/or identification is a result of the slight variations in the repetitious monologues, examined earlier.



CONCLUSION

Adrienne Kennedy is a unique voice in the contemporary American theater in that she not only has paved the way for the audience's receptivity of dramatically innovative modes of presentation, but also has manifested a notion of cultural identity that promotes a state of mind, a terrain, in which a myriad of constituents are incorporated, no matter how discordant they are. Kennedy's work, and particularly her three plays, analyzed within the limitations of this dissertation, is illuminated from the perspective that considers her plays as productions of a psyche that is bound up with several different cultures. The cultural constituents of her work never seek to gain authority over the other. In other words, Kennedy does not let them be organized in a hierarchical, and in an easily decipherable manner.

What comes out of her plays is the idea that a culture is not sealed-off, and is perpetually in dialogue with other cultures, as has been throughout history. Linda Kintz defines the general tendency to ignore the encounters and fragmentary fusions between the cultures as the "phobic insistence on purity and its cleanly separated categories, unities, and singular identity." (1992: 144). However, it is inappropriate to attribute this phobic insistence only to the W.A.S.P. culture, since it was also the community of Kennedy's own cultural background that dismissed her work in the 1960s. It may somehow be quite difficult to comprehend the subtle meanings in Kennedy's work at that period because of the very reason that the social environment forced the individual to take either marginalized side. The concepts of "separationist" and "integrationist" were defined according to a narrow understanding of cultural interactions. However, in the course of time, these concepts, together with several others, have been redefined, deconstructed and reconstructed and still are in this inconclusive process. The contemporary assessment of Kennedy's obsessions with the "masks of culture" and the clichés, which had, at one time in history, served as realities, sees that the playwright is dismantling them, in an unconscious effort to clear the minds of the binary thinking schemas.

Kennedy's plays deconstruct the cultural myth of purity by way of its own instruments. For instance, throughout history, the colors of black and white have been charged with cultural associations, which are confirmed by countless means, the Bible being only one. Religion, merged with culture, dictates the individual that black suggests evil and white suggests purity. Although the association of whiteness and death is not novel in Kennedy's case, she uses these colors as masks. This strategy leads the audiences to re-examine the hitherto established and already confirmed conceptualizations of black and white.

Through the excessive use of masks, Kennedy presents cultural signifiers as artificial images and as "true delusions," although in a highly symbolical way. Being one of the most conventional props of drama, masks function both literally and metaphorically. Kennedy makes use of the revealing and concealing functions of both the literal and metaphorical masks, but declares neither domination nor authenticity of the masks. The revealing/concealing strategy obscures the defined boundaries between images that are bound up with cultural associations. Kennedy plays a trick on these sites of heritage, crashing them into each other. However, she manages to crush them in a very subtle manner, since most of her masks are metaphorical. One finds frame over frame, constantly being denied a safe space of narrative that s/he can cling to. However the hidden design of these plays is to deceive the audience by offering them the true delusions of binary logic.

The multileveled and anti-hierarchical structuring of Kennedy's work is a manifestation of her experience that shaped her notion of culture. She has actually lived in a democratic environment during her childhood, as stated earlier. In this sense, it is also insightful to note that the terms 'minority,' and 'third world' do not exist in Kennedy's vocabulary, just like the colors white and black exist as masks. Similar to the way in which her work resists the rigidity of theories, she herself rejects being defined by the terms that bear the biased marks of racism. In her interview with Diamond, she articulates her attitude toward the issues of hatred and racism: "...human beings seem...to hate each other. That's why I don't like

the word *minority* because I'm not a minority in the world. I hate the phrase *third world*. What's the first world?" (1996: 134).

Kennedy's notion of cultural identity as a terrain of confrontation and indecisiveness holds a female point of view. The specifically female issue of reproduction is inseparable from Kennedy's drama in that it is buried in the multidimensional conflict of the plays. However, this distinctive female stance is not to be considered as a matter of fixity, a definite point of departure, because the experience of the African-American female subject in her plays is not representative of all women. The fact that Kennedy's plays are not representations, which is part of the reason behind their unpopularity, manifests that the staged experience of the subject is unique, a condition which holds true also for the other subjects. In other words, the experience of each African-American woman differs and this is what makes them subjects—human beings who structure their consciousnesses in their own terms, according to their particular historical circumstances, and by their own ways of resistances.

