CHAPTER 2

UNVEILING THE VEILED INTERIOR: THE GROWTH OF EXPRESSIONISTIC IMAGES IN KENNEDY'S PLAYS

2.1 INTRODUCTION: THE TRANSITION FROM THE EXTERIOR TO THE INTERIOR LANDSCAPES

The transition in art from the nineteenth century to twentieth century is marked by various 'isms' such as impressionism, symbolism, neo-romanticism, futurism, surrealism, and expressionism. All these innovative 'isms' reveal the artists' imaginative calibre and their creative power. Of all these 'isms', expressionism attempts to express an inner reality by creating the essence, rather than the appearance of reality, through the use of non-realistic symbols and the juxtaposition of ordinarily non-related realistic symbols. The characteristic artistic skill of Adrienne Kennedy finds expression in all of the expressionistic techniques, which she effectively adopts in delineating the inner workings of her characters.

Expressionism was a twentieth century movement and it was started in Germany in 1910 and it flourished till 1924, during and after the First World War. According to Ian Ousby, the term was first applied to certain methods in painting that were followed by the French painter Julien Auguste Herve in 1901. Herve used the term expressionism to distinguish his painting from other paintings that were mainly impressionistic in style. Impressionistic techniques are explained in detail, later in this chapter. The term 'expressionism' was not in common use for several years. At first, in painting, it attempted to denote visual marks of art expressing the psyche or the inner turmoil of the artist rather than to represent the external features conventionally
and objectively. Soon the term was also used with reference to literature, music and architecture. Expressionistic writers and painters show reality distorted by an emotional or abnormal state of mind. According to R.S. Furnes (1972),

the dissolution of conventional form, the abstract use of colour, the primacy of powerful emotion - above all the turning away from mimesis herald a new consciousness and a new approach in painting, which literature was to follow.

The emphasis is more on new subjective visions and concerns for human life than on the naturalistic description of social and moral conditions. The inner vision, the psyche within the man becomes more powerful and subjective when they are represented through expressionistic techniques. According to Raymond Nelson (1979),

expressionism, it turns out, is characteristic of our age. It is marked by extreme emotion, by distortion and grotesqueness, by violent colour, line and contrast, although it takes many forms. It is marked by its extraordinary manic-depressive quality, vision of universal brotherhood alternating with the blackest despair. It is haunted by uncontrollable cries of pain and the subject matter of expressionist art thus tends to be shocking and depressive.

Expressionism is encapsulated in Malcolm Pasley's (1972) words when he observes that expressionism includes the various uses of anti-naturalistic or abstracting devices, symbolic picture-sequences, theme of spiritual regeneration and also an intense declamatory note. Expressionism, in dramatic art is an important technique that seeks to represent concretely on the stage what happens inside a character's mind in response to the external objects. It believes in distorting objects, exaggerating and breaking up time sequences. Expressionistic techniques are applied in drama to show effectively the troubled, sick or abnormal mind of a character rather than the physical state of his mind in a realistic or naturalistic way.
Naturalism, according to Benston (1976),

takes man to be a part and function of his environment and depicts him as a being who, instead of controlling concrete reality, is himself controlled and absorbed by it...all actions, decisions and feelings contain an element of the extraneous, something that does not originate in the subject and that makes man seem the unalterable product of a mindless and soulless reality. So long as Afro-American drama maintained naturalism as its dominant mode, then, it could do little more than express the 'plight' of black people.

The plight of Black people in all its stark realities finds better expression in African-American writings that draw liberally from modern techniques. These Black writings attempt to subvert the White hierarchical structures and pronounce a distinct discourse of Black experience. Black playwrights started taking up arms against the limitations of the theatrical mainstream and expunging the accepted forms of realism and naturalism.

The predominant works of Black playwrights like Baldwin, Bullins, Baraka and Kennedy mark a complete departure from naturalism to modern 'isms'. In order to unveil the plight of the Black people, contemporary Black dramatists make use of novel modes and put new life into the sterile form and experiment freely with all the salient features of drama. Their profound insight into the realities of life is revealed through their dramaturgy and interior vision. They attempt to explore the inner reality of Blackness, with a mixture of Black pride, culture, and the quest for identity through their independent use of images, metaphors and symbols. The deeper they delve into it, the wider its ramifications seem to stretch. As R.S.Fumes (1972) observes,

the growing independence of image, the absolute metaphor, the intense subjectivity of the writer and the probing of extreme psychological states- above all the artist as creator, as passionate centre of a whirling vortex: all this becomes more and more apparent.
Thus, expressionistic techniques serve the purpose of the Black writers to highlight the tragic history that binds them together. The study of expressionism is all the more fascinating, where its underlying innovative dramatic strategies, attempts to explore the inner realms of Black womanhood.

This chapter recounts a brief history of expressionism, as a movement and its significant influence upon important writers. Then follows an analysis of Kennedy’s impressive use of a variety of expressionistic devices such as symbols, images, metaphors, atmosphere, style of acting, plot, structure, setting, light, colour, language and characterization, in exploring the psyche of the suppressed Black women and their untold misery. The in-depth analysis of her experiments in select plays such as *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, *The Owl Answers*, *A Rat’s Mass*, *A Lesson in Dead Language*, *A Beast Story* and *A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White* establishes the fact that the highly shocking and startling impact of her plays is primarily due to the energetic and artistic use of these devices.

2.2 EXPRESSIONISM AND REALISM

Expressionism is different from realism and impressionism, though it is an extension of impressionism. The expressionists adopt the stream of consciousness method instead of the linear dramatic sequence of events. The reality of life becomes disjointed and scattered as in a dream, which represents the inner world. The expressionists attempt to explore the inner mind without the externals and thus the subconscious becomes the reality. But in a ‘realistic’ and ‘naturalistic’ play, speech and action are used to suggest the working of the mind of a character. But the expressionists feel that no human being wants to be seen or exposed for what he really is. This is the major reason why an expressionistic playwright depends on the understanding of human psyche in all its informal moments. In realism, the emphasis is primarily on characters and the social environment they are living in, while in expressionism, importance is given to the use of symbols, metaphors, strange images,
fables, allegories and allusions in order to probe the inner soul of a character. In J.W.Marriott's (James, 1984) words,

a realistic play is based upon superficial observation of detail – a mere photograph; but expressionism has been likened to an x-ray photograph.

2.3 EXPRESSIONISM AND IMPRESSIONISM

Expressionism has also been associated with other avant-garde arts and movements like surrealism, cubism, futurism, epic drama and the theatre of the Absurd. Expressionism is an extension of impressionism as it emphasizes the creator's mood and attitude. According to Gassner and Quinn (1970),

impressionism is an account of how the world of reality affects the describer. It is thus a subjective account of an objective perception. Expressionism, on the other hand, is an imposition on the outside world of the describer's concept of it. It is thus a subjective account of a subjective perception.

It seeks to replace passive observation with active expression, aesthetic appreciation with ethical engagement, beauty with intense distortion, dissonance and ugliness with strong emotion, terror, agony, anguish, violence, fury and death.

The expressionistic writer takes the whole human race and the entire cosmos as his province, but he shows it to us as it is seen through the eyes of one character, invariably an alter ego for himself (Gassner and Quinn, 1970).

Thus, for the expressionist the world is crammed into the compass of one man's vision and it is completely subjective. It becomes deliberately and purposefully distorted. This subjective distortion always emerges in the form of protest and rebellion.
2.4 EXPRESSIONISM: A FORM OF PROTEST

Expressionism in literature started as a revolt against materialism, bourgeois prosperity, rapid mechanization and the First World War. In forging a drama of social protest, the expressionistic writers attempted to convey their revolutionary ideas through a new style. In Germany, the younger generation of writers were dissatisfied with the narrow-minded and patriarchal concepts of the political and social set-up. So the early expressionistic plays were protest plays against family relationships, which curbed the development of an individual. Their concern was with general truths rather than with particular situations and the emphasis was not laid on the outer world of vision but on a man’s inner mental state. There is a single hero or heroine in an expressionist work around whom the action revolves and the other characters in it serve as subordinates to him or her. The agitated and furious mind of the protagonist’s psyche is explored in depth and often delineated as violent, frustrated, or discontented. This results in the chief characteristics of expressionism being

intense subjectivism, the externalization of the writer’s inner feelings and an atmosphere of violence directed largely against the family as the basis of society (Gassner and Quinn, 1970).

2.5 EARLY EXPRESSIONIST DRAMATISTS

2.5.1 German expressionists

The chief characteristics of expressionism are identified in the plays of Buchner, Strindberg and Frank Wedekind who are real masters of expressionistic writing. Strindberg’s A Dream Play, as the title itself exemplifies the richness of expressionistic techniques. The whole play takes place in the realm of dream and a viewer can understand the plot if only he becomes a dreamer himself. Like a typical expressionistic drama, the atmosphere of this play is shadowy, hallucinatory and surrealistic. Besides Strindberg, Frank Wedekind is also a very important forerunner of expressionist drama. He conceives of his works as a criticism of society. The
puppet-like style of acting, which he develops, exercised a profound influence upon later expressionists. George Kaiser, a well-known German playwright is another expressionistic dramatist as is evident from almost all his twenty-four plays. August Stramon, Walter Hasenclever, Fritz Von Unruh and Paul Kornfeld are some of the other important early German expressionists. Ernst Toller is different from other expressionist dramatists in that he is hopeful that mankind has the potential to redeem itself. His plays examine in detail the condition prevailing in the society of his time.

