Alice Childress, Lorraine Hansberry, and Ntozake Shange are three outstanding black women playwrights who are crucial links in the development of black women playwriting in America. These three playwrights offer perspectives and portraits of black life and culture which are decidedly different from those of black male and white playwrights. They dispel the myths of the "contented slave," "the tragic mulatto," "the comic Negro," "the exotic primitive," and the faithful servant singing the spiritual. They have created images of the blacks such as "the black militant," "the black assimilationist," "the struggling black artist," and "the contemporary black matriarch." As Elizabeth Brown Guillory points out, the images which distinctively appear in the plays of these playwrights are "the black male in search of his manhood," and "the black male as a walking wounded."¹

Genevieve Fabre points out that Alice Childress's plays can be placed in the category of ethnic theatre of black experience as opposed to militant theatre of protest.² The theatre of experience develops out of a dialogue in the language
of blacks about their own experiences. This theatre, which is both collective and individual, embraces the rituals of daily life. It derives its strength from the liturgy of the black church, religious and secular music, and the oral tradition. It offers a contrast to the didactic speech of the militant theatre which demonstrates and prescribes action. It does not advocate change in the condition of the blacks. This theatre illustrates the existence of a black culture that continually invents itself outside the codes of the dominant society. It perceives black culture as a body of knowledge and as a symbolic universe. Interacting with a language which is distinctively black, these images of black culture articulate ethnic identity. Facets of black culture revealed here through the dynamics of theatricalization cannot be considered as those of a sub-culture or a counter-culture. Envisaging black culture as a subculture or a counter-culture would involve defining it too simplistically as a reaction to a dominant culture.

One of the important features of African-American playwriting is that in their quest for identity dramatized by these playwrights the problem of ties with Africa occupies an important place at two levels: at the level of thematic preoccupations and at the level of design of the drama including choreography, miming, dance and ritual and other features which are derived from the African world view. Two images
converge here. They are (1) of a mythic land belonging to a distant past and revived by collective memory (2) of a real continent of nations struggling for liberation. The African American theatre, by means of its plea for liberation and by means of its incorporation of features from the oral traditions of Africa, is a forum for the expression of social roles around which images of the new identity are carved. The theatre is seen as both the manifestation and the formulation of culture. In performance, it transforms the audience into privileged actors seized by the glare of history.

In his essay, "Black Theatre - Go Home," Ron Milner appeals to his fellow playwrights to create a living art from material and techniques within the community. He defines theatre as a prism of life that projects warnings, directions, memories, or exemplary creations. From his point of view, the theatre not merely reflects experience, but gives organization and meaning to the confusion of reality. Ed Bullins visualizes the theatre as a monument built from black awareness. Defined in nationalistic and religious terms, the theatre is transformed into a place of communion and of celebration dedicated to the creation of communal forms.³

For the playwright and theoretician Paul Carter Harrison, theatre expresses the spiritual reality of African-American life. The theatre of experience, by finding its
roots further back in African oral traditions, reveals two features: (1) The dynamism of a culture whose importance and authenticity have been denied, and (2) Integration of all aspects of black life. The mode of discourse develops from dramatizations found in black tradition — religion, rituals, narrative forms, and music. It borrows most of its elements from popular culture, but enlarges that culture by proposing specific models, images, and new representations of reality.

The militant theatre and the theatre of experience are not two successive stages in the development of black drama. The theatre of experience was born out of the disenchantment caused by the defeat of the revolutionary fervour. In examining the struggle of the blacks, militant theatre focusses on the condition of the victims and also shows the possibilities for change. It revives in its dramaturgy the earlier traditions of slave narratives, popular epics, and abolitionist literature. The theatre of experience finds its roots further back in African oral traditions. The two developments reveal two distinct perspectives. The militant theatre subordinates theatre to an action by making it serve the revolutionary cause; the theatre of experience restores the theatre's primordial function and autonomy. It offers a more comprehensive definition of black theatre. Sometimes its ideological choice of a focus on black people by black,
playwrights for black audiences makes it merge with the revolutionary theatre.

The Moynihan report describes the persistent failure of blacks to create stable family units. If the society depends on the institution of the family, then the deterioration of the black family leads to the death of the community. The Moynihan report is an example of white liberals' attempt to legislate on black community. While being ignorant of its social fabric and culture, black theatre could not remain apart from this debate. It raised issues central to the whole question of the black family. The black family is looked upon as a dynamic cultural entity endowed with its own vitality. The dialectical relations it maintains with other elements of the community and with the dominant society are the subject of dramatization.

Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* provides the most interesting prototype of the black family ever developed in the contemporary theatre. Hansberry endows the Younger family with characteristics that challenge the existing stereotypes. The Youngers seem to be exceptional and separate from the mass of family types in the ghetto. Like those of many African-American, the Youngers' forbears left for the North in search of employment and a life free...
from racism. Hansberry makes the relations between the characters really dramatic by introducing a moment of crisis when each dreams of spending the dead father's insurance annuity in his or her own way. These different aspirations reveal divergent ethical choices. *Raisin* illustrates social and racial relations in America which promise integration in theory only. On a more profound level, however, the Youngers' victory is due to the fact that they are different from others in the ghetto. They have adopted the values of the middle class and hence they deserve to move into the white suburbs. The Youngers' aspiration to get out of the ghetto characterizes the aspiration of many ghetto families. But the Youngers' entry into the white neighbourhood and Hansberry's hope for integration for the Youngers and for Black theatre can only be a concession to the taste and ideology of Broadway audiences.

This theme of integration is presented more realistically in Louis Peterson's *Take a Giant Step*, a play which depicts the life of a black family after the move. Neither Hansberry nor Peterson states that integration could be a trap for blacks for, in effect, social mobility leads them into a hostile environment and exiles them from their community. However, *A Raisin in the Sun* marks an important step in the direction of the image of the family which black
The play's interest lies especially in the representation of relations between man and woman and in the contradictory images Hansberry proposes. Walter gives us a portrait of the mother wherein he offers criticism of the down-to-earth woman:

May say to his woman. I got me a dream. His woman say: Eat your eggs. Man say I got to take hold of this here world baby. And a woman will say: Eat your eggs and go to work. Man say: I got to change my life, I'm choking to death, baby! And his woman say - your eggs is getting cold ... That is just what is wrong with the colored woman in this world ... Don't understand about building their men up and making 'em feel like they somebody. Like they can do something.  

In the theatre of the sixties, this role is more clearly defined as that of a castrator, and the woman will appear quite often as an obstacle to the man's affirmation of virility. *A Raisin in the Sun*, by an analysis of moral considerations rather than the economic situation, presents a conclusion where perseverance and integrity triumph. And Broadway audiences preferred to call this play not a black play but an American play.
The realist playwright, according to Lorraine Hansberry, states not only what is but what can and should be. Accepting realism as a mode of dramatic unfolding, she expresses in her plays both her American identity and the black female identity of one who grew up in a comfortable home on the South-side of Chicago. There is perhaps no exaggeration in the statement, when we examine the entire canon of Lorraine Hansberry's writings, that she is the voice not merely of black identity but of the dynamic culture and the tortured politics of the United States of America as a whole. This is revealed in a play like *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* with its challenging of the apathy of the American intellectual and his indifference to the serious problems overtaking the world. In fact, Hansberry shows how the obligation to limit one's creative energies to the treatment of the immediate but parochial injustices of racial intolerance has indeed sapped the creative vitality of the black writer. In thus achieving an objectivity and a perspective which free her from entanglement in a one-sided particularity, Lorraine Hansberry is no more separate and apart from America than one can think of. Cyprian Ekwensi apart from the Nigeria which is embodied, symbolized and illuminated in his writing. In this, Hansberry is not an exotic ethnic of the Eurocentric imagination. Her vision is essentially harmonizing and integrating.
Hansberry's substantial contribution seems to be to reveal a shared vision with Alice Childress and Ntozake Shange. An examination of the symbols of these playwrights indicates a conscious effort on their part to illuminate the condition of the blacks in patriarchal America through the medium of a "Theatre of struggle" in which black resiliency and spirit of survival are heralded. While Alice Childress confronts social and political issues out of a philosophical conviction that all art is and must be political, Hansberry believes that the black artist has a responsibility to tell the truth, especially about the coloured. But in terms of mediating this vision through the theatrical medium, she is committed to the idea of celebrating the joy of living and struggling together and optimistically reconstructing the world.