Kennedy's speaking subject is not representative and thus, does not allow for the audience's identification. This subject, furthermore, does not provide the audience with a positive role model. On the contrary, she is a "failure" who could not manage to develop into an entire character. The deficiency of this character also alludes to her destruction through death or madness. However, Kennedy presents the factors, although in a highly complex manner, why the subject remains incomplete, fragmented into alter egos. Her consciousness is shaped by the coercive binary oppositions that are defined through racist myths, and subsume the individuals under cultural categorizations. These myths reside in the pitch-dark vaults of the American people, operating on the molding of cultural identities as stereotypes. Kennedy's speaking subject is unable to develop her subjectivity; the construction of her consciousness is left unaccomplished, because she is caught up in the mesh of the binary system of logic. In this sense the audience's attention is distracted from the dreadful end of the subject to the circumstances that drives her toward death and insanity. The impact of the process, rather than that of the

product, remains with the audience, leaving the members to evaluate these oppressive circumstances critically. This is the initial step for the member of the audience in the construction of her/his subjectivity.

On the other hand, identification is a habitual act for the mainstream audience. The Aristotelian hero, who is represented as subservient to the dominant ideology, calls for the audience's identification. Because his discourse conforms to the authoritarian ideology, the act of identification with him immediately exterminates the critical evaluation of his authoritarian point of view. In this way, the audience goes through the experiences identical to the Aristotelian hero and is never offered the opportunity to decide for itself; in other words, the audience is denied its own subjectivity.

In this sense, the Black American theater of the sixties is comparable to the mainstream representational drama in that its audiences were expected to confirm to the authoritarian view imposed through the plays. The narrow demands of the Black ideology of the 1960s called for an essentially African-American identity, which set a certain hierarchy among cultures. The Black ideology, thus, displayed a system of thinking, which shared its binary logic with the dominant white ideology. In this context, it is obvious why Adrienne Kennedy's works, which presented confused speaking subjects, in other words, negative images for the Black struggle, were dismissed. Kennedy displayed the experience of the cultural confrontations from her point of view, which did not conform to the low aesthetic standards of the "revolutionary" Black theater. Today, the voices of the African-American woman artists serve to manifest the heterogeneity of cultural experience and identity. As they portray such a "colorful" mosaic, they still preserve their critical stance against the authoritarian ideologies.

Teresa de Lauretis draws the attention to the concept of experience arguing that it sometimes remains an ambiguous and oversimplified term, which remains inadequate to correspond to the totality of the historical circumstances and of the differences that constitute a woman's consciousness as well as perception. She

defines the notion of experience “in relation both to social-material practices and to the formation and processes of subjectivity,” and further, acknowledges it as a feminist concept (1993: 81). Subjectivity, constructed as a result of this experience, is sensitive to the issues related not only to sex and gender but also to “race, class, and any other significant sociocultural divisions and representations” (1993: 89).

Furthermore, according to de Lauretis, the female subject’s disposition, in other words, the feminist discourse, is most productive at the sites which are disengaged from binary oppositions: “The tension of a twofold pull in contrary directions...is most productive in the kind of critical thinking that refuses to be pulled to either side of an opposition and seeks instead to deconstruct it...to disengage it from the fixity of polarization.” (1993: 88). The disengaged viewpoint that de Lauretis refers to, the “anti” attitude, which does not construct a fixity on its own and remains forever resistant to polarization is also an articulation of Kennedy’s distance from either sides of her hyphenated identity, while at the same time, internalizing them with all their conflictual histories. Such a stance rejects the hierarchical organization of cultures, as well as the essentialization of subjectivities.

The idea of constituting an amorphous assemblage by maintaining the differences conveys inner contradictions; nevertheless, this is the distinctive characteristic that shapes Kennedy’s notion of culture, of cultural identity, and of subjectivity. Her vision of reality evidences the differences particularly within the African-American community, rather than the ones between cultures. This is also to say that Kennedy, by stressing the dissimilarities among the people who, more or less, have the similar cultural experience, promotes a site resistant to polarizations, and comparable to de Lauretis’ notion of female subjectivity. The subjectivity that denies the authority of any specified stance also contributes to the heterogeneity of response within the culture. These creative responses are challenging by nature, since they combat the oppressive representations of the dominant ideology, and try to create their own spaces of articulation. This artistic

struggle can be described as the totality of the efforts to redefine, revision, and reframe the established concepts of culture, and the modes of representation available.