2.5.2 Significant influences

The expressionistic style has been adopted by many well-known writers of the twentieth century including Baudelaire, Dostoevsky, Nietzsche and Lacan. The psychoanalytic theories and therapy of Freud and Jung helped the expressionists probe into the hidden realms of the human mind through the medium of theatre. William R.Elwood (Bryant Jackson, 1992) says,

in many ways the expressionist playwright and the theatre practitioner were producing on stage what Freud and Jung were proposing in psychology. Through therapy, Freud and Jung probed the unconscious mind for deeper levels of truth and meaning. The expressionist was producing such inquiry through the medium of the theatre.

The impact of the two World Wars and the sufferings of mankind have formed the subject content for many plays written during this period.

2.5.3 Early American expressionist writers

Eugene O'Neill is considered to be the father of expressionist drama in America. O'Neill shows himself as a psychologist in his earlier plays but his later
plays are expressions of social protest. Expressionism, according to O’Neill (Hirsch Foster, 1986),

tries to minimize everything on the stage that stands between the author and the audience. It strives to get the author talking directly to the audience.

The other expressionists who followed O’Neill are Elmer Rice, Arthur Miller, Thornton Wildes, Tennessee Williams, Kaufman, Connelly, Hart and Sean O’Casey. They use symbols, metaphors, images and irony to accomplish their aim. Distortion and exaggeration are the other techniques that they follow. In addition to these playwrights, the epic theatre of Bertolt Brecht stands out as one that has been directly influenced by expressionism.

2.5.4 Recent playwrights

Though expressionism was started in Germany and flourished over a period of fourteen years, expressionistic techniques hold their sway over the writings of playwrights of all ages all over the world. As J. L. Styan (1981) says,

if the original German expressionism, limited from the beginning by its nihilism, is now as dead in Europe and America as it is in Germany itself, expressionistic techniques are now part of the common pool from which many contemporary playwrights and directors draw.

Many recent eminent European and American dramatists like Jean Claude Van, Amiri Baraka, Edward Albee and Adrienne Kennedy have also adopted expressionistic techniques in their plays. They present tormented characters in a moribund culture, caught up in the network of alienation, racial discrimination, sexual harassment, poverty, deprivation and dreadful diseases. They unveil the predicament of these struggling souls as they suffer calamity upon calamity.
Contemporary Black women writers, who have been suffering for two centuries, attempt to represent their own sexuality, which becomes a struggle to claim and reclaim an empowering racial identity. Adrienne Kennedy, Ntozake Shange, Alice Childress and Lorraine Hansberry demonstrate an affinity in the delineation of the coloured woman’s psychic problems. Kennedy focuses her main attention on this aspect and she delineates the way acute cultural conflicts occur within the inner world of the protagonists stemming from the issues of racism, miscegenation, and gender discrimination. Her pen strongly delineates the psychic break down of her Black protagonists who fail in their attempts to find the meaning of their survival. This chapter’s aim is to analyse Kennedy’s plays, especially in relation to racial discrimination and the fractured psyche of the characters resulting from the identity crisis within the context of White oppression. She focuses her attention on the different choices made by her Black characters to escape the tyranny of racial injustice and gender discrimination. Her characters are doubly vulnerable because of being both Black and female.

2.6 ADRIENNE KENNEDY: AN EXPRESSIONIST

Kennedy is regarded as one of the boldest artists among the playwrights of the twentieth century. Her plays, according to Feingold (1995),

are the songs of a naked soul in pain, and her expressionist tactic is to let the pain come at you unmediated. The strategies she employs to convey her pain always strike you as products of an inner need, never as devices consciously cooked up.

She is highly innovative and provocative in the treatment of prohibited themes, strange images, symbols, allusions, and metaphors. As Robert L.Tener (1975) puts it,

...her dramas are rich collages of ambiguities, metaphors, poetic insights, literary references, and mythic associations, all of which provide a dramatic form unique to Miss Kennedy.
She experiments quite successfully with the expressionistic devices to probe into the inner mind of her paranoiac characters. Expressionism enables Kennedy to depict the inner realities of her personages. The emphasis shifts from the external to the inner world, the action moves backward and forward freely in space and time in harmony with the thought processes of the character concerned. There is a deeper and deeper probing of the subconscious; action is increasingly internalised and what goes within the soul becomes more important than the external action. Kennedy (Lehman, 1977) has stated, “I believe in listening to one’s inner voices”. Her experimental plays reveal her expressionistic or subjective explorations of the Black woman’s psyche. Benston (1976) observes,

the overall effect of her oeuvre from *Funnyhouse of a Negro* (1962) to *Sun* (1970), is one of mystery, mythic fantasy, and poetic ambiguity. The growing interest in and appreciation of her work among Afro-American artists and critics attest to their increased acceptance of expressionistic, or ‘subjective’ explorations of the black psyche.

Although Kennedy was born eleven years after the German expressionist movement had given way to other movements in the history of the world of arts, Kennedy’s plays are very rich in expressionistic qualities. They help her externalise effectively the internal problems of the fragmented psyche of her characters. William R. Elwood (Bryant Jackson, 1992) writes,

Kennedy’s works appear to take the seemingly fragmented quest for emotional truth to a new level of rhythmic presentation. Where the German expressionists disassemble the materialist reality, Kennedy transmutes it through rhythm.

So Kennedy’s handling of the expressionistic elements in her plays deserves scholarly attention.
2.7 EXPRESSIONISTIC TECHNIQUES: AN ANALYSIS

2.7.1 Nightmarish atmosphere

As has already been stated, the atmosphere in an expressionistic play is
dreamlike, hallucinatory and nightmarish and is often supported by dull colours,
unreal lighting, imaginary settings, visual images and strange symbols. The use of
characteristic pause or silence is
carefully placed in counterpoint with speech and held for an
abnormal length of time, also contributed to the dream effect (Styan,

In Kennedy's masterpiece, Funnyhouse of a Negro, the world of nightmare is tangibly
felt through terrifying images such as unreal light, dark monumental bed, chandelier
red walls, flying ravens, cheap curtain material and cheap casket:

...the rest of the stage is in unnatural BLACK NESS. The quality of
the white light is unreal and ugly (Kennedy, 1988:2).

These images form the substratum for the nightmarish experiences the characters will
undergo. The whimsical world is created at the beginning of the play itself. The very
first line of the play is described thus:

before the closed curtain A WOMAN dressed in a white nightgown
walks across the stage carrying before her a baldhead...As she
moves, she gives the effect of one in a dream (Kennedy, 1988:2).

The hallucinatory effect of the somnambulating figure, walking with a
baldhead continues till the end of the play. Somnambulism becomes a symbol for a
perverted mind. The great Swiss psychologist and psychoanalyst, Carl Jung, has had
an immense influence on modern thinking about the human mind. As he (1970) says,
detailed records of a case of somnambulism...with powers of a spiritualistic medium, are presented, whose family had exhibited symptoms of eccentricity and personality disorders. Records of family members reveal waking hallucinations, eccentric and bizarre behavior, personality aberrations, extended trance states, and varying degrees of neurotic and psychopathic behavior.

Sarah’s eccentric behaviour is revealed through her somnambulating mother figure at the very beginning of the play. These unreal images symbolize the complicated mind of the heroine, Sarah, and prepare the audience for the suicide that occurs at the end of the play. The prolonged chimerical quality from the beginning of the play represents how Sarah’s psyche,

is a faceless, dark character with a hangman’s rope about her neck and red blood on the part that would be her face (Kennedy, 1988:4).

The tragic fate of hers is apparent through the fragmented fantasies of Sarah who is preoccupied with the innumerable problems of love and identity, confused relations with parents, the meaning of life, the ambiguity of the world, the meaning of truth and her relation to God.

The real and unreal elements are conjoined in The Owl Answers and this contributes to the frenetic quality of the play. The ambience is sombre in the description of the scene itself. It “is a New York subway is the Tower of London is a Harlem hotel room is St. Peter’s” (Kennedy, 1988:26). The use of powerful images such as owls, birds, dark sky, High Altar and strange ceremonies intensifies the gloominess further. With the amalgamation of these emblems, says Benston (1976),

of seen and unseen, of natural and fantastic, of human and divine, ‘action’ comes to have the force of symbol, and conversely symbol assumes sometimes the character of action.
The agitated mind of Clara is distinctly identified from the beginning of the play, she will pick them (notebooks) up, glance frenziedly at a page from a notebook, be distracted, place the notebooks in a disorderly pile. Drop them again, etc (Kennedy, 1988:26).

The title itself suggests the capricious world as in the case of A Rat’s Mass. The milieu is hallucinatory with the horrifying images of dying babies, screaming girls, dark sun, red carpet and summer dull lights. Together these images produce a chilling effect on the minds of the spectators. To quote from the text,

...within our room I see our dying baby, Nazis, screaming girls and cursing boys, empty swings, a dark sun. There are worms in the attic beams. They scream and say we are damned. I see dying and grey cats walking (Kennedy, 1988:56).

