CHAPTER 3

DECONSTRUCTING THE BLACK SELF: KENNEDY AND THE SURREALISTIC THEATRE

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Surrealism has been subjected to strong criticism ranging from enthusiastic approval to downright rejection. It is mainly concerned with the human unconscious. The unconscious realm serves as a guide to man's quest for the meaning of his very existence. It also attempts to find a unity among the seemingly unrelated objects and a new understanding emerges out of it. The unconscious realm is a godless Bible and man is a harpist of it. Modern man lives in an age of ideological imperialism, where technology reigns supreme. Therefore, man has to either yield to its powers or resist them. The former is the least difficult and the latter demands extra energy and painful effort. Surrealism welcomes the latter. It declares that the time has come to revolt and to resist the basic tenets of all the accepted norms in art and literature. To be a surrealist, is to be a thorough revolutionist.

3.2 SURREALISM: A REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT

The term 'surrealism' is derived from the French word 'surrealisme', a movement that originated in France and dominated the French and European literary stage between the two World Wars. This movement, in art and literature aims at expressing the unconscious mind, by juxtaposing irrational, strange and bizarre images. The term 'super-realism' was first coined by Guillaume Apollinaire in 1918 in the preface to his experimental play The Breasts of Tiresias, to describe the
significance of modern movements such as Cubism, Futurism and Dadaism which aimed at establishing a reality beyond the web of reason.

Apollinaire used the term surrealism for the first time in his fantasy play to reveal his rebellion against the artists' imitative role in relation to nature. He identified surrealism with the power of invention in any field of human activity. Cubism, Fauvism, Futurism and Dadaism aimed at undermining or refining the existing orders in every sphere of life and many of them were nihilistic in their perceptions. They are often cited as impassioned pleas for different perceptions of reality. Surrealism is sometimes grouped with those - 'isms'. Surrealism is mainly associated with three important sources: Hegelian dialectics, Freud's findings in the realm of the subconscious and Marx's ideologies of the conflict between the bourgeois and the proletariat. All these ideologies influenced the surrealists' idea of 'revolt'. Some critics argue that surrealism is anarchism, because it has its own law, its own church and its own government. Disillusioned with the destruction wrought by the World Wars, surrealism and Marxism aimed at reviving anarchism.

What is surrealism? Surrealism is art that is much like our dreams. Surrealism is fantasy, a world of dreams, and distorted and odd images. Some surrealist art is mysterious or scary, like fantasy pictures taken from children's books. Some surrealist art also uses symbolism, or warps an object in some way, like Salvador Dali's paintings of a strange world. Paintings by Rene Magritte also had an offbeat oddness in them. According to Breton (Young, 1981), the simplest surrealist act consists of going out into the street with revolver in hand and firing at random into the crowd as often as possible.

Having defined surrealism, this chapter attempts to present a comprehensive account of the surrealistic movement, its genesis, development and achievements. It also analyses the manifesto laid down by Breton and the controversy
regarding the nature of surrealism that is seen as a deviation from Dadaism. It attempts to examine the surrealistic techniques used by Adrienne Kennedy in her psychodramas. The aim of the argument presented in this chapter is to reveal Kennedy as a dyed-in-the-wool surrealist, who reveals the intense suffering of the Blacks by the use of surrealistic images, symbols and metaphors.

3.3 CAUSES FOR THE RISE OF THE NEW SURREALISM

Surrealism, which has its birth from Dadaism, turned out to be a great revolution in art and literature. Dadaism was an art movement that followed Cubism, Expressionism, and Fauvism. The Dadaists were mainly a group of ill-organized artists experimenting with bizarre art and literature. The main Dada artists include Hugo Ball, Jean Arp, and Marcel Duchamp. The artists wanted to take modern art into a direction that would broaden the meaning of 'what art was and could be' (Young, 1981). It defined, redefined and refined the principles of art and explored the mysteries of the rational minds through arts. While Dadaism criticized art strongly by disrupting its growth, surrealism made use of the unconscious as a device to control rational perceptions. Surrealists are more powerful and strong and aimed at the derangement of our senses, while Dadaism tried to rule the human activity. Surrealism was identified with the irrational images in movies in the 30s and 40s. However, surrealism carefully deflected the audience from logical thinking. This disorder was created to lift the audience to a new pedestal, a 'poetic level of perception'.

Surrealism aimed at destroying the notion of literary categories and genres. Surrealists attempted to realign the writing pattern in a poetic and liberating manner. This movement was a reaction against rationalism and the destruction it had wrought in culture and politics (Spector, 1997). Surrealists attacked the formalist group and steps were taken against all procedures, says Gassner and Quinn (1970),
that tended to destroy the enigma of existence by submitting the unknown elements in man’s words and actions to a rational understanding of them.

Surrealism deviated from the Dadaist movement, which defied reason in its anti-art. However, surrealists emphasized positive expression. Hegel (Jeffery, 1976) strongly believed that Dadaism could be examined as a negation and surrealism as a negation of the negation. As he has succinctly stated in his treatise Preface to Logic, it is quite vain to retain the forms of an earlier stage of development when the inner structure of spirit has become transformed; these earlier forms are like withered leaves which are pushed off by the new buds already being generated at the roots.

Breton rejected the nihilism and chaos of Dadaism in favour of a humane optimism and edited a book Litterature in 1922, which foreshadowed surrealism. Breton published his first Surrealist Manifesto in 1924. Due to important changes in politics, surrealists joined the communist party in 1927. The crisis within the party led to their expulsion and the publication of the second Surrealist Manifesto in 1929. The second manifesto called for a revolution of the world while the first manifesto proposed a revolution. Following metaphorically the ideas of Marxian Revolution, they tried to transform the real conditions of people’s lives not economically, but by a rejection of bourgeois values. However, their association with Freudian and Marxist principles did not yield any fruitful results.

3.4 SURREALIST MOVEMENT
3.4.1 Early history

The history of the surrealist movement is more complex. Many critics feel that it is impossible to give a standard discussion on surrealism, or find answers to the questions of surrealist theory with regard to its most vital period (Young, 1981). Surrealistic theories have been modified continually since the early twentieth century because of the changes in the movement’s membership and political circumstances.
The movement has gradually become more powerful with the new theories of Hegel, Marx and Freud. Thus, change and modification have been welcomed and encouraged in surrealist thought and movement.

The iconoclast Breton laid out a brief description of surrealism in his First Manifesto in 1924 that served like a dictionary or encyclopaedia.

Surrealism, psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposed to express - verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner - the actual functioning of thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern... surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of previously neglected associations, in the disinterested play of thought. It tends to ruin once and for all other psychic mechanisms and to substitute itself for them in solving all the principal problems of life.

Breton’s definition pays no attention to conventional aesthetic questions of craft, beauty, style or expression. The question of aesthetic value has not been important to the surrealists who leave their works merely as documents. They present their works not to please and satisfy but to disturb and liberate the mind or even provoke thoughts of revolution.

3.4.2 Dadaism and its failure

The chief characteristics of Dadaism have to be examined before going into a discussion of the demands of surrealism. The former raised more questions than answers. Dadaism questioned the fundamental honesty or commitment in a work of art and the function of art in society. It also questioned the strong bond between the artist and his society and in turn, society’s relation to art and artistic expression. Its aim was to change the world aesthetically and to study how the people perceived the world about them. Dadaism (William Rubin, 1968) is recognized as a spirit of restless movement and this spirit of Dadaism is transformed as surrealism with various new
attitudes and innovative technical devices, redefined like dressed-up chicken. Surrealism thus is a revolt, a revolt in an unconscious state of mind.

Tristan Tzara and Breton are credited with redesigning Dadaism into surrealism. Tzara who was primarily a Dadaist, aimed at shocking and frightening the audience with his art devoid of sense. According to him (Young, 1981), nothing was sacred; all orders, all systems, all social conventions and manners should be abolished. He insisted on the need of chaos in art. He proclaimed that the chief purpose of the movement was to create ambiguity. He encouraged the artists and literary people to shake the world with violent gestures, bloody scenes, screams and whistles. He urged the writers to upset the rational thinking. In Tzaraian terms, a poem should be recited with the accompaniment of wild bells, rattles and bestial sounds (Matthews, 1974). A Mona Lisa art should be portrayed with large moustache. Dadaism, which started as a valid artistic movement, failed to survive, and was seen to be completely incongruous in the final stage and this paved the way for the rise of surrealism.