A study of the symbolism of *A Raisin in the Sun* and *The Drinking Gourd* would illustrate this idea. *A Raisin in the Sun*, for example, suggests through the symbol of the furnishings on the stage a spirit of desperation associated with the ghetto image. In her *To Be Young Gifted and Black* Hansberry writes thus: "We must come out of the ghettos of America, because the ghettos are killing us; not only our dreams but our very bodies." The furnishings suggest two things: the struggle of the blacks and the deferred dreams. In addition, the image of the ghetto and the feeble plant
contribute, in terms of theatrical suggestiveness, the idea of deprivation, thwarted dreams and so on. These manipulations of the "tonal form" indicate how, like Shange who shapes tonal form in the choreopoem, *For Colored Girls*, Lorraine Hansberry not only portrays the spirit of survival of the blacks but also their movement towards something liberating and dynamic.

*A Raisin in the Sun*, although dismissed as assimilationist, projects a revealing portrait of the African-American family and its struggle for equality. In the words of Anne Cheney, *Raisin* not only stresses the importance of African roots, but also progresses into a "universal representation of all people's hopes, fears and dreams." In examining the importance of African roots, Hansberry not only anticipates the new thinking of the 60s but also resurrects the idea of the Harlem Renaissance. The very title of the play, derived from Langston Hughes, suggests the tensions and frustrations of the black man's and the black woman's existence by an evocation of the images of inevitable decay and deferred dreams. If Walter Lee represents the ambitions, frustrations, and at the same time, the dream of attaining equality with the whites by imitating their mode of social advancement, and thus ironically promotes the white racist cause, Beneatha's personal odyssey towards wholeness culminating in the African
dance introduces yet another tonal quality in the play whereby an establishment of kinship with African roots is suggested. Beneatha's intense awareness of her racial origins and her association with Asagai indicate, through her wearing of the African robes, how she steeped herself in the culture of her forbears. The nickname "Alaiyo" given to Beneatha is an indication that Hansberry's concern in this play is not so much with the poverty of the Youngers but with the need for spiritual replenishment and the return of dignity to the blacks. In a way, Asagai illustrates a concept (which gained momentum during Marcus Garvey's "Back to Africa" movement) by inculcating in Beneatha a growing awareness of the need to fight for black people's rights and for women's rights. He thus demonstrates to her the idea of black is beautiful. In fact, Asagai himself is not only a symbol of black struggle and freedom, but even more, a symbol of the oneness of suffering either in Africa or black America. Asagai's serving as a cultural conduit whereby he baptizes Beneatha in African history and mores shows yet another element of the African-American drama, employed in A Raisin in the Sun to some extent but utilized more fully as a dramatic device in The Drinking Gourd which belongs to the ritual tradition of African-American drama. One of the qualities of this tradition is that within the context of real and present time and place, the audience participate in the dramatic event by means of
their emphatic transportation to their roots. As against this dramatic device, the Euro-American tradition aims at creating, in a mimetic sense, an illusion of reality of time, place, and character where there is an architectural separation of actors from audience. The elements of the black ritual drama that are subtly interfused with the dramatic design of Hansberry's last plays celebrate a sense of community and fellowship which is one of the characteristics of a drama embodying a quest for identity. If Les Blancs examines the implications of the Mau Mau Revolution, The Drinking Gourd is an incisive indictment of American slavery which has proved itself to be an exploitative self-perpetuating system.

As in Soyinka's plays, in which the Yoruba myths offer a mytho-dramatic design, in Les Blancs the popular mythic symbolism of the hyenas and the elephants is used in order to highlight the idea of intrusion. The cause of total African self-rule and freedom is suggested by the theme of the Mau Mau Revolution which is treated in Ngugi's novels like Weep Not Child and plays like The Trial of Dedan Kimathi. Not only does Lorraine Hansberry use African myths to suggest the idea of rites of passage, but she also employs old folk tales in order to heighten the drama of revolution and change. In Les Blancs, Kumalo, the returned expatriate, and Tshembe, who finally recognizes the value of revolution, are in a way the two Kenyattas.
The Drinking Gourd shows the relentless greed and exploitation and unresponsiveness operating in the abuse of the system of slavery. The play is a costume drama which projects yet another aspect of not only the blackness but the universality of Hansberry. While the play takes its title from a Negro spiritual, it gives expression to Hansberry's view of the Slave South as dehumanizing both the black and the white with its characteristic capitalistic infrastructure. Through the portrayal of Hiram in this play, Hansberry seems to indicate that the insidious effects of slavery will be far reaching. In the final words of the play, the Soldier/Narrator says thus:

Slavery is beginning to cost this nation a lot. It has become a drag on the great industrial nation we are determined to become; it lags a full century behind the great American notion of one strong federal union which our eighteenth-century founders knew was the only way we could eventually become one of the powerful nations of the world ... It is possible that slavery might destroy itself - but it is more possible that it would destroy these United States first.10

The portrayal of Rissa in The Drinking Gourd shows how Hansberry breaks the mold shaped by southern attitudes
and manages to bring a new life to the cliché depiction of the black mother. Rissa flagrantly turns her back on Hiram in desperation and continues to minister to her blind son. This shows that Hansberry reverses the sacred image of the mother in this play and inspires her nevertheless with a motherly act of vengeance which sets her apart from the familiar archetype.

A play of ideas, The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window is a new theatrical experiment interweaving nevertheless the familiar constituent elements of Lorraine Hansberry's drama. The play challenges the apathy of the American intellectual. Set in a time of racial turmoil, it reflects a spirit of harmony and acceptance between blacks and whites and among peoples of varied background. The play is more or less in the main stream of contemporary drama. Relating itself to the American tradition at large and further locating itself within the tradition of Absurd drama, this play however reveals a typical attribute of Hansberry's work in general in its mixing of individual and social drama, European and African culture, realism and fantasy, drama and dance and music, and tragedy and comedy. There is the fantasy sequence in the play in which Sidney's wife Iris dances to banjo music.
Completed in 1962, Hansberry's most experimental piece *What Use Are Flowers?* is a fantasy about nuclear holocaust and the possibilities of survival. The play deals with the theme of civilizing children orphaned by nuclear holocaust. The play's stress on the educational theme links it up with the African tradition and shows that education is a redeeming, rejuvenating force contributing vitally not only to the expression of freedom but also to the restoration of humanity.

In late 1962, Lorraine Hansberry proposed a community theatre project for Harlem. In this prospectus for the John Brown Memorial Theatre of Harlem, she came out with the suggestion that this theatre should carve out the cultural heritage of the people by showing its inextricable links with African ancestry. At the same time, however, she suggested that this theatre should "readily, freely and with the spirit of creativity of all mankind, also utilize all and any forces of the western heritage of that same people in the arts." Hansberry's plays indeed reveal this assimilation in an abundant measure. In fact, the very act of naming a black community theatre after a white man emphasizes the consciously paradoxical nature of Hansberry's world view and art: she is a fighter for her race who insists on the oneness of the cause of humanity, a Pan-Africanist
who wishes to place the western heritage of African-Americans alongside the African heritage, and a dramatist who is both an artist and a propagandist.

Alice Childress's plays, which Genevieve Fabre places in the category of "ethnic theatre of black experience" as opposed to the militant theatre of protest, are a crucial link in the development of black women's playwriting. She incorporates in her plays the liturgy of the black church, traditional music, African mythology, folklore and fantasy, apart from experimenting with socio-political, romantic, biographical, historical, and feminist themes. A forerunner of Lorraine Hansberry, Sonia Sanchez, Martie Charles, Adrienne Kennedy, Ntozake Shange, and others, Childress has opened the door for other black women playwrights to make significant dramaturgical advances. It has been pointed out by Elizabeth Brown-Guillory that Childress, by her refusal to bow down before the pressures of commercialism and by her insistence on craft and integrity, has paved the way for significant and innovative contributions to black women playwriting in America. She provides the bread and song of the plays especially of Lorraine Hansberry and Ntozake Shange. Childress's sensitive treatment of the black male in search of his manhood reflects her vision that black men and women can become whole only when they join forces and resources as well. Unlike the
black male in search of his manhood is the black male "as a walking wounded." Here in this instance the black male struggles to free himself and others from oppressive forces. He possesses a positive sense of self and a strong sense of family togetherness which his African forbears brought with them to America. In short, this character is the opposite of the image of the incorrigible black beast that dominated the American stage for decades. The best example of the black male as a walking wounded is Hannibal in Hansberry's *The Drinking Gourd*. Hannibal refuses to accept slavery and makes a vehement pronouncement:

> And I tell you like I tell Coffin (the plantation Uncle Tom) -- I am the only kind of slave I could be -- a bad one! Every day that come and hour that pass that I got sense to make a half step do for a whole; every day that I can pretend sickness 'stead of health; to be stupid, 'stead of smart, lazy 'stead of quick -- I aims to do it. And the more pain it give your Marster and the more it cost him -- the more Hannibal be a man!