The description of the main characters, Sister Rat and Brother Rat, is weird,

BROTHER RAT has a rat’s head, a human body, a tail. SISTER RAT has a rat’s belly, human head, a tail (Kennedy, 1988:55).

Though the setting of the play A Lesson in Dead Language is in an ordinary Latin classroom, the atmosphere of the play is dreamlike as in her other plays. The appearance of the teacher, White Dog, seven girls as Pupils, statues of Jesus, the Shepherd, Joseph, Mary, and the blackboard provide the fictitious atmosphere. The play soars to a frenetic pitch when Kennedy describes the seven students as, “They each have a great circle of blood on the back of their dresses”(Kennedy, 1988: 49).

The setting for A Beast Story takes place in a gloomy house that is fused with bleak landscapes of monsters, apparitions and nightmares. The opening lines of the play portray the murky milieu. The dramatist describes the Beast family thus:

ty (Beast family) perhaps could an artificial pallor or perhaps artificially pale eyes, but it should be subtle (Kennedy, 1974:191).
Even the outside atmosphere changes with the death of Dead Human,

now the sky above our house is blue, three robins with red chests appear on the horizon. All is warm and sunlit. Strange bright sunlight, then darkness (Kennedy, 1974:201).

The floating images, dim room, yellowed wallpaper and the gloomy houses serve the purpose of creating a nightmarish setting. The same illusory environment is created by the conglomeration of real and unreal cinematic backgrounds in *A Movie Star has to Star in Black and White*.

### 2.7.2 Illusory settings

The settings in the expressionistic plays introduce and develop the themes of the plays and are highly unconventional. The decoration is made up of strange shapes and colours. Kennedy has abandoned the realistic and traditional setting in her plays to allow her paranoid characters to move about in a non-realistic way. The settings include funnyhouse, owlhouse, rat hole, insane asylums, cages in a zoo, gates of a palace, prison and classrooms where the heroines are imprisoned. The setting of *Funnyhouse of a Negro* resembles that of an amusement park in Cleveland, Ohio (Betsko, 1987). The scene resembles the familiar setting of Edgar Allan Poe’s poems. The curtain is of cheap satin and it looks as if rats have gnawed at it. The setting of the play is the Queen’s chamber that consists of a dark monumental bed resembling an ebony tomb and a dark chandelier with candles. The play describes it thus,

dark monumental bed resembling an ebony tomb, a low, dark chandelier with candles, and wine-coloured walls. Flying about are great black *RAVENS...* On the white pillow of her bed is a dark, indistinguishable object (Kennedy, 1988:2).

Thus, the location includes funnyhouse, the Queen’s chamber, the student Sarah’s room in a boarding house, the chandelier ballroom of the Duchess and the various
jungle revealing various layers of the heroine’s consciousness. The scene itself is highly suggestive of the fact that a dream is commencing.

The decoration and the lights of Kennedy’s plays are dull and somnolent, and are so engineered to lay bare the inner states of the character’s minds. The light changes from brightness to darkness in The Owl Answers indicating the dying condition of the desperate heroine. Styan (1981) observes,

...settings are virtually abstract and unlocalized, suggesting a bad dream. The properties are few and symbolic.

A Rat’s Mass is set in the rat’s house, in the imagination of the rat siblings. Brother Rat acts and thinks like a rat and Sister Rat is a passive and submissive emblem of rathood, “The rat’s house consists of a red carpet runner and candles. The light is the light of the end of a summer day”(Kennedy, 1988:55). The location of A Lesson in Dead Language is an ordinary Latin classroom with a White Dog as teacher and seven girls as pupils. The room is occupied with the statues of “Jesus, Joseph, Mary, two Wise Men and a shepherd (are) on a ridge around the room”(Kennedy, 1988:47). In A Movie Star has to Star in Black and White, the setting is the fantasy world of the three popular English movies as well as heroine Clara’s room and hospital room, while the play A Beast Story is placed simultaneously in Beast Man’s room, Beast Girl’s room and Beast Woman’s room as in The Owl Answers.

2.7.3 Non-linear plot and structure

2.7.3.1 Disjointed parts

The plot and structure of an expressionist play tend to be disjointed and broken into episodes, incidents and tableaux. Instead of a dramatic sequence of events, the plot is portrayed through stream of consciousness techniques. The surface of life is disjointed, scattered as in a dream, which symbolizes the inner realm, lying beneath the surface. Scenes are often brief, and sometimes, without time-sequence. They have
neither order nor unity. They alternate between reality and illusion. Kennedy’s short and one-act plays are disorderly and disjointed pieces of exploration of the psyche. Instead of the conventional dramatic conflict, the inner turmoil of the protagonist unfolds itself in a sequence of dramatic statements made by the character, a dreamer. The story of her plays is usually made explicit by the various utterances of her heroines. It is never enacted in the theatrical sense. Her plays are about the Black girl’s struggle to move away from the unbearable psychological stress of her plight. Many of Kennedy’s plays are conceived in what Paul Carter (1974) calls, the ‘Kuntu form’. Kuntu drama is the concept of African continuum that is mainly dependent on the beliefs, sentiments and concepts of Blackhood of the Black consciousness. There is not much room for suspense and plot in the play and the question of what will happen next does not bother the audience as the action is pieced from the past, present and future. For an instance, Clara is simultaneously imprisoned in the Tower of London, is sitting in a subway train and in a hotel room with a Negro man. Clara shares affinity with Sarah of *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, where the frustrated mulatto dwells with multiple personalities and when the conflict between her various selves forms the narrative mode of the play. It is highly interesting to analyse the different forms of structure that lead the protagonists to undertake their individuation process. The individuation process becomes an important feature in Black plays.

### 2.7.3.2 Individuation process

Many writers have followed different patterns to demonstrate the individuation process of their characters in their attempt to crush the sense of emptiness within themselves. The individuation process is based on the structure of a play. It is signified as a process of self awakening or spiritual realization, thereby fighting against the obstacles that bind their existence. This journey of an individual in search of his identity or selfhood to become a whole or enriched man is strongly linked with the dramatic structure. The structure forms the dramatic action of a play. Classical playwrights like Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and Aristophanes have
experimented with the structural organisation of a play. The history of drama reveals us the fact that revolutionary changes have been made in the dramatic structure of the play, for instance, from the miracle or mystery play to the morality play and then to the interlude or non-religious plays. Structural forms have changed down the centuries from Shakespeare to Albee, Baraka and Kennedy to cater to the tastes of spectators. Shakespeare has followed the Aristotelian rule of dramatic structure—exposition, rising action, climax, falling action and catastrophe. In this context, Longman (1986) says,

for several centuries the five-act structure was regarded as essential. For much of the present century, the three-act play has been the norm, recently replaced by the two-act structure.

Carol Pearson and Katherine Pope have, in their work, *The Female Hero in American and British Literature* (1981) categorized the odyssey of an individual as—departure, initiation and return of the individual.

2.7.3.3 Transformation from conventional to unconventional

According to J. Hunter (1974), the aim of the structure of a play is to reveal its inner meaning or the thoughts of a writer. He says that the structure permits playwrights to express different kinds of subjects like justice, freedom, love, beauty, peace, fame, fortune, generosity, selfishness, economy, marriage, sex and larceny. In his treatise, *How Plays are Made*, Stuart Griffiths (1982) states that the structure of the play is built upon action, tension and characters. Raymond Hull (1983) in his *How to Write a Play* argues that the structure of a play is dependent upon six important "Cs": conflict, characters, complications, crisis, catastrophe, and conclusion. Longman (1986) in *Composing Drama for Stage and Screen* affirms that the structure of a drama is shaped by different phases such as precipitating context, the emergence of the driving force, resistance, crux and denouement. Freytag’s (1972) ‘Pyramid’ dramatic structure is akin to the concepts of the writers mentioned above. His Pyramid dramatic form comprises epitasis or rising action, tragic force or climax and catastrophe or falling
action. The American theatre has also been receiving the elements of African tradition and culture from the writers like Soyinka and Achebe. The plays are replete with the accretion of African songs, dance, drums, rituals, masks, chants and music. So, whatever may be the terms assigned to build up the structure of a play, the play should be what Longman (1986) regards as, "...a coherence, a system of relative values, by which the audience knows what has imported and what does not".

2.7.3.4 The quest for self-image through various stages

The protagonists in American fiction and plays set out on their quest for self-identity in which they are spiritually changed or purified and return to society as complete human beings. Brown Guillory (1988) has conceptualized a man’s process of individuation through six stages: koinonia, logus, metanoia, kerygma, didache and eucharistia; this is akin to Freytaj’s (1972) Pyramidal delineation of dramatic structure. The pyramid is so placed that the upward slope of the pyramid forms the rising action. The downward slope refers to the falling action and resolution. The apex of the pyramid denotes the climax of the action.