3.4.3 Influence of Breton

Andre Breton, a medical student influenced by Freud, published his First Manifesto in 1924, which soon replaced Tzara’s Dadaist manifesto. He imported Freudian psychoanalytic theory into his argument and advocated his own style of writing, namely, artistic anarchy, which is made up of words and images deduced from free association. This writing was called ‘automatic writing’. He (1969) emphasized that surrealist art should serve as a window through which the spectator or reader could perceive the inner soul or psyche. His new theory included dreams, fantasies, hallucinations and illusory realms. They became important components in a surrealist work of art. The notable precursors were Hieronymus Bosch and Lewis Carroll, who drew their materials frequently from the conscious. In this context, surrealism was recognized as a way of life rather than a significant movement in art and literature.
Influenced by Freud, Breton attempted to use the arbitrary flow of bizarre images when he was struck by a phrase “there is a man cut in two by the window”. This was accompanied by several visual images and in fact, it was the very first determined stirrings in the experimental surrealist movement. According to him (1969), surrealism represented the cravings of a poet, the desire of a man to grow beyond himself. It had been brought out within the realm of everyday objects, circumstances, familial patterns and so on. The poetry of surrealism was tangible and prosaic in nature. In Litterature magazine in 1919, the first part of Les Champs Magnetiques by Breton was published and it was recognized as the first surrealistic text. The surrealists followed the experimentation as is revealed in the works of Eluard’ Les Dessous d’une Vie and La Pyramide Hermaine in 1926. His collaboration with Marx Ernst Les Malheurs des Immortels appeared in 1922. Breton also experimented with techniques in Poisson Soluble, in connection with the Manifesto of Surrealism in 1924.

3.4.4 Declarations

Some of the declarations made by the surrealist leaders in their manifesto are given below:

- Surrealism is not a new means of expression or a simple one or even a metaphysic of poetry. It is a means of total liberation of the mind and of everything else.
- We are determined to create a ‘Revolution’.
- We have bracketed the word surrealism with the word revolution solely to show the disinterested, detached and even quite desperate character of the revolution.
- We lay no claim to changing anything in men’s errors but we intend to show them the fragility of their thoughts and on what shaking foundations, on what hollow ground they have built their shaking houses.
• We hurl this formal warning into the face of society; whatever protection affords its disparities, each of the false mores of its spirit, we shall never miss our aim.
• We are specialists in ‘Revolt’.
• Surrealism is not a poetic form. It is a cry of the mind at which life and death, the real and the imagined past and present, the communicable and the incommunicable and high and low ceases to be perceived as contradictions (Matthews, 1965).

These declarations of surrealism show that they were implacably opposed to the restrictions of conventional life and the literary bourgeois. Thus, a surrealist involved himself in a political as well as in a spiritual revolution, whereas a Dadaist had for the most part disconnected himself from social and political activities. Surrealists attempted to extend their revolutionary acts potentially from the world of arts to politics and they demanded freedom for their aesthetic values. They are not content with the liberty achieved in political fields alone. They insisted on freedom in art and literature.

3.5 AESTHETIC FREEDOM

Surrealism owed its development and principles to Dadaism in many aspects. It has relied on the basic principles of Dadaism ‘to revolt’, but has taken precautionary steps to avoid the pitfalls of Dadaism that led to its decline. They have reaffirmed the Dadaist’s notions of cultural values and the role of human destinies within the social, political and cultural set-up of the modern world. Surrealism, like Dadaism, mocked bitterly at the organizations and mores of today’s world. Surrealism finds its aggressiveness in the stimulus that it draws from the very opposition it provoked in an unsympathetic public. Nevertheless, this aggressiveness, as in Dada, is the reflection of the profound concern and the necessity to make certain current issues live (Paul Ray, 1971). Therefore, it is an expression of a persistent desire for a change
in the society. Breton (1944) calls it, "... the greater liberation of the mind". Surrealism has regarded liberty or freedom of man as the most precious possession. Breton published his Arcane 17 twenty years after his First Manifesto wherein he (1944) defined liberty as, "... opposition to all forms of servitude and restraint". He presented it as 'a state of immobility'. However, the surrealists were aware of the fact that this "immobility ensures its immediate ruin". Later on Breton (1944) defined liberty as "a living force ensuring a continual progression", as he had learnt a lesson from Dadaism. The subversive attitudes of surrealism were clearly expressed in a series of open letters that began to appear after the publication of the First Manifesto. They quote the examples of the invasion of Ethiopia, the war in Spain, Japan's invasion of China, which were all disguised behind words like 'democracy' and 'liberty' (Spector, 1997). Their belief in the vindication of total liberty leads the surrealists to embrace society with all its ugliness. To reform or to undermine society is the all-time favourite subject for surrealists. Through Pierre Mabille's book Le Merveilleux (1964), the surrealist speaks of the present society as

a cultivated and stratified scab, which tends to separate more and more seriously the inner force of our being from the universe which surrounds it.

3.6 THE ETERNAL AND THE PRESENT

The prevailing two poles of experience recognized in surrealism are the 'eternal' and the 'present'. According to Breton (1969), the former is represented, as 'the mind' at grips with the human conditions, while the latter is 'the mind as witness' of its own movement'. The best surrealist arts make society or the public become aware of this dichotomy. Surrealism has proposed to do nothing less than enabling

the mind to leap the barrier set up for it by the antinomies of reason and dreaming, reason and madness, feeling and representation etc. that constitutes the major obstacle in western thought (Breton, 1950).
Surrealism's optimistic quality is revealed in the works of Breton and Albert Camus. They confirm their conviction that man and the universe are reconcilable. Man must seek to find his experience, a sense of discovery, revelation and conquest, which, surrealism claims, can come only from within one's own self, and not through religion.

3.7 RELIGION

Surrealists were perceived as irritants to religion; but they were aware that the pearl is the product of an abrasive process. Such pearls are worth the death of a thousand divers. Having this strongly in mind, they attacked the Chancellors of Europe's Universities for breeding men blind to the mystery of life. They attacked the Pope for distorting the human spirit. La Revolution Surrealiste published in 1924 was one of the letters that had been addressed to the Pope, indicating a total rejection of religion, of Christianity. One of the letters stated, "We cannot admit the hindrance of the free development of human ideas and acts" (1925). According to them, an artist should not distinguish between art and life as it debilitates man in all his ventures. His capability to explore beyond his self, to analyse his inner psyche, is transformed into a perverted craziness for God and religion. His 'beyond' can be easily reached within its own regions. An odyssey through the regions enables him to reach the 'beyond'. According to Hegel (Jeffery, 1976), any religion is nothing but the fantastic reflection of men's minds of those external forces which control their daily life of reflection in which terrestrial forces assume the form of supernatural forces.

Man blindly believes in the existence of supernatural beings associated with any religion. Surrealists believe that religion is nothing but an illusory world or an experience revealing a particular kind of social set-up. Religious illusions are born out of helplessness, depression and despair and they dominate man's day-today life. Sometimes, man, in his distorted condition, seeks spiritual release and mental comfort
in religion. Religious illusions can be eroded when he begins to reform the society by eliminating its follies and evils, including the roots of religion. On the whole, surrealists assert that man should not believe in religion, if he is in search of his 'beyond'. The 'beyond' is his 'other' side. He is its miniature and it is he in 'expansion' (Young, 1981).

3.8 SURREALISTIC SUBJECTS
3.8.1 Unconscious realms

It is highly interesting to analyse a few surrealistic subjects and techniques before examining the abundant use of surrealistic images in Kennedy's plays. As has already been pointed out, surrealists concentrate mainly on the revolt in the unconscious realm of human minds. Like the romantics, surrealists are fascinated by dreams, hypnosis, somnambulism, madness and hallucinations. Their aim is not to subvert but to redefine reality, as they endeavour to integrate both the conscious and the unconscious realms of the human minds. They are not fascinated by the clinical practices of Freud; on the other hand, they view madness as a key factor to perception and to the reconciliation of opposites. They consider dreams not as a proof of undesirable neurosis, but as evidence to prove the power and perception of the imagination unmediated by the intellect (Gassner and Quinn, 1970). They are also against the prosaic and deterministic approaches of naturalism and the aesthetic consciousness of modernism. Their aim is to

unite the conscious and the unconscious, to join the world of dream and fantasy of the everyday rational world in an absolute reality, a 'surreality'. The unconscious part of human mind becomes an element of reason in every mind that provides the ultimate source for imagination and even for genius (Breton, 1969).