Hannibal embodies the survival spirit of blacks in America and shows Hansberry's perspective as societal and global. Hansberry once said that she was concerned that her plays treat issues that were highly sociopolitical:
All art is ultimately social: that which agitates and that which prepares the mind for slumber... The writer is deceived who thinks he has some other choice. The question is not whether one will make a social statement in one's work -- but only what the statement will say, for if it says anything, it will be social.\textsuperscript{15}

Though Childress, Hansberry, and Shange have created credible images of black men, the females in their plays are more subtly delineated. These writers do not limit themselves to the deity or slut syndrome. They offer a special view of black women. It is from this point of view that there is a special justification for studying black women writers:

What is most important about the black woman writer is her special and unique vision of the black woman... One of the main preoccupations of the black woman writer has been the black woman herself -- her aspirations, her conflicts, her relationships to her men and her children, her creativity. ... That these writers have firsthand knowledge of their subject ought to be enough to command attention.\textsuperscript{16}

One image which dominates the plays of Childress, Hansberry, and Shange is the evolving black woman. Rissa in \textit{The Drinking Gourd} by moving from mammy to militancy
epitomizes the evolving black woman. In Shange's *For Colored Girls* the women are preoccupied with themselves because they have been disappointed by the men who have come into their lives. The image of the black woman in Childress's *Wine in the Wilderness* and Shange's *For colored Girls* is that of one who has to "sing the blues" before she is able to make some sense of the chaos in her life. Though the abandoned black in Childress and Shange bewail their loss, emphasis is placed on their ability to survive in a world where they are forced to care for themselves. Shange's feminist play *For Colored Girls* is different from either a Childress play or a Hansberry play. It advocates that women band together to shield themselves from the enemy men are. The evolving black women in Shange's *For Colored Girls* speak of the brutal treatment accorded to them by men. These women have been knocked down, but they search for a way to hold on to their sanity and to improve their lifestyles. They show the spirit of survival, realize their responsibility to themselves, as lady in blue demonstrates. As Elizabeth Brown-Guillory observes, "Shange's women are not whole; they are bruised women in transition who are apparently forming another subculture."

Alice Childress, Lorraine Hansberry, and Ntozake Shange are black women playwrights who do not create images which represent the majority of blacks. They do however present
a vital slice of life and capture a multitude of images of the blacks.

In order to develop the artistic and ideological basis for a new drama, black theatre establishes strong ties with African-American culture. Combining the three principles of drum, song, and dance, the theatre associates textual with scenic writing. From the Harlem Renaissance to the sixties, theoreticians of black art have always envisaged a relation between theatre and culture. The theatre has been viewed as a means to rediscover, recapture, and reinvent the cultural heritage. It is a space where people can be confronted by their history and antiquity. In dramatic discourse, the past becomes a syntagmatic element of the total history of African-Americans. The theatre shows blacks as a people and a nation. Since a recapturing of cultural consciousness is at the core of black ideology, models for forging a new theatrical language are sought within that very culture. Certain elements borrowed from the oral, musical, or religious traditions or from rituals of daily life are integrated into the drama as a morphology, a structure or a sign system. These elements codify the aesthetics of the theatre and create a new art form which goes beyond the dictates of Western dramaturgy. Apart from incorporating the oral tradition which holds a prominent place in African-American culture and which transmits a sense of the
collective consciousness, music and ritual are employed in order to suggest a sense of community and in order to create an "atmosphere" in the theatre suffused in black heritage and identity. Just as religious dance came to serve a secular function, secular dance too preserves its ritualistic character. The incorporation of dance into drama, the theatricality, the visual effect and the symbolic force it represents shows how in African-American drama the element of dance blurs the distinction between spectators and participants. One of the important elements in the plays of Ntozake Shange is its choreography. In drama, choreography can revive the principal moments in the history of the black nation: confrontation, encounter, dispersal, and resistance. The element of dance inspires the work of many theatrical groups. The most noteworthy direction has been taken by Gilbert Moses in Slave Ship and in the dramatizations of Ntozake Shange. The revolution in the black theatre in the sixties and the seventies has shown how the theatre postulates the existence of a community of experiences and becomes a space where they can be represented.