This rite of passage from innocence to experience is subtly visible in all the creative African-American writers like Baraka, Bullins, Childress, Hansberry and Shange, who attempt to delineate an individual odyssey to unveil the meaning and purpose of the hero or heroine’s existence. Though African-American women dramatists like Childress, Hansberry, and Shange have followed the traditional and conventional rules of structure to portray the Black experience, Kennedy, a provocative and innovative playwright, challenges the African-American theatre with her experiments in all the dramatic devices of a drama. She redefines and deconstructs the conventions, rituals, traditions and myths. Kerr (1960) states that every young playwright “is obliged to invent his own form”, and Kennedy lives up to that model.
The process of individuation is examined with the structural form as it is inextricably correlated with African-American traditions and rituals. A Black woman's tiresome odyssey in the process of individuation is analysed through various stages of psychological growth. The growth of each stage, as Guillory (1988) points out,

is a completion of the play. Parallels can be drawn between the stages of growth and the progression through the phases of exposition, complication and resolution. The progression, however, is undeniably linked to Afro-American struggle for survival and wholeness.

2.7.3.5 Various passages: from innocence to experience

Koinonia means fellowship. It is deeply and inextricably linked with the family experiences, sharing important events or incidents in life. It acts as a buttress to assert one's personal image positively. In other words, it is the beginning of a person's life. It is a state of innocence. The second stage is logus. It brings with it confusion and doubt regarding one's very existence. The racial atmosphere shocks the protagonist as she sets out to encounter outer reality. It refers to the loss of innocence. As Lucius Guillory (1985) argues, logus is a testing period, "which determines if a person can withstand the subtle and overt racist-based derision". It is the intense pain that a Black man or Black woman feels as he or she is victimized because of the colour of the skin. The third stage is metanoia. It refers to the quest to find the meaning and purpose of an existence and it is turning away or turning around from confusion or doubt or frustration. This stage occurs as Reverend Victor Cohea (1985) observes, "when the person discovers that the 'nigger moment' was a hoax...that he or she is a worthy human being deserving of equitable treatment".

The protagonist is compelled or forced to speak about her inner self in the next stage of the psyche's growth, which is Kerygma. It is a stage of the "slaying of the dragon" as it is explained in Joseph Campbell's (1973) study in The Hero with a
Thousand Faces. It also signifies the verbal or physical explosion of the character. She is dragged into that situation because, in the words of Carol S. Pearson (1981), “she is female, black or poor, is almost always a revolutionary”. The summation of the whole message follows the next stage after kerygma. The fifth stage, didache, holds the in-depth message which the protagonist conveys (as a mouth-piece) for the cause of womanhood and Blackhood. This message serves as a catalyst, as Brown Guillory (1988) views, “for those who have sat in judgement and catapults the heroine into the final stage” of the psyche’s growth in the individuation process. The final stage is eucharistia in which the inner soul of the protagonist unites with the outward community. It is a state of peace and full life. This wholeness or completeness that the heroine experiences in her inner realm supports her to build up a family, whether “it is a consanguineous or spiritual one, that has been torn apart” (Guillory, 1988). In many cases, the protagonist reunites with her family or the community or with the loved ones. Guillory (1988) states that it is a grand celebration of the self, life and community for its wholeness and strength.

2.7.3.6 Trapped in the ‘Nigger moment’

Kennedy’s plays are strictly complex psycho plays and the characters are emotionally trapped in mental conflicts. It is represented by koinonia and logus. Koinonia in Kennedy’s plays is an imaginary world created by an individual. It is built up to escape from the logus of where she is victimized. Her dream world is an idealized version of reality and finally leads to ultimate destruction or annihilation. There is no metanoia or kerygma in the plays as she is still caught in the net of ‘nigger moment’ in which her battles become futile. The final stage is not a celebration of the self but the funeral of the self. Her characters meet their end in different ways as they are unable to find their selves’ wholeness. Even though Kennedy is aware of the fact that “being ‘discovered’ seemed to be something necessary for happiness” (Kennedy, 1987:44), she never allows her heroines to do so. For an example, A Lesson in Dead
Language deals with the theme of bleeding as it is recognized, in Genevieve Fabre's (1983) words as a fact of life that is not only the symbol of the female but the sign of sexual games that end in death.

A Rat's Mass is a parody of Holy Mass which is also abstract and revolves around the theme of incest committed by the rat siblings with the White girl, Rosemary. The sense of shame and guilt haunts the minds of the rat siblings and they nostalgically remember their blissful days with Jesus, Joseph and Mary. They beg Rosemary, the representative of White religion, to redeem them. But, she is callous to their anguish and mercilessly hands them over to the Nazi persecutors. They are trapped in the hapless moments in the situation controlled by Rosemary.

The Beast Woman In A Beast Story attempts to prevent her daughter Beast Girl from entering the passage of womanhood through sexual initiation, as she is obsessed with her own pain. She keeps an axe as a strong weapon to protect her daughter from male intruders. She finds solace when the Beast Girl,

...pulls down the ax...swings She swung the axe upon him. He tries to kiss her but falls dead in his blood (Kennedy, 1974:201).

The lingering anxiety of Clara to become an established writer forms the narrative mode of the play A Movie Star has to Star in Black and White. Her husband, Eddie rejects her writing as an obsession and dismisses it as unrealistic. He expects her to take up the role of a good and understanding housewife. Her mother is also not interested in her daughter's creative writing. Clara exclaims desperately,

I can't sleep. My head is always full of thoughts night and day. I feel so nervous. Sometimes I hardly hear what people are saying (Kennedy, 1988:82).
2.7.4 Characterization

Characterization is the fundamental factor of any play and the characters are the agents who lead the action of the play. Action moulds the character in the traditional form of the theatre. Characters can be classified into two groups, flat and round. The first category can be defined as comprising the ones who remain static throughout the progress of whole dramatic action, detached from moral, physical, spiritual or psychological growth that takes place in the entire course of the play. The second group, round characters, can be identified as they develop psychologically or morally with the development of the action thereby presenting a dynamic, whole and complete presentation. Usually in an expressionistic play, the number of characters is cut down to the minimum. Attention is focussed on the inner reality of the central figure and the other characters are not individualised. They simply serve as a background and sometimes as a chorus of voices.

Kennedy’s characters are not marked as round characters as they do not grow emotionally or morally during the course of the plays. They are isolated in a psychological miasma. The excruciating and appalling plight of the characters retards the individuation process. The secondary characters exacerbate the pain of the tormented psyche of her protagonists. They are flat characters as they represent only one aspect of their personality, which threatens to swallow the very self of the individual. It is important to mention the fact that Kennedy’s characters appear as though in fairy tales. They move as if they are in a fantasy world. It reveals her fascination for fairy tales. She says,

there was a journey in life that dark and light, good and evil, and people were creatures of extreme love, hatred, fear, ambition and vengefulness, but there was a reward if one kept seeing the light and hoping...Stories of people could hypnotize (Kennedy, 1987: 8).

Kennedy’s plays are built upon her own personal experiences or those of her family members. She names some of the characters as members of her family, but
they are also a composite of historical, mythical and living personalities. A character of hers may be either a composite character with various selves or a multiple character with several names to represent the various features of the personality. Thus, her characters are created metaphorically. They are desperately in search of their lives, love, religion, mother or father figure, fulfilment and harmony. Werner Sollars (1991) glorifies Kennedy's plays as

the condensed expression of a theatrical mind that has integrated the diverse autobiographical elements of family history, the tragic paradox of American race relations in the twentieth century, and the impulses of popular culture as well as of high modernism, of European as well as African art, into an effective aesthetic form.

Kennedy's characters are unable to reconcile with their present problems; they become half-mad and their hopes are in ruins. Kennedy's grandfather is a White and wealthy farmer, a fact which has affected the direction of her work. Kennedy has also seen a victim of racial discrimination in her school days and in her college life. She (Betsko, 1987) says, "There was a lot of competition between blacks and whites". Her bitter experiences in college are revealed in *The Ohio State Murders*. Many of the hostels were segregated and the White students did not interact with the Black students. This experience has left an unchangeable impression upon her sensibility and produced a deep hatred for racism which later found an outlet in her plays. Her suppressed and pent up emotions burst out through the voices of her characters. As has already been mentioned, Kennedy has a habit of using personal experience as metaphor rather literary examples. The name of a person in her family or her relative may be assigned to a character who is a composite of mystical or historical figures. Sarah in *Funnyhouse of a Negro* and Clara in *The Owl Answers* are the composite characters of Kennedy's aunt and her neighbour. She says,

how could I know that years later, one summer sitting in a house on Piazza Donatello in Florence, I would create two heroines, and one's name would be Sarah and the other, heroine in a play called *The Owl Answers*, would be named Clara (Kennedy, 1987:35).
The character Reverend Passmore, the adopted father of Clara, is modelled upon Kennedy’s Church minister. She remembers him as one who

was always 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 (Kennedy, 1987:20).

This feature is common in Ibsen’s plays where he telescoped events but in Kennedy’s play, there is an attempt at telescoping traits of characters.

Instead of delineating characters with enduring qualities, Kennedy is primarily concerned with the angst caught in their lamentable condition. She has eroded the traditional drawing of characters and has created a number of characters in whom disparities and contradictions coexist. They are not a composite whole who struggle to establish their identity in a bewildering world. She simply deconstructs the ‘romantic’ concept of man. Unable to overcome their destiny, they are driven either to commit suicide or to transform into non-human beings. Characters thus lose their individuality and are merely identified by nameless designations such as ‘The Man’, ‘The Father’, ‘she’, ‘The Mother’ and so on. These characters are stereotypes, representing social groups rather than particular individuals.