According to Breton (1969), the final aim of surrealism is the unification of interior and exterior reality. He does not give any priority to the need for change in exterior reality, which is the solution offered by Marxists. For a surrealist the 'interior
reality' is as important as the 'exterior reality'. The real task is a systematic examination of both realities with the purpose of uniting the two in action. As Young (1981) puts it, surrealism is a self-evident, universally desirable and inevitable manifestation of the modern western art. Surrealists believed that the potency of art should be drawn from the unconscious and should stimulate similar associative responses in the spectator. This process resembles the psychoanalytic approach rather than conventional art making. Art is considered as an experimental approach to reveal the actual workings of the mental and creative processes. The final goal of these explorations is liberation from the known and rational (Bigsby, 1972).

Breton identifies the correspondence between visual sensation and the unconscious and this link proves the superiority of the visual arts. He says in this context that auditive images are inferior to visual images not only in clearness but also in strictness. What he (1969) tells us about the use of figurative sentences is this:

The child is interested, for instance, to see a horse galloping on a tomato should be looked upon as a cretin. A tomato is also a child's balloon-surrealism, I repeat, having suppressed the word 'like'.

Surrealists follow two ways while exploring the unconscious minds. Magritte and Dalí rely on the realistic images and descriptions of objects removed from their normal contexts. In this approach, a spectator has to acknowledge the sense of the irrational that unfolds itself to enable him to discover the hidden forms, double images and subversive meanings in the ordinary. Ernst and Masson follow different approaches that introduce novel forms, spaces and techniques. This results in visual correspondence taking precedence over the verbal free associations (Gassner and Quinn, 1970).
3.8.2 Dreams

The essential characteristics of surrealism in any form of the arts are the cult of the dream, the unconscious realm, the representation of the absurd, the erotic and the objective. Dream, as Jung (Jacobi, 1953) says, is a little hidden door in the innermost and most secret recesses of the soul. A great dream, says Kennedy, "has to come before great achievement" (Kennedy, 1987:86). A dream is also quite important in surrealistic techniques. It is not the antithesis of reality or an escape into fantasy from the reality. The expression of the psychic experience of man is revealed through a form of writing that is automatic in the sense that it is uninhibited and as free as possible from the mind (Gassner and Quinn, 1970). Drama should be based on the premises that would provoke direct and violent reaction. The progression of thought and the penetration of the writer’s sensibility into the reader’s mind become effective by free association and explosive metaphor (Matthews, 1965). For the surrealists, the absurd is the conciliation of action with the dream. It is neither a corrective device nor a superior mockery of the human condition. The surrealists introduce complex events as they happen in the dream.

3.8.3 Love

Love is the dominant subject in the surrealist dramas and it is unsentimental and physical; sometimes, it is deemed sacred, sinless, unrestricted and magnetic. The surrealist orbit does not include plays dealing with the social and psychological problems of love and for the surrealists, the analysis of love falls short of the actuality of love. It is free from social obligations or conventions.
3.9 FORERUNNERS OF THE MOVEMENT
3.9.1 Early writers

The dramatic works of the first generation of surrealists were blueprints for new drama rather than finished works. The plays were very short and were performed experimentally between 1920 and 1940. Writers like Jarry, Tristan Tzara and Gertrude Stein broke with the convention and rebelled against bourgeois morality. They were concerned with the communication of vision rather than action. The surrealist stand was not against the flaws in human nature but against narrow perspectives, patterns of group behaviour and dull individual imagination. In *If You Please* (1920), Breton and Soupault mingle the mystery of the poetic sense of life with the speech of ordinary café and office conversation. All the characters are dream-oriented and have a surrealistic sense of time and magnetic power of words. The last act of this play was never written.

Louis Aragon is more poetic than dramatic. In his play *The Mirror Wardrobe One Fine Evening* (1969), there are two forces that do not come into conflict. One force is the colossal army, disciplined and confident in its task of making everyone “perfectly content”. However, on the other side, the members in the force are not effective dreamers and the two contradictory forces cannot keep the tide in an allegorical wardrobe. He concludes the play saying, “The world must die before it can become the world again”. In *Place de l’Etoile* (1927), Robert Desnos creates the climate of the dream in its characteristic shaping of daily events, achieving it through metaphors rather than plot. The hero is multiplied into many personalities continuously moving from one role to the other. Fabrice, the heroine, lives in dreams and she is obsessed with the notion that love is free of sin. Desnos concludes the play showing Fabrice in the last scene pressing for entrance into the room and the life of a new lover.
Some of the early surrealist plays are Breton-Soupault’s *Vous N’Oublierez Pas* (1922), Benjamin Peret’s *Comme il Fait beau* (1923), Breton-Aragon’s *Le Tresor des Jesuites* (1929), Roger Vitrac’s *The Mysteries of Love* (1927) and Victor Ou les enfants au Pouvoir (1928) and Jarry’s *Ubu Roi*. Jean Cocteau became generally identified with surrealists in the 1920s and 1930s because of his effective use of myth and fantasy in his works such as *The Eiffel Tower Wedding Party* (1921) and *Orphee* (1926) and the films *The Blood of a Poet* (1932) and *Beauty and the Beast* (1945). Regarding Cocteau’s surrealist techniques, Gassner (1970) says,

...the mystical landscape of a psychic and multifaceted reality, revealed in a series of unexpectedly juxtaposed objects of lights and shadows; of drawn personae communicating with live actors, of gaping wounds and symbols of chance, in cryptic images that convey the major emblems of surrealism on the screen.

### 3.9.2 New dramatists of the movement

Henri Picnette ranks first among the surrealist dramatists. His *Les Epiphanies* (1947) and *Nuclea* (1952) reveal, with their immense settings, big casts, intuitive expressions, rebellion of lovers and the nightmarish experiences of war. His emphasis is on the poet and the lover as liberating forces in the world. The author tries to combine poetry and the metaphoric language in search of purity in the most unexpected environments. His plays are full of ‘oneiric’ speech patterns. Arthur Adamov belongs to the same period and his ideas vacillate between the influences of Kafka and Strindberg on the one hand, and his close intimacy with the surrealistic ideas of Artaud on the other. He demonstrates surrealism in the projection of metaphysical introspections and the incongruities of dreams in terms of monologues and it can be seen in his plays, *The Parody* (1950) and *The Invasion* (1950). George Shehade cultivates the illogical language of dreams and searches for new myths in his experimental plays. The transparent nature of his characters is better compared to the latter-day symbolism of Beckett. Yacina Kateb, who is primarily a poet, projects himself as a surrealist dramatist. More surrealist in spirit, his basic subject is
revolution, treated not as a potential but as a reality of the Algerian Revolution. He expresses the metamorphosis of the political state through the violations of the meaning of words in *Le Cadavre encercle* (1958). Aime Cesaire, the West Indian disciple of Andre Breton is another surrealist to be noted. After writing surrealistic poetry, he turns dramatist with his play *La Tragedie du roi Christophe* (1964). He brings in the images of black magic and metamorphosis and the theme of Negro liberation from slavery in Haiti, which he presents in a surrealistic style. Radova Ivsic who is from Yugoslavia, presents the surrealist concept of the magnetic power and proliferation of love in his *Airia* (1960).