This resisting, criticizing and revising efforts of the African-American woman artist is interconnected with Cornel West's understanding of the "new cultural politics of difference," according to which the artists "align themselves with demoralized, demobilized, depoliticized, disorganized people in order to empower and enable social action and...to enlist collective insurgency for the expansion of freedom, democracy and individuality." (1993: 204). This understanding of aesthetic articulations of difference calls for politics to operate within the artistic/cultural production, in order to reveal the shortcomings and the biases of the kind of representation that the dominant culture nurtures. Even if the artistic presentation is in terms of highly personal utterances, as in Kennedy's case, the connection to the social/cultural/political sphere can still be found, no matter how deeply buried it is. The autobiographical utterances have the power to make political and ideological statements.

It is apparent from the three plays, in addition to her other works, that Adrienne Kennedy does not acknowledge cultural identity as fixity, nor does she privilege one cultural aspect of her identity over the other. "The enigmatic implosions of autobiography," which are powerfully evident in her works display the crucial issues of feminist discourse, such as childbirth and the confirming of her writer's identity. Kennedy unconsciously, and through a very personal mode of representation, draws the attention to the female subjectivity, while subverting the socially structured cultural myths by crashing them into each other.

In this sense, the way she stages her particular experience of culture requires a new organization of the conventional dramatic elements—the transmuting of the Aristotelian representation. Her theater, as manifested by the three plays Funnyhouse of a Negro, The Owl Answers and A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White, shares little with the conventions of Aristotelian drama.

However, it is not her total rejection of the traditional dramatic form that marks her presentations as unconventional. The way she transmutes these conventional dramatic elements extends her theater toward “the intersecting boundaries” of genres and consciousnesses.

Her audiences are denied the comfortable and secure position of omniscience, the authority to decide on the meaning. Nor are they the judges that moralize the staged event. The clichés are juxtaposed, and the established binary associations are deliberately merged into each other through discursively repetitious monologues that obsessively linger on certain issues. These strategies attack the audience’s established notions of culture, history and identity as static constructions.

The dramatic composition of the subject is dispersed so that the definite act of pinpointing her is beyond possibility. She pervades the stage with her state of mind, which is extremely confused as to which mask she fits under: Is it the plain, self-sufficient schoolteacher from Savannah, who desires to arrange her dubious father a proper burial? Is it the urban pseudo-intellectual who unsuccessfully mimics the petit bourgeoisie and who phobically tries to get away from her father? Or is it the playwright who has to live through her own realities and not the romantic fantasies of the Hollywood celebrities? The indeterminacy as to the authoritarian aspect of the subject’s selves deters the development of the character. Conventionally, she should have been given reason, orientation, motives, psychological depth, and an ideological viewpoint, which are the holistic qualities that Kennedy denies her subject.

Moreover, Kennedy’s subjects display the distinctive stance of the female in that the mother and daughter cycle is conspicuous by the recurrent themes of madness and death. Additionally, what Hooks detects as the Southern sensitivity in Kennedy’s work is also partially linked to female reproductivity and rape, the myths of slavery, interfering with the perception of cultural identity and with childbirth (1992: 182). Through the loose composition, in which the other selves

of the “main” character do not constitute an entirety, but in which the female is evident, these characters form their own spaces of resistance within their specified historical contexts.

The organization of the plot is an uttermost challenge to the Aristotelian beginning-middle-end structure, which also governs the terms in which an audience perceives a narrated event. In Kennedy’s plays the events proceed on multiple levels of realities. The linear time is symbolically represented by the presence of Raymond and the landlady, although by way of their lunatic attitudes they belie their positions as the agents of the actual reality. A weak but perpetual factor indicative of the actual level of reality is the presence of the Negro Man, together with the brief reminder of Shakespeare, Chaucer and William the Conqueror’s transformation into the strangers on the train. Apart from these instances, the reality of the plays takes place in Sarah/Clara’s imagination. However, even in this psychic realm, in this surreal space, the racist myths, and the impact of Hollywood’s ideological representation continue to interfere.