Kennedy carries her vision beyond the split personalities to unveil the fragmented and fractured psyche of her heroine. As Benston (1976) says,

the multiple personalities of the characters and their various environments change rapidly, often obscurely, and together form an intricate matrix of associations which alone defines the totality of their world.

Kennedy’s characters are dark, violent, frenetic, fractured and multi-faceted and they are always in phantasmagoric frenzy. In their impersonality, they appear unreal. They are not like the sophisticated heroines in the romantic age. Though Kennedy is fond of
romantic heroines, she cannot present a picture of her Black characters' problems in a romantic setting. She says,

a heroine who possessed an essential romanticism that I could not seem to convey in my heroines on the New York landscape or the Ohio landscape— to yearn, to dream, to be in love, even tragically in love, as the Princess Zinaida is. But she was a countess living in the idyllic Russian summer landscape. How would I transfer that lyricism to the heroines in my stories? It seemed futile: for a start I bought a pale green stone necklace at a store on MacDoughal Street and a pale green shirtwaist dress to match (from the Grab Bag on Broadway) and dreamed of being in Turgenev’s Russia as I walked down Broadway taking my son to play in Riverside Park (Kennedy, 1987:83).

The secondary characters are often puppet-like marionettes or reduced to flat types, which may be projections of their central roles. Sometimes, they serve as aids in revealing the mind of the protagonists. Kennedy attempts to portray the complicated inner tensions of a personality, and the development of these tensions is produced by means of masks. It is the right medium of portraying the impression of the soul as shown through the expressionistic techniques.

Characters are frequently splintered into literary figures, iconic public figures, royal personalities, contemporary revolutionists, Hollywood actors and even owls, rats, beasts, dogs and ravens. She admits,

...all these people mingling in my life, my thoughts, and my imagination were leading to a strengthening of my writing and a truer expression of it. All these people were presenting me with a form for my work as well as great inspiration (Kennedy, 1987:110).

Alone in her room, Sarah has fantastical visions of historical ‘selves’ which enable her to escape from the tortures of being a Black and to claim White ancestry. Sarah’s selves like Queen Victoria, Lumumba, the Duchess and Jesus reveal her fascination for the White culture. They are a part of Sarah. The selves are the twisted fragments of
the mulatto girl Sarah who hates her Blackness and cannot forgive her Black father who has raped her light-skinned mother, leading her to insanity and death. The Black father's characterization is subtly delineated while the mother makes only a brief appearance with the baldhead,

black man, black man, I never should have let a black man put his hands on me. The wild black beast raped me and now my skull is shining (Kennedy, 1988:4).

There are various interpretations regarding the final moments of Sarah's father. She believes that he has hanged himself in a Harlem hotel room when Lumumba is shot to death. But Sarah herself says,

...but the truth is that I bludgeoned his head with an ebony skull that he carries about with him (Kennedy, 1988:8).

Raymond has a different version,

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...her father is a nigger who eats his meals on a white glass table (Kennedy, 1988:22).

The secondary characters like Raymond and the Landlady are introduced to focus on the obsession of Sarah and to portray what goes on within her mind. The Landlady, an eavesdropper and Sarah's Jewish boyfriend, Raymond, are the representatives of the White ancestry that the anglophile Sarah longs to claim. She always prefers to be with the accompaniment of her White selves Queen Victoria and the Duchess,

as an embankment to keep me from reflecting too much upon the fact that I am a Negro (Kennedy, 1988:6).
She talks about the royal White blood and

the royal world where everything and everyone is white and there are no unfortunate black ones (Kennedy, 1988:5).

The one and only way to overcome this madness, the dark reality of Blackness is death. Ultimately, she hangs herself. The Landlady and Raymond comment over the event without any fellow feeling, "The poor bitch has hung herself" (Kennedy, 1988:22).

Sarah attempts to find the meaning of her existence through her various selves, Queen Victoria, the Duchess, Lumumba and Jesus. Each of those selves is a symbolic representation of the dichotomy of Sarah, as Werner Sollars (1991) suggests:

the antithesis between Victoria and Lumumba may thus be seen as that between empire and anti-colonialism; Jesus and the Duchess of Hapsburg may relate to each other as love and lust; the Duchess and Victoria may represent the conflict between a scandalous and a proper woman; Lumumba and Jesus may embody militancy and forgiveness. Sarah, however, is all of these masks, and each of the selves a person in the original sense of the word 'persona' mask.

Rosemary K. Curb (1980) states that Sarah's selves

are not the historical persons whose names they carry and whose costumes they wear, but fragments of Sarah's mind so real as to seem separate persons.

Queen Victoria whom Sarah and Kennedy idolize stands for purity, chastity, power and white ancestry. In contrast, the Duchess represents uncontrollable sensuality. Lumumba evinces strong Black racial pride, while Sarah is ashamed to claim her African heritage. Jesus who is portrayed as a hunch-backed, yellow-skinned dwarf is equated with one of the facets of the White Christian religion and this White religion could not offer solace to the suffering Blacks. Those contradictory selves enact Sarah's psychic conflict or transformation as they move in and out of her mind. The
two secondary external characters the Landlady and Raymond neither share her feelings nor are considerate to her tragic predicament. They are cold, callous and contemptuous. They are the funny people in Sarah’s unnatural funnyhouse, the sneering spectators of her conflict. They grapple with the schizoid realm of frustrated dreams and fantasies.

The recurrent motif of metamorphosis in Kennedy’s dramaturgy mainly depends on the fragmentation of the heroine’s inner soul, which consequently drives her to her doom. The splintering of the central characters into various selves of different bestial forms is symbolic as they are unable to grapple with the reality. In The Owl Answers, Clara finally transmogrifies into an owl while in A Rat’s Mass, the central characters are in mutant forms, half-human and half-rodent. In A Lesson in Dead Language, the White Dog, the teacher is once again half-human and half-canine, which represents the inherited sin and guilt. The four main characters in A Beast Story are bestial forms and the fourth character is Dead Human. Their movement and speech are bestial but they possess human forms,

the beasts are real people, a black people family. At times their speech can be slightly unreal or at times their physical movements can suggest a bestiality, but they are real people. Ideally they should all resemble each other (Kennedy, 1974:191).

Thus, the characters of bestial forms serve as symbols of regression from the higher state to the lower state, from human to non-human forms.

The innovative depictions of Kennedy’s characters are entirely subjective and it is difficult to delve into the inner mind of the heroines. They exist in multiple planes. For instance, Clara Passmore exists as

SHE who is CLARA PASSMORE who is the VIRGIN MARY who is the BASTARD who is the OWL (Kennedy, 1988:25).
One of the most notable features of Kennedy’s plays is the main character becoming a symbol as the play progresses. Clara becomes a powerful symbol of the psychological torments of the whole Black womanhood. The play moves between the realistic psychological mode and the symbolic track where Clara is in a loveless, soulless hallucinatory world. The other multiple personalities like Chaucer, Shakespeare, Dickens, Anne Boleyn, William the Conqueror are all invented figures of her imaginary world who serve to emphasize the protagonist’s trauma.

The rat siblings in *A Rat’s Mass* are deprived of everything including religion, childhood, and innocence and are forced to confront their fatal death because of their incest and sin. The seven girls in *A Lesson in Dead Language* move, speak and respond as in a marionette play and the White Dog’s role is that of a lifeless automaton. Kennedy’s characters project and possess a static quality and they are deprived of any moral or psychological development. Even then, the complexity of the stagnant, solidly uniform and immovable characters of Kennedy is poignant and unforgettable. It is evident that Kennedy has kept the spirit gained from her experience that impelled her to depart from the traditional parameters of characterization.

The story is Clara’s own, but she plays a very small role, “to me my life is one of my black and white movies that I love so...with me playing a bit part” (Kennedy, 1988: 99). Her perceptions and reflections make up the play. It is like a “spectator watching my life like watching a black and white movie” (Kennedy, 1988:99). However, the filmi characters who serve as dubbing artists separate Clara from the real situation. The characterization of Clara in *A Movie Star has to Star in Black and White* is powerfully done with the secondary characters such as her mother, her father and her husband and the film stars helping her in the search for an identity. The psychological realm of Clara is revealed against the background of films. Despite the lack of encouragement from her whole family, she continues to write, “I am terribly tired, trying to do a page a day, yet my play is coming together” (Kennedy, 1988:82). Her diary plays second fiddle to her life and is a testimony of her fractured
and diffused self and her suppressed feelings. It is like a spectator watching her struggle to achieve her aim in life.

2.7.5 Dialogue and language

Language plays a significant role in the design of Kennedy’s plays and the tone and mood of the play is effectively set through the peculiar way in which she handles the language. Language is for the most part the expression of the character’s decision, beliefs and emotions. Sometimes, it is the expression of the author’s thoughts for which the character functions as a mouthpiece. The potential of a play is determined through these two governing factors, dialogue and language. The expressionist theatre rejects the straitjacket of the traditional regulations and experiments for innovative modes of communication. Black playwrights dismiss the conventional norms and regulations and project a rich amalgam of Afro-centric forms. Language is “eminently untheatrical” in an expressionistic play, as The Reader’s Encyclopaedia of World Drama (Gassner and Quinn, 1970) points out. An expressionistic play often,

uses an elliptical, telegram-like style in which syntax is compressed, often a staccato, machine-gun style abounding in stichomythic phrases, but always there is the identifying characteristic of intense feeling. The expressionist does not make a statement, he lets loose what we have come to recognize as the expressionist Schrei (scream).