Many writers have written books on surrealistic principles, language and techniques. To mention some of them, Antonin Artaud’s *The Theatre and its Double* (translated by Mary C. Richards), published in 1958, describes his views regarding the principles that should govern the theatre of the future. Anna Balakian in her *Surrealism: The Road to the Absolute* (1959) spells out some of the basic characteristics of the surrealistic language and form as well as the principal concepts that motivate her philosophy. Michael Benedikt and George E. Wellwarth have brought together an anthology of translations of surrealist plays in 1964 titled, *Modern French Theatre: The Avant-Garde, Dada and Surrealism*. Martin Esslin in *The Theatre of the Absurd* (1961) speaks about the absurd and the surrealist plays, and how the plays help to perceive the different trends in the theatre after the Second World War. Wallace Fowlie’s *Dionysus in Paris* (1959) describes the plot and character of many plays of the contemporary stage. J. H. Matthew’s *An Introduction to Surrealism* (1965) discusses the basic surrealist techniques and concepts. Robert Motherwell edited the best and most complete anthology *The Dada Painters and Poets* and Leonards C. Pronko’s *Avant-Garde: The Experimental Theatre of France* (1962) is the most up-to-date discussion of French dramatists regarding the treatment of plot and character. More recently, Kennedy, who attempts to express the workings of the subconscious by fantastic imagery and incongruous juxtaposition of subject matter, occupies an important place as a surrealist writer in the history of the Black theatre.
Kennedy revolted against the western canons through her dramaturgy as the surrealist writer, who represented a reaction against the destruction wrought by the "rationalism" that had guided European culture and politics in the past and that had culminated in the horrors of World War I.

3.10 SURREALISM AND EXPRESSIONISM

Some of the characteristics of surrealism overlap the dramatic devices of expressionism as both the 'isms' aim to capture the unconscious realms of human minds. Though both the 'isms' aim to probe the unconscious realms, there are some differences between them. The main aim of expressionists is to reveal the unconscious mind of people through external objects. The use of symbols and images is irrational, distorted and bizarre in surrealism and their main aim is to deflect the audience from logical thinking. Their major concern is to provoke the mind to revolt against the conventions in order to liberate the soul and mind. It would be an interesting study to probe the interior of the minds of Kennedy's characters applying surrealistic tenets. An in-depth study of the unconscious realms of her heroines has been made in the third chapter; this chapter shifts the focus a little and explores the unconscious states of the protagonists, who wander aimlessly in a world of dream and fantasy, in surrealistic terms.

3.11 KENNEDY: A SURREALIST POET OF THE BLACK THEATRE

3.11.1 The world within

Kennedy's plays are a collage of texts, ideas, disrupted fragments of stories, and juxtapositions of bizarre and irrational images. Barnett Claudia (1997) says that Kennedy's plays are shrouded in mystery, present, terrifying visualizations of tormented psyches. Kennedy's plays may be seen as expressions of failed pregnancies of pregnancies that end in miscarriage and madness.
In her plays, Kennedy makes an analysis of an unknown world dealing with the bizarre images of the workings of the unconscious minds. This resembles the statement made by Breton (1969) that surrealism is a means of reuniting conscious and unconscious realms of experience in the world of dream and fantasy. The absurdity, the improbability and the inconsistency of the unconscious are portrayed to decompose and deconstruct the traditional realistic conventions of the theatre. Kennedy’s plays make no reconciliation with the absurdity. Kennedy herself describes her non-realistic style of writing in her autobiography, People who led to my plays thus:

after I read and saw ‘Blood Wedding’, I changed my ideas about what a play was...Never again would I try to set my plays in a ‘living room’, never again would I be afraid to have my characters talk in a non-realistic way, and I would abandon the realistic set for a greater dream setting. It was a turning point (Kennedy, 1987:108).

What is unconventional can be best portrayed in ‘the surrealistic mode’.

Drama as an artistic medium of expression undergoes a radical transformation in Kennedy’s plays. She has brought out the inner realm and its absurdities by distorting the surface that is seemingly neat and ordered. Surrealism acts on the mind as much as drugs do. It creates a certain state of need and can push man to frightful revolts. Kennedy’s dramas are an invention, a revolt and a rejection of imitation. She disregards time and space, and this deflects the audience from logical thinking, which is one of the important aspects of surrealism. The play is her universe; where she is the creator of all her characters. Her characters are not bound by any rules; they follow no mores, no metaphysics, no orders or laws and dwell in the unconscious. Her aim is to project ‘the world within’, a world, which is a part of the reality, through unrelated objects, an important aspect of surrealist principles. It is a world of universal experience, a world whose sole role is the unique justification of its own existence. That is why she has made her characters move in the surrealistic realm.
Kennedy calls these trapped realms 'surreal'. The realms that form, govern and motivate man’s actions cannot be portrayed on the stage realistically, as they are mainly concerned not with what man seems to be but with what man is. It is relevant to quote Jung’s (Jacobi, 1953) words here,

the conscious mind allows itself to be trained like a parrot, but the unconscious does not – which is why St. Augustine thanked God for not making him responsible for his dreams. The unconscious is an autonomous psychic entity.

The heroines are in a miserable, hapless state, like puppets. In short, her characters represent the tragic predicament of women found not only in America, but also in the whole world as her portrayal is mainly concerned with the unconscious. This plight is the plight of every human.

3.11.2 Plot and structure

Kennedy does not call herself a surrealist, but she uses surrealistic techniques as a powerful liberating force to liberate the mind or to provoke the mind to revolt. Based on the tenets of surrealism, Kennedy has composed a performance sequence that can be understood only as a sequence. The plot and structure of her plays unfold discrete events and images in a confused order. They lack a clear order of a beginning, a middle and an end. In an interview with Lisa Lehman (1977), she has stated the origin of her innovative techniques thus:

all those plays are a product of ideas I’ve been working on from the time I was twenty five to thirty. I was struggling with those ideas for a long time. Once I found a way to express in ‘Funnyhouse’, I think that was when I found a technique, I employed that technique for the rest.
The story material of Kennedy's work is highly autobiographical, full of important thematic matter such as racial heritage, racial discrimination, social justice, psychological consequences of oppression, personal experiences of integration and psychological disintegration. The plays of Kennedy reveal her psyche and expose the inner wounds inflicted by racism, sexism, religious stifling of sexuality and other oppressions. Cathy (1995) says,

through surrealistic, opaque luminously crafted devices, the plays dealt with her adoration of the British culture and fear-ridden anger at its racial crimes, her love for classic American movies and pain at their exclusion of black realities, her admiration for male achievements, especially in writing, and agony over the limitations on women, her tormented consciousness of colour and class divisions among blacks, and her need for an identity to unify these disparate, conflicting elements.

The anguish of discovering selfhood, a predominant theme, is played out in the fantasy of racial dreams in her plays.

The material is so potent especially in the overall historical context in which it has emerged, that it is difficult to keep attention on the form alone. However, in Kennedy's case, her themes are embedded in a background story. What Theodor Adorno (1984), a French critic of recent fame, expresses in purely theoretical terms about art is particularly relevant to Kennedy's plays,

...control over artistic forms and over how they are related to materials exposes the arbitrariness of real domination which is otherwise hidden by an illusion of inevitability.

The action of exposing a matter of the real world through a counteracting control in an artistic form seems precisely to be the task that Kennedy sets herself to perform as a
prominent artist. Her art is perfectly anticipated by another theoretical idea of Adorno's (1984),

in art the difference between purely logical forms and empirically oriented ones does not exist. Space, time and causality, to which Schopenhauer had given the status of principles of individuation, crop up again in art, but in a refracted shape. This refraction imparts to art the aspect of freedom governing the unity and sequence of events.

The surrealistic devices, which have been discussed in the earlier part of this chapter find expression in her complex plays. A description of surrealistic devices in Kennedy's plays has been made in the following section of this chapter.

3.12 FUNNYHOUSE OF A NEGRO
3.12.1 Action and structure

The potent sexual, racial and political content of Funnyhouse of a Negro has a simple form, echoing ancient and modern dramatic factors, elements of ritual and Freudian theories. The action of the play is not represented by the passages of spoken texts. The live performance of the play is structured into an action, taking place in the unconscious mind of the heroine, which is revealed through surrealistic devices. The action is an attempt of a hapless psyche striving to find out the meaning and truth of its survival. The action begins only moments before the act of self-destruction. The whole play, as pointed out by Robert Scanlan (Bryant, 1992) has three different surrealistic set-ups worth mentioning here. They are: some stage effects like tableaux, stage gimmicks, pantomimes, horrific sounds and terrorizing visuals. The second aspect comprises a few interspersed 'scenes' or traditionally dramatic groupings of character exchanging dialogues in location settings. Finally, there are passages of pure writing, in the monologue form. The action comprises the dreams, hypnosis, somnambulism, madness and hallucinations, which are all a part of surrealistic drama.
Sarah’s hallucinations and her mental conflicts form the main action of the play that links all the episodes. Kennedy says,

**Greek heroines:**

their vision was chronicled for me to share two thousand years later. Then the conflicts in women were important. I wasn’t being weak or cowardly to often feel the same distress and conflicts. I made them my friends. Nothing I felt was wrong, since they had felt it centuries before me (Kennedy, 1987:88).