The articulation of the action, too, resists the mimesis of events, instead, creating its own space of presentation. Monologue is inevitably the sole means of expressing the “what has happened,” since the nature of the action, the “background story,” resists dramatization. The monologues, anachronically scattered throughout the play, do not resemble the conventional ones in that they are repeated, and that these repetitions demonstrate nearly indistinct variations. Kennedy, improving upon the traditional theatrical device of monologic exposition, makes use of it both to render the action and to play tricks on the historically constructed clichés, stereotypical images through slight deviations in the narrative.

In order to present the several levels of reality, Kennedy superimposes multiple spaces onto one another. This transformational strategy constitutes an extreme opposition for the Aristotelian premise that privileges the singularity of time, place and plot. Multiple segments of time and space are fundamental to

Kennedy's presentation, since the reality of the African-American female subject requires the complexity of images. In Kennedy's plays the form is never separable from the content, and the content from the form. Since she expresses the polyvocal, polyrhythmic experience of the female subject, who is at once non-Western and Western, she transmutes the modes and devices of dramatic expression, organizing its constituents in her own way, which would be suitable to correspond to the reality she desires to stage.

Kennedy's theatrical strategies present a subjectivity that belongs to the one, who is excluded not only from the representations of the dominant culture, but also from the representations of the excluded culture. This is to say that the predominant tendency of the *malestream* (as used by West 1993: 204) ideology is to homogenize the voice(s) of the African-American people into one standard blend. This intentional effort to erase the subjectivity of the African-American woman results in the preservation of the racist myths, stereotypes and clichés that cover up the atrocities of the white American history. Moreover, the diverse voices, which would cultivate the creative responses of a culture, for the most part, belong to women, since their voices have hitherto been heard the least.

The particular theatrical strategy, which corresponds to the predominant theme of being torn between ancestries, is the transformational device. Through transformation, Kennedy's subjects literally "put on" their personas just as they do their masks. Such a strategy of presentation functions to obscure the boundaries between clear-cut notions of culture and identity, and in further analysis, identity is loosely formulated "as open, an articulation, interculturably negotiable, and always in the making: *a process*." (Olaniyan 1995: 116).

The unity of form and content, in other words, the inseparability of themes from their transmuted representation entails a fresh approach to contemporary theatrical studies; studies especially on the work of multicultural dramatists, which would incorporate the cultural point of view, as well as the specificity of gender, together with sexual politics and a perceptivity of class issues. Such multiplicity of

assessments and heterogeneity of responses would challenge the white heterosexually biased malestream criticism, paving the way to sharpen the audiences' perception to be able to hear the voices of the others, and hopefully, give an affirming response.

Contemporary theatrical criticism therefore asks for the benefit of other fields of interests such as feminism and cultural studies in order to illuminate the notion of subjectivity that a particular play displays. Within the light of the process in which that specific subjectivity and/or consciousness is generated, the theatrical analysis has its elaborated criticisms to offer. A fixed critical view inevitably promotes a homogenous and a conformist stance, which is associated with the mainstream *and* the *malestream* point of view. The recognition of the heterogeneity of responses, caused by the differences of gender, sexuality, race and class, bears an alternative to the aforementioned statical stance. This statical stance deters the audience from acknowledging the otherness of others, and by extension, the subjectivity of others. However, the receptive attitude structures the members of the audience as subjects on their own, and as subjects among others, who also have their own narratives to share. In this way, the audience, instead of contemplating on the sameness and the similarities, learns to see the differences in order to affirm their own subjectivities.

In this sense, Adrienne Kennedy's theater provides the audience with an experience that drastically differs from their own. Shaped by the personal, even idiosyncratic expressions that are articulated as implosions on the stage, the appealability of Kennedy's plays cannot be confined to a homogenous group. Multiple fields of interests are embedded in her compact plays, which urge a re-examination of what theater means, exhausting the dramatic conventions. The transmutation of representation is manifested by the theatrical articulation of her notion of cultural identity, which, again, is ever resistant to theorization, closure and familiarization. Her audiences are urged to acknowledge Sarah/Clara's difference, in other words, subjectivity, and then contemplate on theirs.

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