Kennedy deconstructs the norms of the traditional play by adopting an enigmatic and complex language, and her language is infused with the spirit of Black spirituals, Black sub-culture and Black dialect. It is poetical, personal and condensed and the style is disjunctive and telegraphic. Gerald Freedman (1969), the director of Kennedy’s play Cities in Bezique comments,
she is a poet of the theatre. She does not deal in story, character and event as a playwright. She deals in image, metaphor, essence and layers of consciousness.

Sun a choreopoem is a short lyrical play written on the death of Malcolm X. The norms of a standard play are subverted by the non-sequitur fashion of the hallucinatory and psychic realm of the protagonist. For example, Brother Rat says,

beyond my rat head there must remain a new Capitol where Great Kay and I will sing. But no within my shot head I see the dying baby Nazis and Georgia relatives screaming girls cursing boys a dark sun and my grave. I am damned. No ... when I grow up I will swing again in white trees because beyond this dark rat run and gnawed petals there will remain a Capitol (Kennedy, 1988:62).

As is evident from this monologue of Brother Rat, the themes such as sexual initiation, guilt, incest, rape, corruption and the problems of self-identity are vividly explored through the poetic use of her language.

In an expressionistic play, dialogue is not conventional. It is poetic, febrile and rhapsodic. Sometimes, expressionists use long monologues, which are highly subjective. As defined by Gassner and Quinn (1970), the expressionistic play is characterized by intense subjectivism, a violent antipathy to society and to the family, a powerful lyricism that takes precedence over plot and character.

Dialogue does not direct the actor’s movement but tries to evoke sympathetic feelings in the audience. Dialogue takes place not through conversational exchange but through the fluid interplay of visual and verbal imagery. Kennedy uses monologues and repetitive dialogues in her plays to probe into the inner soul of her protagonists and to race the course of their psychosis. She (Betsko, 1987) herself admits, “I am sure I was also influenced by O’Neill’s long monologues about people’s torments—by the use of
interior monologues". Kennedy has derived the stories for monologues from the stories told by her mother in her childhood. She says,

she told me stories of her life in Georgia, which would one day sound remarkably like the monologues spoken by the characters in my plays (Kennedy, 1987:12)

At times staccato phrases are made use of:

They. Take you?
She. Take me?
They. Take you?
Will. And do they take you? (Kennedy, 1988:38).

2.7.6 Action

The action in an expressionistic play centres on the heroic attempt made by the main character in securing psychic survival. The style of action represented is a deliberate deviation from that which is usual and conventional. In order to present the mind of the character, strange images are presented on stage. As has been already pointed out, the action is like a puppet show, a marionette. In Styan’s (1981) words,

...in avoiding the detail of human behavior, a player might appear to be overacting and adopting the broad, mechanical movements of a puppet. All of this lent a sense of burlesque to the image of life presented on the stage.

Acting, in Kennedy’s plays is highly stylised and the characters may put on masks or paint themselves in outrageous colours. All these are made to create a disturbing theatre experience. In The Owl Answers, the Black Reverend father changes slowly into different personalities like Clara’s White father, Goddam father and the richest White man. The assembling of strange emblems such as those of owl, fig tree, White bird, cage and ravens has intensified the effect of the action portrayed. Kennedy converts action into emotion and it reveals the intimacies, ecstasies and anguish of the
African-American's soul life. Action ends where the story ends, that is with the suicide of the protagonists. For instance, the structure of The Owl Answers is such that it does not make a linear presentation of images. The multiple personalities of Clara like those of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Anne Boleyn and William, the Conqueror, are presented one after the other. They all together form an intricate matrix. Clara burns the High Altar with the owl feathers and gradually becomes owl-like. This idea highlights the rebirth of a phoenix from death.

The action of the play in A Rat's Mass is very thin where Brother Rat and Sister Rat are equating their love for their former friend Rosemary, who is a "descendent of the Pope and Julius Caesar and the Virgin Mary" (Kennedy, 1988:58), in order to be accepted by the White ancestry. Rosemary, their neighbour orders them to commit incest and thus unveil their love for her. They are admitted into the adult world after this sexual initiation. They find this inherited guilt everywhere and Sister Rat fears that she is pregnant. She is preoccupied with the thoughts of dead rat babies, though no real baby appears in the play. The play carries a parodied mass with catholic symbols. Blood is a powerful symbol and it is forever present both as a sacrament and as guilt.

In A Lesson in Dead Language, blood controls the action of the play. The action of the play goes thus: the teacher teaches a lesson in lyrical language about bleeding. Interpreting Christ, Caesar and the Sun, Kennedy portrays menstruation as an admission in to Christian culture and also as an indication of the transition from childhood to womanhood. This play deals with the themes of guilt, loss of innocence, corruption and psychic dissolution. Readers are made to experience genuine pain through the tenebrous ambience.

In the short lyrical play Sun, Kennedy delineates a man in an intricate situation using different coloured suns and moons. He slowly vanishes as they bleed and change colour. However, he is sensitive to cosmic rhythms. Although he is
invisible, his voice enunciates his vision through a small Black sun. Kennedy tries to show him on stage with the power (Malcolm X) and moral strength of a man who has really worked for the cause of the Black race.

In *A Movie Star has to Star in Black and White*, the action centres on Clara’s attempts to obtain a self-identity. Clara’s unhappy married life and the hospitalisation of her brother are the two important events that accentuate the action of the play. The emotions and the anguished feelings of the heroine are expressed through scenes from the three popular American movies, *Now Voyager*, *Viva Zapata* and *A Place in the Sun*. The conflict between Clara’s White mother and Black father is revealed through the conversation between Bette Davis and Paul Henreid in the popular movie. The disappointment of the Southern Blacks when they face oppression in the North reveals the gap between Clara and her husband. Clara speaks through Bette Davis as Clara in *The Owl Answers*, “I call God and the owl answers” (Kennedy, 1988:43). The second action is set in the hospital where Clara’s brother is hospitalised because of an automobile accident. The mother blames herself for her children’s unhappiness, as is disclosed through Jean Peters. The third action brings Shelly Winters and Montgomery Clift to the stage. Ultimately, the whole family dissolves into a tragic end, as Clara looks like an owl similar to Clara in *The Owl Answers*. Feingold (1995) eulogizes the elegance of this new device,

...the rigorous dignity with which Kennedy uses it, put any question of camp light-years away. The image of the black woman standing and listening, with infinite interest, while a white woman, iconically costumed and posed, speaks lines that belong to her story, is like a multifaceted gem, reflecting dozens of ideas off its brilliant surface. American movies are racist in ignoring blacks and mythologizing whites; Clara’s suffering is more meaningful than the trashy screenplays; the movies are a necessary escape from the drabness of our real sorrows; the movies are a lasting record of our culture, as the journal is of Clara’s life; the movies give us behavioral models for successful situations.
Thus, the play is well balanced and the real situations and the characters are not confused with the background.

2.7.7 Symbols
2.7.7.1 The symbolic significance of the title

A symbol is an image, object or a sign that represents, typifies, suggests or refers to some particular idea, concept, abstract idea or even a group of opinions, which is inseparable and adorns the literary piece. It expresses the intangible emotions and difficult ideas. Kennedy’s plays are a fretwork of symbolic expressions. They plays are replete with non-realistic symbols and powerful images. Stephane Stills and Charles (1971) state,

...her plays abound in what can be called ‘overlay’ with imagistic fragments of memory, and echoes that appear and fade away only to recur and finally exist as a montage of inconclusive images.

The titles of Kennedy’s psychodramas are highly symbolic and unveil the inner meanings of the plays. A carnival house in Cleveland where Kennedy spent her childhood inspires the title of the play Funnyhouse of a Negro. It is a metaphor for the dream world, America, “where real places don’t exist, only bizarre houses”. The two large bobbing figures, laughing inanely at the entrance of the funnyhouse, are suggestive of the title. The author (Betsko, 1987) states in an interview,

my brother and I used to hang around there a lot. It always seemed to me that the white world was doing this ridiculing the Negro.

The heroine, Sarah, is tortured and troubled at heart and lives in a hallucinatory, nightmarish private world, which becomes her funnyhouse. In this realm, her distorted and false perceptions ultimately lead her to take her own life. The funnyman of Sarah’s funnyhouse, Raymond, and the funnylady Mrs. Conrad are callous and cold to Sarah’s fevered plight.
The title of The Owl Answers is awe-inspiring. Clara is torn between the war waged by Black and White ancestry in her conscience and she is transmuted into an owl towards the end of the play. Her search for an authentic selfhood and genuine love are answered not by God but by the owl,

I call God and the Owl answers... I keep calling and the only answer is the Owl, God. I am only yearning for our kingdom, God (Kennedy, 1988:43).

She beseeches God to bestow His grace upon her, but it is the owl that answers her prayers. The owl’s responses symbolize the sensual part of Clara and at the same time her inability to exist in the carnal life. As Yank in O'Neill’s Hairy Ape, she prefers transforming into an owl, a bestial form living a life that is plagued by the fear of sexual corruption.