### 3.12.2 Fantasy world: a preface

In Kennedy’s early plays *Funnyhouse of a Negro* and *The Owl Answers*, the chief surrealistic devices are typified. The heroines dwell in phantasmagoric worlds in which they are identified with irrational and distorted images and metaphors. The surrealistic dreamy atmosphere is created by the use of a sleepwalking figure of a woman with shining baldhead, ebony mask and a second figure with a hangman’s rope. Kennedy says,

...Picasso’s work had inspired me to exaggerate the physical appearances of my characters, but not until I bought a great African mask...of a woman with a bird flying through her forehead...I would soon create a character with a shattered, bludgeoned head. And that was his fixed surreal appearance (Kennedy, 1987:121).

The play is set in Queen’s chamber, which resembles the setting of Gothic romances and recalls the nightmarish atmosphere of Edgar Alan Poe’s poems. The opening scene is in a ritualised style, anticipating the arrival of something. The heroines in Gothic romances wait for the arrival of the night, to receive their husbands or lovers. They are forced to surrender themselves sexually. The unusual mingling of desire and agony is stereotyped in all Gothic stories. The Queen and the Duchess of Hapsburg are two dreamy characters, who expect the arrival of a dreadful figure as in Gothic romances. The knocking as they expect their dead Black father frightens them,
Victoria. ...he is dead
Duchess. And he keeps returning (Kennedy, 1988:4).

The arrival of the father in the night is symbolically suggestive of the sexual violence as it is depicted in Gothic stories.

3.12.3 Extraneous characters

The surrealists strongly believe that interior reality is as important as exterior objects, because the exterior reality reveals the contradictions that prevail in the society. Hence, the secondary characters, the Landlady and Raymond, Funnywoman and Funnyman are introduced to indicate the structural divisions of the play and bring out the feeling of a domestic set-up. Their primary role is to reveal what has been going on in Sarah's mind, what they have seen and what Sarah has told them. Sarah says that she murders her father because of her hatred towards Blackness. However, it is denied by the Landlady who says, Sarah's father comes to the house to beg her to forgive him for being Black and to return with him to Africa to save the Black race. As she cannot reconcile her identity either with Jesus or Lumumba, both of whom she identifies with her father, she hangs herself. Robert Scanlan (Bryant, 1992) comments on the Landlady's role as a corroborating witness, like an innocent bystander responding to an official investigation of the events. By bearing witness, the landlady helps us structurally in our search for the central event, the heart of the play - what Freud would have called the nucleus of the dream. What she says is less important than her function in the plot.

She clings to Raymond because he is a White and seeks his company in an effort to conceal her Black identity. She begs him to hide her: "Hide me here so the nigger will not find me. Hide me" (Kennedy, 1988:10). Nevertheless, he is callous to her tormented feelings and refuses the protection she needs. His hostility and unsympathetic nature towards Sarah's fragmented psyche is thus revealed: "Why
would your hair fall out? Is it because you are cruel? How could a black father haunt you so? ...How tormented and cruel you are" (Kennedy, 1988:10). The role of Raymond is to aggravate the tormented feelings of Sarah, thereby dragging her to a desperate predicament. Thus the creation of these real characters directs the attention of the readers to the surreal world of Sarah.

3.12.4 Multiple selves
3.12.4.1 Selves: an illusory world

The creation of selves as in a dream is one of the chief of surrealistic devices. The introduction of multiple selves resembles the techniques followed in the early surrealistic play of Robert Desmos, where his heroine Fabrice appears in several personalities. All the selves speak the same lines spoken by Sarah in the first person mode as though they are all Sarah. They serve as a separate whimsical world, where Sarah can seek love and quiet. Sarah is aware of the fact that her selves are mere fantasy, she says,

I try to give 'myself' a logical relationship but that too is a lie. For relationships was one of my last religions. I clung loyally to the lie of relationships, again and again seeking to establish a connection between my characters ...A loving relationship exists between myself and Queen Victoria, a love between myself and Jesus but they are lies (Kennedy, 1988:7).

3.12.4.2 Patrice Lumumba: a Nigger of two generations

Patrice Lumumba, one of her selves, appears on the stage as an apparition: "...a FIGURE appears in the darkness, a large dark faceless MAN carrying a mask in his hand" (Kennedy, 1988:11). He repeats the story of the Duchess and the Queen at the beginning. He also speaks of the horrible discovery of the loss of his hair:
1988:20). He is angry with Lumumba as the latter is considered as father of Jesus and he is also Black. Jesus says,

I am going to Africa and kill this black man named Patrice Lumumba. Why? Because all my life I believed my Holy Father to be God, but now I know that my father is a black man. I have no fear, for whatever I do, I will do in the name of God, Albert Saxe Coburg, in the name of Victoria, Queen Victoria Regina, the Monarch of England, I will” (Kennedy, 1988:20).

The scene between Jesus and the Duchess is an important surrealistic event in the play. Both lament over their loss of hair as the other selves do. The Duchess says, “He speaks niggerly grovelling about wanting to touch me with his black hand” (Kennedy, 1988:10). All the four selves of Sarah cry together.

my father isn’t going to let us alone, our father is the darkest of us all. He is a black man...I am bound to him unless, of course, he should die (Kennedy, 1988:17).

The portrayal of Jesus as a hunch-backed man is eerie. He stands for the Black people’s perspectives of the White man’s religion, Christianity. His deformity signifies the impotency, the lack of power of the religion to ameliorate the sufferings of the coloured people.

3.12.4.4 The Queen and the Duchess: White supremacy

The selves of the Queen and the Duchess illustrate Sarah’s fascination for the White world. She assumes the roles of these characters to escape from the reality that she is a Black. She tries to claim her White ancestry, by doing English courses, “I am an English major” (Kennedy, 1988:6) and she chooses White friends as, “they are necessary for me to maintain recognition against myself” (Kennedy, 1988:13). Her dream is, “to live in rooms with European antiques and my Queen Victoria, photograph of Roman ruins…and to eat my meals on a white glass table” (Kennedy,
1988:6). The Victorian period disapproves of certain attitudes such as insularity, materialism, complacency and hypocrisy. In Queen Victoria’s rule (1837-1903), gentility, respectability, propriety are regarded as the greatest public virtues. Hence, Queen Victoria epitomizes the glory of Whiteness, the puritanic spirit and power. The self Queen Victoria is the objective correlative of Sarah’s obsession with Whiteness linked to the glorious period of Victorianism. In this connection, Linda Kintz (1992) says,

as a historical character, Victoria is a trope of history itself, lending her name to the era of English capitalism’s greatest colonial epoch and its participation in rearranging cultural logics all over the globe. The Duchess of Hapsburg, too, signifies a family whose intrigues were generalized to the level of world history in the Holy Roman Empire; in these intrigues marriage strategies were used politically on a grand scale to amass an empire.

She also hints at Sarah’s sexual restraint. On the contrary, the Duchess represents the early Sarah’s physical relationship with her Jewish boyfriend, Raymond.

3.12.45 Necrophilic act: an epilogue

The final moments of the play are set in a surrealistic mood, where rape and murder are expected to happen. Sarah’s torment reaches its apex when the four selves confront each other, “...wild Black beast in a jungle” (Kennedy, 1988:20). They stop speaking and stand absolutely still. They request her to forgive and at this juncture where several fragmented selves repeat one another. Sarah, whose cup of pain and torment is full, takes her life in the final crisis of the play as she is unable to confront the sharp polarization. The light goes off when the red bloodied hands of her father approach her- “We see her hanging in the room” (Kennedy, 1988:22). The suicide of Sarah happens exactly as in a surrealistic dream and the tension or the climax of the play ends with this. Her alternative selves, both Blacks and Whites, have failed to save her from Blackness and offer her an authentic identity. The final conversation between funnyman and funnylady of the funnyhouse of Sarah resembles an epilogue in which
the Landlady confirms the death of Sarah. Raymond says flippantly: “She was a funny little liar” (Kennedy, 1988:23). The play transcends time and space, and what are more significant in this surrealistic play are Sarah’s mind and her dreams. Robert Scanlan (Bryant, 1992) lauds Kennedy; “Adrienne Kennedy has governed ‘the unity and sequence of events’ precisely by her control of the plot, and any good production of the play should make this architecture bold and clear”.