The theatre in the hands of Ntozake Shange views temporality as a double dimension. It refers to the individual's moment of psychological commitment and to the group's historical and mythical past.
In *For Colored Girls*, Shange expresses her commitment to women and children who are abused every year. Unequivocally this work presents men as the instruments of pain. One important symbol in *For Colored Girls* that legitimizes women's vision is the array of colours worn by the seven women. The rainbow myth illustrates that these coloured women are moving towards something good, liberating, and dynamic. Dancing is another symbol that shapes the tonal form of the choreopoem. It launches Shange's characters on self-discovery, initiation into womanhood. Shange writes that "With dance I discovered my body more intimately than I had imagined possible ... pulling ancient trampled spirits out of present tense Afro-American dance."18

Shange carved out for herself a place in American theatre history when she successfully "broadened and redefined American theatre to include the choreopoem as an acceptable, legitimate dramatic form. Not only did she popularize the choreopoem, but she brought to the American theater an art that is undeniably African. Shange's choreopoem, like African theatre is comprised of chants, poetry, dance and rituals."19 Bigsby acknowledges Shange's contribution to the theatre when he says that in *For Colored Girls* Shange presents "a collage of experiences ranging from love to abortion to rape and from ecstasy to despair."20 Feminist poemplays, Shange's pieces
inform women that they have a responsibility to love themselves and each other enough to resist oppression. Her female characters battle with the incomprehensible dilemma of living in a world where being female and coloured makes them twice oppressed. Convinced that American patriarchy often denies injustices committed against women, Shange sketches the lives of often mutilated heroines who band together to provide each other with the courage to become self-sufficient and self-loving to survive. Thus Shange portrays the black spirit of survival and quest for identity in her plays. Shange's trilogy, Three Pieces, explores the notion that a person's identity is not defined by things but by a belief in self. A Photograph: Lovers in Motion presents this theme through the central character, Sean David, a struggling novice photographer involved with a complex triad of women. Spell++7 celebrates the joy, pride and horror of blackness. Shange's most experimental dramatic piece Boogie Woogie Landscapes offers a fine blend of surrealism and expressionism to create a fantasy world in which Layla and the other nightlife companions sing, dance, and share emotional moments of being black and female in America. Employing feminist rhetoric and evocative poetry and blending music, dance, and poetry to express the misery and ecstasy of being female and black in America, Shange is one of the finest of African-American playwrights who has forged a new dramatic idiom to capture the nuances of being
black in America. With her keen ear for black American idioms recreated in the rhythms and nuances of the language of her characters, Shange recalls some of the salient features of the American theatre and establishes a vital link between African theatre and the African-American experience. Her interest is in the poetry of the moment and the emotional and aesthetic impact of a character. In her search for the African-American theatre that suits her dramatic concerns and her quest for identity, Shange offers a recreation in the theatre of an African-American language which expresses the self-conscious feelings of the community creating an African-American image in its essential truth. In her quest for the African theatre that suits her genius, she uses the theatre, as Alvin Goldfarb and Edwin Wilson point out, not in the European theatrical manner of entertaining and teaching but in the African model of "embodying, affecting, and being." Shange insists that her background shaped her view of the interconnectedness of African-Americans and other people of colour:

My parents have always been especially involved in all kinds of Third World culture ... I was always aware that there were different kinds of black people all over the world because my father had friends from virtually all of the colonized French --, Spanish --, and English --
speaking countries. So I knew I wasn't on this planet by myself. I had some connection with other people.\textsuperscript{22}

Informed by an African world view, Shange reveals a preoccupation with blacks as an integral part of the African continuum.

Lorraine Hansberry and Ntozake Shange, along with Alice Childress, have carved out a unique place for themselves on the American stage by being vital links in the evolution of black theatre in America. If Hansberry's 1959 Broadway debut of \textit{A Raisin in the Sun} made black theatre fashionable and marketable, Shange's explosive choreopoem of 1976 broadened black theatre to include a quest for sexual, racial and social identity. The dramaturgical advances made by the three playwrights Childress, Hansberry, and Shange are "as interdependent as African-Americans are to their African counterparts." This is a subject prominent in the works of all the three women. And especially in Hansberry and Shange's dramaturgy it adds an intra-mural quality.