The title A Lesson in Dead Language represents the inherited guilt, sin and sorrow that are closely linked with the three important phases in a woman’s life, puberty, sexual initiation and childbirth. The significance of the title is indicated through the ritualised Latin class on the assassination of Julius Caesar, which is linked with bleeding of the seven girls. Menstrual blood is the powerful symbol of collective sin. Bleeding is the collective punishment for the sin committed by the mother, Eve. The lesson taught in a dead language, that is soulless, is highly symbolic of European or Western culture. Genevieve Fabre (1983) says that the ‘dead’ language of the play is an exchange, which,

is borrowed from parental authority, Christian dogma, Roman history, and is stated in a monotonous tone, evoking scenes of punishment and murder in which life courts death. The rejected identity is disguised as frustrated sexuality. The lesson for women is the impossibility of achieving anything without being wounded with humiliation or rape.
The holy religious term 'Mass' which means the celebration of the Lord's Supper has taken a variant meaning in *A Rat's Mass*. The play deals with the fall of rat siblings, Blake and Kay, because of the sin of incest. They had been living in harmony and with peace before the sin was committed. With the sin they have committed to prove their love for Rosemary, the rats have to meet their downfall from their Eden garden where all the religious emblems have turned against them. They have become an absurd caricature. The Communion wine becomes blood. The religious prayer chants change into gnawing voices of rats. They are symbols of dirt and filth, carriers of disease and rot. Kennedy tries to show a consumptive world with all its diseases, furtiveness and corruption. In this disjunctive state, the Holy Communion is perverted and distorted into a rat's mass, which becomes a parody of Holy Mass.

The pathological sexual fear or hatred that leads to the metamorphosis of human beings into mutant forms is the central subject of the play *A Beast Story*. Beast girl stands symbolically for the sin committed by Beast man and Beast woman. The incidents that take place in the course of the play are hallucinatory and expressionistic, narrating a beast's story.

The title *A Movie Star has to Star in Black and White* is also highly symbolic and the play delineates the struggle Clara faces in trying to become an intellectual Black woman and established writer in spite of various oppositions, discouragement, unhappy married life ending in divorce, the separation of her parents and her brother's accident. The 'real' life is interwoven with 'cinematic' life as it takes place in the mind of Clara. The pun of the title lies in that the characters in Clara's life are Blacks and the movie stars in the background are Whites. The film actresses who represent the different moods of Clara are Bette Davis, Jean Peters and Shelley Winters. Their words are not taken from the original films but their speeches in the play reveal the original feelings and emotions of Clara.
2.7.7.2 Character: a strong symbol

As has already been mentioned, it is interesting to note that Kennedy’s frenzied characters become intensely symbolic in the gradual development of the play. As she says, “Famous writers often seemed to be powerful images in themselves” (Kennedy, 1987:82). Sarah’s selection of her selves reflects her desire to be accepted into the White world. Queen Victoria and the Duchess represent Sarah, as anglophile and the distorted, evil and Black image of Jesus confirms Sarah as an Anglophobe and represents her hatred towards White, Christian religion. The martyred national Black hero Lumumba represents colonialism and he also stands for the disaffiliation with the White religion and cultural context. Jesus’ intention to kill Lumumba in the play is equated with the power of European culture to erode the African culture.

Like Sarah, Clara’s tragic plight in The Owl Answers is shown symbolically through the various personifications of her character. She stands for the whole Black womanhood. An anglophile mulatto girl like Sarah, Clara always associates herself with White ancestry, “I am almost white, am I not?” (Kennedy, 1988:29). Clara is terrified and again she cries at Anne Boleyn for help. Anne Boleyn is the second wife of Henry VIII, and his marriage to Anne has brought about the English Reformation. Anne’s arrogant behaviour soon makes her unpopular and she is charged with adultery. Henry sends her to the Tower of London on the charge of adultery and even incest with her own brother and she is beheaded. Thus it is highly symbolic that her notorious character is associated with Clara’s immoral behaviour with men in the subway.

Blake, Kay and Rosemary in A Rat’s Mass collectively emblematise the inherited guilt or the sin of incest. The rat siblings are pursued by the avenging Nazi squad, who symbolically aim at the creation of a pure state, i.e., White world, and the extermination of the aliens, the Blacks. Kay’s and Blake’s incest drive them away from the society to be victims of Nazi persecution. Rosemary, the White Catholic girl,
represents the White religion and unscrupulously leaves them at the mercy of the Nazi squad. The worms in Rosemary’s hair are linked with the smothering of the innocent, happy and peaceful lives of rat siblings. Her hair charms like a modern Medusa’s head, as she brings about the downfall of the rat siblings.

2.7.7.3 Hair imagery

Funnyhouse of a Negro is replete with rich symbols, particularly the hair imagery. Stephane Sills and Charles’ (1971) encomium can be quoted here,

the play is a brilliant and purposively troubled orchestration of repeated motifs and symbols that emerges as a theatrical tapestry that is ornately rich and imaginative in the intricacy of its ultimate design.

Much attention is paid to hair and death. Death is indicated right from the beginning of the play through bad omens such as ravens, falling hair and Black birds. Kennedy is obsessed with hair as she says, “Years later my obsession with hair would again and again reveal itself in my work” (Kennedy, 1987:36). She imagines herself as having pretty hair even in her dreams, and she thinks, “I often thought they were mine. They all belonged to me” (Kennedy, 1987:36). According to Kennedy, hair is a living thing, a symbol. The falling of hair is ominous, foreboding death. The falling kinky hair of Sarah and her White mother is related to their self-hatred and self-destruction. The falling of hair symbolically represents the insanity of the light-skinned mother and the suicide of Sarah at the end of the play. She considers her kinky hair as a defect,

my one defect is that I have a head of frizzy hair, unmistakably Negro Kinky hair...(Kennedy, 1988:6).

Sarah’s mother, whose hair “…is wild, straight and black and falls to her waist”(Kennedy, 1988:2), has lost her hair as “she’s suffering so till her hair has fallen out”(Kennedy, 1988:8). Her hair fell out after
...she married and she spent her days lying on the bed watching the strands fall from her scalp, covering the bedspread until she was bald and admitted to the hospital (Kennedy, 1988:12).

One of Sarah’s selves, Patrice Lumumba, who is identified as the dark-skinned man, laments,

it begins with the disaster of my hair. I awaken. My hair has fallen out, not all of it, but a mass from the crown of my head that lies on the center of my white pillow (Kennedy, 1988:11).

The Duchess speaks the same lines too. The wild kinky hair imagery is loaded with various symbolic nuances. The loss of hair is unmistakably associated with the vision of death.

2.7.7.4 The owl: a dynamic symbol

The owl is the dynamic and dominating symbol in *The Owl Answers* and it is associated with night, the ensign of bad omen. The hooting of an owl is highly symbolic, associated with death. In Robert L.Tener’s (1975) words, it is

...a symbol for non-believers in god who dwell in darkness; a messenger of witches or the bird transformation of witch; another name for a harlot who works for the night...at night its voice is the spirit of a woman who has died in childbirth and is crying for her dead child; its presence near a home presages ill fortune to the inhabitants. Its legendary associations with death, trees, ill-fortune, anti-Christian nuances, quest for love, and a female principle thus make it a richly ambiguous metaphor suitable for Kennedy’s intentions.

The owl, which is a solitary bird, a solo traveller, is a symbol that signifies the plight of Clara. Jeanie Forte (1989) observes in the play 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)”. The solitude and isolated plight of Black women in America are equated with the animal symbol. Stephane Sills and Charles (1971) observe,

...the wise, solitary bird cries out in the night ‘Who-o-...’ The big questions for the Negro in his American solitude and isolation are ‘Who?’ or ‘What am I?’ ‘What is my destiny?’ ‘In what course lies the proper road for self-discovery and self-development.

The fig tree is another exceptional and profound symbol. It is associated with marriage and sexual relations, and is sometimes treated as a symbol of love and life and as the Tree of Knowledge. African tribes consider it a spiritual husband in a sacred marriage. Clara is locked up in the fig tree by the Reverend mother and it is emblematic of Clara’ longing for a meaningful or fruitful life with someone in the world.

The Tower of London is another important symbol in the play. Shakespeare, Chaucer and William, the Conqueror, lock her up in the Tower in order to keep her away from the funeral of her White father. They are aware of the fact that she is not the legal daughter of the dead White man, who symbolically represents her entrapment inside the very heritage that she desires but cannot attain in reality.

2.7.7.5 Religious symbols

Kennedy does share an affinity with the early expressionists in her employment of religious symbols and images. Similar to Strindberg’s plays, Kennedy's plays are replete with religious emblems as they represent the violent, inherited sin and guilt of her characters. Kennedy’s fascination for religious symbols is discernible in all her plays. She has made use of various emblems like the Holy Trinity, Mass, Christian religion, High Altar, Communion wine, procession, chants, rituals, the nativity figures, the Shepherd and finally Christ, the Almighty. But she deconstructs the holiness of these symbols to express the themes of guilt, sin, incest, fear of rape, the perverted, fractured and distorted conditions of the universe. One of
Sarah’s ‘selves’ is Jesus whom she considers as Black as evil and dark. He is depicted as a deformed, yellow-skinned, impotent dwarf who symbolically represents the distorted perspectives of White Christianity. He also stands for non-affiliation with the Black man’s views.