3.12.5 Surrealistic symbols

It is fascinating to analyse the exceptional symbols right from the beginning of the play. These strange and bizarre images invite different interpretations. The reappearance of the somnambulating figure with the baldhead symbolizes the recurrent motif the trauma of rape and sexual exploitation. Sarah’s first appearance with a red bloody face and a hangman’s rope around her neck predicts the climax of the play. Knocking also serves as a notable symbol as it anticipates the arrival of the dreadful father figure. It is heard throughout the play. The dream figure is identified as Sarah’s mad mother. Her sleepwalking scene resembles that in Shakespeare’s Macbeth, representing the intolerable pain of one’s self. Though Sarah hides herself among old statues, Roman ruins and herself, the reality strikes through her features such as pallid Negro skin and her hair. The loss of hair is the result of her inner tension, she says,

I do myself waver in their opinion of me, as I waver in the opinion of myself. But if I had not wavered in my opinion of myself, then my hair would never have fallen out. And if my hair hadn’t fallen out, I wouldn’t have bludgeoned my father’s head with an ebony mask (Kennedy, 1988:7).

Hair is a traditional symbol for African people; it transforms as an appendage to tortured Blacks in a White dominated world. Linda Kintz (1992) says,
in folklore hair often symbolizes fertility or power over the person whose enemy might shear it. In this play, which begins with a baldhead...and the straight black hair that continually falls out is associated with Sarah of mixed blood who tries to be as white as possible.

Kennedy concentrates more on the type of hair especially while describing it as, ‘mild straight hair’, ‘baldness’, ‘frizzy hair’, ‘hair torn out in patches’ and ‘a nimbus on African heads’. Kennedy herself links her loss of hair to depression and she states in her autobiography,

...often when I was depressed, my hair fell out, as my mother’s hair fell out when I was born because of the other she had to take during a difficult labor (Kennedy, 1987:117).

The loss of hair or the baldhead indicates the gradual destruction of the soul. Sarah screams while watching the fall of her hair in tufts. Her constant fear of death is associated with the loss of hair, which becomes a bad omen. It also implies the rape trauma motif and also enacts the cultural rape of Africa. Sarah’s father sets out on a mission as per his mother’s words for “the erection of a Christian mission in the middle of the jungle” (Kennedy, 1988:9). The word ‘erection’ has been interpreted as indicating the son’s Oedipal relation with the mother. He participates in the cultural rape of Africa by preaching the White man’s religion. He leaves the place with a broken heart, as he understands the dual rape of his people and his wife and her subsequent depression.

The hair image is a continuing one as it commences with Sarah’s mother when her Black father brutally raped her mother. The mother, who has lost her innocence, prevents her daughter from growing up. She becomes insane and is haunted by fear. This sense of fear has passed over to Sarah and she dwells in a state of sexual repression. Like the rat siblings imprisoned in rat hole and Clara in the Tower of London, she is locked up in an asylum as she fails to reconcile with the male body violence. Sarah experiences her mother’s rape obsession and she dreads for the
arrival of her father. Beast Girl and Clara also experience the fear of rape by the father. The bloody face of Sarah can be contrasted with the blood stains on the backs of the seven girls in A Lesson in Dead Language. The loss of hair is connected with menstruation as something has gone to waste. The red bags that the selves carry, are identified with the colour of periodical bleeding.

A shift in the multiple personalities of her characters is indicated through costume changes. The change of scene is identified through unpleasant sounds such as a scream, knocking, laughter and visual images like dropping the head, black outs and change of light and colour, which typify the surrealistic settings of Tristan Tzara’s art. They are highly symbolic of female powerlessness and lack of autonomy.

Sarah’s self-explanatory monologue reveals the mental agony of a Black soul. The repetitious dialogue represents the gradual deterioration of Sarah’s schizophrenic mind. The impact of tradition on her psyche is evident in her dialogue and strange behaviour. Her conflict centres around her mother’s madness and the torments she has suffered on her death bed in a mental asylum. An inborn ‘inferiority’ appears to destabilize her and the contemporary racial atmosphere fanned her fears of being Black. There is a crisis between reality and her dream, and the co-existence between illusion and reality inside herself suggests an obsession with her identity. Even if they have achieved Black identity, the obvious fact is that it is only an inferior identity.

The suicide of Sarah becomes a potent symbol just because it is typical of the fractured self of the modern world, where she finds it hard to achieve her self-identity. Kennedy projects this identity crisis as an important issue of the twentieth century and it is not restricted to the Black experience alone. The loss of identity, which is not Sarah’s alone, is a trauma transferred from the Black father to her daughter, and appears to be a curse upon Blacks. It is suggested that the curse has inflicted all the Black families all over the world. It is evident that the Black must
always be on his heels, running away from the 'self' into 'selves', a flight that culminates in psychosis. Thus, the play is highly successful because of the surrealistic devices discussed so far.

3.13 THE OWL ANSWERS

3.13.1 Surrealistic ambience

In The Owl Answers, Kennedy deals with the problem of miscegenation, obsessive fear of rape and guilt and the problems of self-identity. Clara is cocooned in her own world of imagination where she visits England with her father. But in reality, she seduces a Negro man in the subway. The protagonist dwells in a surrealistic world of her own but, when she is forced to enter what is presented as real life, she fails to survive. The animal images, the High Altar, ravens, cages, subway cars and suddenly changing figures contribute to the surrealistic effect. This mood is strengthened by the description given in the beginning of the play,

there is the noise of the train, the sound of moving steel on the track. The WHITE BIRD'S wings should flutter loudly. The gales, the High Altar, the ceiling and the Dome are like St. Peter's, the walls are like the Tower of London (Kennedy, 1988:26).

Thus, the play is set in the mind of Clara, where the horrifying surrealistic images mingle with the past and present events. The conversation is monotonous and that reflects the monotony and meaninglessness of Clara's life.

3.13.2 Dreamy characters

The dramatic world of The Owl Answers has multi-layered characters and all of them share something of the nature of the protagonist. Clara's father, mother and the bird in the play are also multi-layered characters. They change into some other personalities by the removal of some costume.
The characters change slowly back and forth into and out of themselves, leaving some garment from their previous selves upon them always to remind us of the nature of She who is Clara... (Kennedy, 1988:25).

A single actress portrays the four personalities of a single character. The other characters are the products of her mind and not external ones. Clara performs the four personalities through a single character but, Sarah has created four personalities to play the roles of the four selves she has created. Clara’s dead father takes the role of the richest White man, Goddam father and Reverend Black father simultaneously. This creates the effect of an artistic and ritualistic spell.

GODDAM FATHER who is the RICHEST WHITE MAN IN THE TOWN who is the DEAD WHITE FATHER who is the REVEREND PASSMORE (Kennedy, 1988:25).

Besides the Negro man, there are no other real characters except the multiple personalities of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Anne Boleyn and William the Conqueror. Their roles are described thus:

their lines throughout the play are not spoken specifically by one person but by all or part of them (Kennedy, 1988:27).

The conversation between two of the characters does not seem to be a conversation between separate consciousnesses but as alternate visions of the same divided consciousness.

3.13.3 Mental conflict

Clara remembers or imagines her landing in England to see the land of her father’s ancestors. She declares in tears that she does not intend to go back, “I am never going back... I will not go” (Kennedy, 1988:39). It is not clear whether she never wishes to make another trip to England or whether she decides never to go back
to America. She imagines that she and her White father tour London together, where he suddenly dies near the Tower of London. His body is taken to St. Paul's Chapel and she is guarded by Shakespeare, Chaucer, William, the Conqueror and Dickens to prevent her attending the funeral. She says in remorse,

you must let me go down to the Chapel to see him...They took my father away and will not let me see him (Kennedy, 1988:28).