In The Owl Answers, the High Altar symbolizes the religious aura of the play. Finally the altar changes into a bed where Clara finds her peace only in a mutant form, an owl, as she cannot gain heaven. Christ becomes a cruel God and he does not offer solace to the suffering woman, “He came into the outhouse, he told me you are an owl, ow, oww. I am your beginning, ow” (Kennedy, 1988:35). Clara is associated with the Great Mother. As Jeanie Forte (1989) notes, “The Great Mother, who was suppressed and supplanted by the Great Father in the Hebrew tribes. But this incident was edited out of the Old Testament, except for a passing reference to her as a screech owl in Isaiah”. The creative power of the Great Mother was thus eliminated from the historical events along with her displacement from religion. Clara, who is the owl, is identified with this lost Great Mother suggesting, “the vestigial possibility of a matrilineal heritage” (Jeanie Forte, 1989).

Clara cannot escape from her Blackness as it is revealed through her naked Black body in a Harlem hotel room. Her pallid skin and Black body are associated with the figure of ‘buckra’, a term that is used to denote a typically mixed-blood person born to a Black mother and White father of European heritage. As Jean Forte (1989) observes, Clara is the original buckra. She is the indelible evidence of cultural abandonment—she is the site of unassimilated difference; too light for one culture, too dark for the other, restrained from claiming her father’s European heritage while her mother (uprooted from her own African heritage divested of her past) represents no heritage at all.

In A Rat’s Mass, the predominant religious images are those of the Communion Mass and the religious procession of Jesus, Mary, the Shepherd and the
two Wise Men. The procession, which appears as a solacing image when the play begins, transmutes itself at the end of the play into an avenging Nazi squad to execute mercilessly the rat siblings for their incest. These sanctified images do not take their original holy meaning and they cannot offer an anchor to the suffering people. Thus, the analysis of strange religious symbols in portraying her characters' struggle to achieve their identity proves to be a rewarding study.

2.7.7.6 Colour significance

Colour has become a powerful image in Kennedy's plays. Kennedy's fascination for colours is revealed in her own words:

by my mid-twenties the colors of life had shifted dangerously, I saw a great deal of trouble in people around me, people whom I loved. Friends, family told their troubles, wept often bitter, said they didn't want to go on. I tried to write of it...tried to use the colors in my poems and stories (Kennedy, 1987: 88).

Black and White with splashes of red is the most significant one, which is identified with death. In Funnyhouse of a Negro, Sarah's selves and mother wear White dress representing their passion for White culture. Sarah and her boyfriend, Raymond, are in mourning dress, Black, while the Landlady is in Black and red. Kennedy describes the masks of Queen Victoria and the Duchess as, "a full red mouth and a head of frizzy hair" (Kennedy, 1988:3). Kinky, unstraightened hair is the symbol of the racial problems that cannot be resolved. Kinky hair involves unusual sexual behaviour or abnormal characteristics. The marble floor of the Duchess is Black and White, and the snow falls in "deathly white" (Kennedy, 1988:3). Sarah's apartment is furnished in White. The statue of Queen Victoria is of "astonishing whiteness" (Kennedy, 1988:3). Red colour symbolizes passion, violence and death. The Duchess uses red colour to comb her hair and she keeps the fallen hair in the red bag. The sun that appears in the jungle is also red. Redness makes the people lose their vitality. In The Owl Answers, Dead White Father is described thus, "The most noticeable thing about him is his hair,
long, silky; white hair that hangs as they bring him through the gate” (Kennedy, 1988:28). Her mother’s long Black hair is as noticeable as the Black subway and the Black Tower of London gates. Clara carries notebooks with White pages and White handkerchiefs. The White bird is contrasted with the dark owl. Reverend’s wife wears White dress while Bastard’s Black mother is in cheap rose, “rose colored, cheap lace dress” (Kennedy, 1988:29). The seven girls are in White organdy dresses with red bloodstains at their backs. Kennedy’s characters meet their ends violently. To live a life of a Black female becomes so hard that death is the only way of liberation or freedom from the racial imprisonment. The death is also not an ending solution as a whole but it is a transformation into a state either bestial or spiritual.

2.7.7.7 Obsession with Blackness and death

Blackness does not have a static meaning. It is highly symbolic of how a common biological fact can be psychological. Black experience is a cloistered one. There are some deviations in Kennedy’s delineation. The Black woman in her plays tries to prevent her daughter’s passage into womanhood through sexual initiation. Kennedy’s obsession with blood is revealed through Beast Woman who is obsessed with blood of her own deflowering and childbirth. Beast Man says, ‘You spoke of death at our wedding” (Kennedy, 1974:197). It is only through death that one is relieved from the burden of generations. Inspite of the girl’s sexual desire for the body, her parents’ taboos and phobias turn her frigid and she throws her bridal bouquet and runs to her mother who has all along wanted to prevent the daughter from normal life. Kennedy’s heroines don’t accept the reality of the present, their Black sexuality and quest remain unfulfilled. Between the subconscious desires and the conscious desires and the conscious reality falls a shadow which on pursuit reveals both the objective and the light.
2.7.7.8 Rape motif: a recurrent symbol

The rape motif is another recurring symbol as the characters are haunted by the fear of rape. They fearfully anticipate the arrival of the Black beast or the father figure and their pathological fear is embedded in the gloomy and dark side of reality. Sarah and Clara are the products of rape and strongly believe that rape or sexual life would put them into the prison of death. Queen Victoria cries in fear,

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 (Kennedy, 1988:4).

The psychosis of Clara leads her to change into a non-human being,

SHE...suddenly looks like an owl, and lifts her bowed head, stares into space and speaks; ow...oww (Kennedy, 1988:45).

The perverted images associated with blood, fear, rape, incest and patricide in A Rat’s Mass constitute Kennedy’s body politics.

2.7.7.9 Obsession with blood

In the play A Lesson in Dead Language, the term ‘blood’ or ‘bleeding’ occurs at least thirty times within thirty lines of dialogue. The term is riddled with different connotations. The red colour of the blood symbolizes the loss of purity or innocence. The patches of bloodstains are suggestive of shame, guilt, disloyalty and unfaithfulness to patriarchal society. The female teacher, White Dog, represents the elder world, and as Rosemary Curb (1981) says,

the White Dog in the play represents the whole world of elders and ancestors from Christianity and classical antiquity down to the two most powerful female authority figures in the adolescent girl’s life: mother and teacher.
The use of masks in expressionistic plays is a psychological device and the realistic notions are submerged under the mask. They are charged with inner meanings. Kennedy is an expert in adopting the technique of mask. She is fascinated by the use of mask in the movie ‘The Seventh Veil’, where the protagonist wears the mask to veil her hidden thoughts, feelings and emotions. Kennedy admits, 

not until I visited West Africa in 1960 and was surrounded by African masks did I see how I could use the ‘veiled’ concept. I simply had my character hide behind an African mask (Kennedy, 1987:49).

Thus the mask is reintroduced as a primary symbol of the theatre. This technique is extremely subjective in relation to the characters. The use of masks in expressionistic plays is a psychological device and the realistic notions are submerged under the mask. They are charged with inner meanings. The mind of a character is explored in depth in all its psychological aspects.

Kennedy attempts to portray the complicated inner tensions of a personality and the development of these tensions is produced by means of masks. Kennedy has given a detailed description of the use of mask at the beginning of the play. In Funnyhouse of a Negro, the reference to mask is found in the following lines:

although in this scene we do not see their faces, I will describe them now. They look exactly alike and will wear masks or be made up to appear a whitish yellow...If the characters do not wear a mask then the face must be highly powdered... (Kennedy, 1988:3).

In A Lesson in Dead Language, Kennedy refers to the mask:

the White Dog sits at the desk. Her speech is unaccompanied by any movement of the mouth, since she should be wearing what resembles a mask (Kennedy 1988: 48).
2.7.9 **Tone**

In an expressionistic play, the tone is immensely pessimistic and it ends on a tragic note. This is true of Kennedy's plays also. Kennedy's purpose to express subjective emotional experiences as opposed to the recording of impressions derived from the external world is achieved when she brings in the animal imagery in the end, with Clara transmogrified into an owl.

2.8 **CONCLUSION**

Kennedy's exquisite craftsmanship in the use of expressionistic techniques renders her style unique. She has excavated the minds and hearts of her characters and has presented her soul to the audience through the lens of expressionism. Benston (1976) says that Kennedy's plays allow the spectator to close the gap between himself and the spectacle only by an act of interpretation. Thus,

>a typical Kennedy drama invades the spectator's mind, putting him in intimate contact with the inner visions he and the playwright share. Ultimately, the character's struggles become the audience's empathic concern (Benston, 1976).

The torment and the bitter reality that are poignantly expressed in her plays justify the submerged pains of Kennedy's. Thus, in Feingold's (1995) words,

>because of her force and directness, Adrienne Kennedy's pain is mine and yours: there is no distance.

Her "force and directness" can be attributed to her adoption of the expressionistic art.