As she is not allowed to enter, she breaks down.

...where there were black ravens on the grass when I broke down. I broke down and started to cry...I was the only Negro there (Kennedy, 1988:39).

Like Sarah, Clara's psyche is also fragmented into many personalities. Her problems are more complex because she has two fathers and two mothers. Sarah's parents present a balance of power in a sexist and racist society. Her mother's White power balances her father's male power and both are despised and oppressed. However, in The Owl Answers Clara's father has all the power and her mother is doubly weak. She remembers how once when her mother took her to meet her father they had to use the back door. She seeks a union with her White father in her surrealistic fantasy world, "We were wandering about the garden, you leaning on my..." (Kennedy 1988:32).

3.13.4 Quest for genuine love

Clara is in search of love, sometimes in the form of a father figure. This motivation of Clara is revealed when she says,

...I ride, look for men to take to a Harlem hotel room, to love, dress them as my father, beg to take me (Kennedy, 1988:38).

When she was with the Negro man in the hotel room, she answers all his questions in a single word, 'love'.
The Negro man cannot understand the meaning of the term 'love'. He takes it as a sexual hint. She completely forgets the fact that she has brought the Negro man to the hotel room to make love. When he tries to undress her, she says,

no God. No, I am not sick. I only have a dream of love. A dream. Open the door and let me go down to St. Paul’s Chapel (Kennedy, 1988:42).

It is also important that she addresses him as ‘God’. She says,


Clara is not able to gain love even from her father through his four personalities—Goddam father, richest White man, Reverend Passmore and Dead father, of whom the latter two appear on stage. The former two roles are remembered in Clara’s and in her mother’s memories. ‘Goddam’ may represent the father damned by God either for his miscegenation with his Black cook and for his ill-treatment of the mother and the child, or for his being the instrument of damnation for mother and daughter. The name may also denote Clara’s anger towards him for his power over her and her mother.

3.13.5 Search for a mother figure

The relationship between Clara and her mother is more subtle and complex. Clara’s suffering is symbolically portrayed through the multiple imprisonments in
places like Tower of London, the subway car and the fig tree and even the prison of her mother's womb itself. She has never experienced the maternal affection in any of these three roles. When she begs Anne Boleyn for love, she suddenly changes into the Black mother by taking off her long dress and putting on a cheap rose lace dress with a dark face. The Black mother throws a White bridal bouquet at her daughter and stretches her arms in welcome. She is horrified at the transformation, but the mother pulls her back through the subway gates' symbolically into her womb. When she cries 'mama', addressing the Bastard's Black mother, the woman changes back into Anne Boleyn. She is continually frustrated by never being able to attract her mother's attention or receive any spontaneous affection.

The Bastard's Black mother changes into the Reverend's wife by changing into a White dress; removing her dark face to reveal a pallid Negro face underneath and producing a picture of Christ from the folds of her dress. She shows her the way to self-destruction to avoid the materialistic love that prevails in the world.

Clara, I know the way to St. Paul's Chapel. I know the way to St. Paul's Chapel Clara...Mother lifts knife. She stabs herself (Kennedy, 1988:44).

She is very particular that Clara should stay far away from the sexual life. She says,

I told the Reverend if he ever came near me again...Does he not know I am Mary, Christ's bride?...Does he think I am like your black mother...he must know I'm Mary. Only Mary would marry the Reverend Passmore of the church on the top of the Holy Hill (Kennedy, 1988:41).

The two Black mother roles represent typical southern Black women - the pious churchwoman and the shameless whore. In both the roles, she echoes the thematic refrain, "I cry when I see Marys cry for their deaths" (Kennedy, 1988:41). Sexual initiation is the death of innocence and the entrance pass into the world of owldom, the knowledge of evil and good. Both the mother and daughter share the nature of Mary
and the owl. The Black mother of Clara tries to keep her daughter a virgin: “When I see sweet Marys I cry for their deaths, Clara...and that is why you must be Mary, always be Mary, Clara” (Kennedy, 1988:37). The corrupted state of Black womanhood is associated with owldom, which inevitably leads to death. The description of the sexual initiation in the play resembles death, the metamorphosis of the heroine: “you belong here with us owls in the fig tree...” (Kennedy, 1988:35). She cannot evade herself from this capture and sexual violation. Her fear of the trauma rape leaves her in the dark, carnal, non-human world of owldom.

3.13.6 Search for a father figure

Right from the beginning, Clara identifies her lineage with her White father and frequently begs her guards to allow her to visit her dead father, but she never meets him. From a distance, he welcomes her with affection:

    yes, my Mary, you are coming into my world. You are filled with dreams of my world. I sense it all. Mary, come in here for eternity (Kennedy, 1988:35).

The father’s world is not only the world of White Englishmen, but also that of the dead. As in Funnyhouse of a Negro, Whiteness is associated with death and decay as well as with a hollow, false aestheticism. The quest for her father figure is motivated not only by curiosity about her ancestry but also by a death wish. Identifying herself with her ancestry is akin to testing the effect of tasting the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil.

3.13.7 Surrealistic symbols

3.13.7.1 White bird: a symbol of Christianity

The play is replete with unconventional symbols. The major symbol in the play is the White bird, which is also Reverend’s canary and God’s dove. It flies down
from St. Peter’s Dome and enters the golden cage of Reverend Passmore. The fluttering of the bird’s wings suggests the change of scenes or the character’s change of roles. The bird flies in and out of the cage throughout the play and mocks at Clara. It is identified with the White father’s heritage and Reverend’s or White man’s religion, Christianity. The bird is also a pet of the Black preacher. The Bastard’s Black mother carries the owl’s blood in a vial as the fruit of her lost maidenhood. The White bird that undergoes no visible transformation can be considered as a whitewashed owl, masquerading as God’s dove at the incarnation of “Owl Mary Passmore”, the doomed mulatto of the ill-fated union.

The Reverend, who never speaks in the play, is totally preoccupied with the White Bible and his human-size White bird, that is the Reverend’s canary, is kept in a golden cage on the stage. This is the important surrealistic symbol adopted by the author to reveal the supremacy of the White religion. The subway mentioned in the play is identified as the world of owls. Kennedy might be haunted by the belief that all living creatures are part human, part animal, and there are frequent animal references for Blackness. The owl is highly symbolic of blacks. Its dark brown colour is invisible, suggesting that Blackness is a more complex reality.

3.13.7.2 Characters become symbols

Clara is obsessed with the manners of European royalty and nobility like Sarah in Funnyhouse of a Negro. She also exposes the vulgarity and filthiness of the contemporary Black American life. Unlike the Bastard’s Black mother and Goddam father, Clara does not change costumes nor does she wear masks. She wears a simple unstylish long cotton summer dress and White sandals throughout the play. The three mother roles- Bastard’s Black mother, Reverend’s Black wife and Anne Boleyn, portray women imprisoned by their female nature and subservient to men. Anne Boleyn, historically the victim of male lust and caprice, represents romantic love to
Clara: “Anne, you know so much of love, won’t you help me” (Kennedy, 1988:29). Anne Boleyn represents love and sorrow. As Kennedy says,

how I was fascinated by her I was as the Beefeater at the Tower of London told us how Henry VIII had imprisoned her...Anne would become an image for imprisonment in a play, a confidante whom a character would discuss love and sorrow (Kennedy, 1987:118).

Clara believes that Anne Boleyn would help her to meet her father, she says,

I spoke to Anne Boleyn, Dead Father. She knows so much of love and suffering and I believe she is going to try to help me (Kennedy, 1988:31)

Her memories of looking backward and forward, the torment of rape, real or imagined, are just a fantasy. Perhaps what has happened to her is a wild daydream between the two subway stops. The tiring journey of a girl in a sophisticated jungle is revealed. Like Baraka’s Dutchman, Kennedy also sets the play in a subway train. Baraka depicts the real action in the literal context, but in The Owl Answers, it is mere fantasy, a dream.

3.13.7.3 Belongingness: owldom

The Reverend’s wife calls Clara “Bastard Clara Passmore” and “Owl Mary Passmore”. Early in the play, the two Black mothers exhibit the signs of owlness. The Bastard’s Black mother says, “ow, oww” and pecks at the red rice on the floor, and sits like an owl. By the middle of the play, the mother roles have blended into one who has begun to build an altar of owl feathers. As an owl, she stabs herself to death with a butcher’s knife on the owl altar. The White bird carries her to the top of St. Peter’s Dome as a diabolical Assumption of the Virgin (Tener, 1975). Her name ‘Passmore’ implies a desire to ‘pass’ into the White world. Like an owl who is a carrier of fatal diseases, Clara cannot escape from her owl nature since it is her beginning, the Black mother’s original sin. It is an ancestral curse and the owlness is the fruit of her
conception. Recognizing her impotence and imprisonment in a female body, she prefers a physical transformation. Ultimately, Clara, who is crippled and confused, is trapped in the nightmare of her own world, of owldom. The skilful use of such morbid and shocking surrealistic images and symbols reveals Kennedy's uniqueness as a surrealist.

3.14 A LESSON IN DEAD LANGUAGE

3.14.1 Surrealistic world

The theme of the play itself is highly unconventional, one which no other writer would dare to touch upon. By adopting a distorted theme, Kennedy revolts against the traditions and mores of the society. Though menstruation is considered as a taboo in a conventional set-up, it is an accepted fact that a girl will attain her womanhood only after attaining her puberty. Women, who have given birth and menstruating women, are considered unclean and they are separated in a different room. The repetition of the term bleeding is indicative of the loaded guilt of being a woman. The flow of blood during menstruation and childbirth is not a matter of shame. The passage into womanhood need not be looked upon as a death sentence. Childbirth is considered a rebirth for women. Kennedy's short play A Lesson in Dead Language serves as a key to all her plays. The opening line itself; "Lesson, I bleed" (Kennedy, 1988: 48), reveals her female characters' obsession with blood. This is exemplified in the following section.

3.14.2 'Lesson I bleed'

A Latin lesson about the assassination of Julius Caesar is in progress. The last line of the play, "Calpurnia dreamed a pinnacle was tumbling down" (Kennedy, 1988: 53) is a laborious translation from the lesson. 'Lesson I bleed' is a dictation to which the pupils together respond, and can also be taken as a moral command from the teacher that they should be careful of unwanted pregnancy. The teacher, who
teaches the lesson, is aware of the fact that the children should know of “what the civilization will require of them, the white dog serves as civilization’s stand-in” (Linda Kintz, 1992)

The process of bleeding is not only the symbol of the female rite of passage, but also the sign of sexual ‘games in the green grass’ that lead to death ultimately. All the images of birth foretell the vision of death which is inevitable. The ‘dead’ language of the blood is borrowed from the parents, Adam and Eve and Christian religion. Woman has achieved womanhood through this process. However, she has to suffer mentally and physically, which is more intense. The pupils say,

teacher, my mother is sending me to the Asylum if I don’t stop talking about my white dog that died and my bleeding and Jesus and the game in the green grass (Kennedy, 1988: 51).

The woman has to accept the torments and tortures from the moment she comes into the universe. The bleeding process drives a wedge between innocence and experience. But Kennedy has established a link between the traumas of the rites of passage and the black experience by delineating both. It is also to be noted that the repetitive use of blood is suggestive of its redness in relation to the color of the skin.

3.14.3 Symbols
3.14.3.1 White Dog: role of a mother

As already mentioned, the White Dog represents the whole world of elders and ancestors from Christianity. She also takes on the role of a mother and a teacher. The adult woman, the teacher, who has also undergone the three phases of womanhood does not advise her students, instead she threatens them with fear and repression. The students utter together,
my mother says it is because I am a woman that I bleed... I asked her who made me bleed... And she said everything soon bleeds away and dies. Caesar too (Kennedy, 1988: 51).

The White Dog with the White mask has to teach the lesson to the young female students dressed in White organdy. The young girls behave like kooks and go on repeating the same lines. The White Dog, says Linda Kintz (1992),

was often an embodiment of the spirit of the harvest or generativity, which lurked in the field until all the corn was harvested. The person who cut the last sheaf was said to ‘kill the dogs’. This kind of conquest of generativity may be part of the lesson the girls learn.

3.14.3.2 Statues

The statues suggest that the setting of the play is in a Catholic school. The statues in the classroom and the teacher, White Dog, exercise their power upon the students and bully them to confess the guilt. Kennedy has used statues in all her plays. The strong motivation behind this creation is explained thus:

to see a man and to see a statue of him in the same space of time broke through boundaries in my mind. Statues are of real people (Kennedy, 1987: 122).

The seven girl pupils wear White organdy dresses, White socks and Black shoes, as White stands for purity and chastity. The virginal costumes are more suitable for church processions than for a classroom set up.

The statues of Joseph, Jesus, Mary and others emblematize the young girls’ unforgettable days with their pet dogs, cats and other pet animals they played with in the grass.

Jesus and Joseph and Mary, two Wise Men and the Shepherd were friends of my childhood. Dear mother (Kennedy, 1988: 52).
Jesus and Mary bestow grace upon them when they are in their innocent state. They are their childhood friends. The Shepherd is a theme in Christian art, and Shepherds paying homage to the new born Christ, is an event described in the Gospel. They were the same Shepherds, who received news of the miraculous birth of Jesus from the angels. They spread the news to the local people and symbolize the spreading of Christianity among people. Kennedy uses the statues of Shepherds as a recurrent symbol, with the hope of bringing good news to the sufferings of Blacks. They have all vanished as soon as the girls started bleeding. Julius Caesar, Sun and father also die. Thus the girls have to bleed until someone accepts the sin of murdering the White Dog, Sun and Caesar. Bleeding is considered as a punishment for them.

3.14.3.3 Loss of purity

The blood stains on their backs symbolize their loss of childhood, innocence, purity and virtue. The same idea, the loss of virginity, is echoed in The Movie Star has to Star in Black and White, in which Clara speaks of, “A virgin who was to bleed and bleed...” (Kennedy, 1988:87). Moreover bleeding is associated with the death of Julius Caesar, instrument of the overthrow of European culture. They could not conceal the crimson stains when they stood up; that is a projection of their collective guilt or conspiracy against the patriarchal set-up. Likewise, Calpurnia conspires with Brutus to bring the death of Caesar, the patriarch. Julius Caesar who is noted for his military and political feats, acquired the title of dictator. Kennedy is more interested in him “than any other figure except Jesus” (Kennedy, 1987:63). The period of bleeding symbolically denotes the beginning of the domestication in a girl. The menstrual blood also indicates that a woman is not pregnant. It refers to the girl’s passage into sexuality and reproduction. Kennedy, who had a miscarriage, knew that blood is ominously linked with the dangers of the biological functioning of a woman. The seven students speak of playing lemons in the grass when they attained their puberty. This is highly symbolic of an “old, popular use of lemons for contraception and, in the related shame, the use of lemons to lighten the skin” (Linda Kintz, 1992).
3.14.3.4 The ‘lesson’ becomes a symbol

The ‘lesson’, as the title indicates, has its connotative meanings. As Linda Kintz (1992) points out, it indirectly refers to the site and space of the lessons as the play is set in a classroom with statues and historical pictures. The lesson may also refer to the necessity for women to learn the lesson about their entry into the state of adulthood. The ‘dead language’ is associated with the language of the mother, and thereby it is directly linked with the body. The spectators are unable to figure out anything from the expressionless, rigid face of the White mother, the teacher who sits in front of the seven girls. As she takes class, the female students write on their imaginary tablets:

the people write in unison with their arms on imaginary tablets.
What they write they speak aloud (Kennedy, 1988:48).

Kennedy surrealistically reveals the agony and mental tortures of menstruating women. The play also becomes ‘a lesson’ for the girls, especially Black adolescents and it reveals the fact that they have to suffer humiliation or sexual harassment to attain their wish. She exposes that womanhood is a dismal and meaningless experience.

3.15 A RAT’S MASS
3.15.1 Surrealistic worlds of the rat siblings

As in Funnvhouse of a Negro and The Owl Answers, Kennedy in her later plays makes use of ricocheting theatrical devices to present the transformation of human beings into mutant forms or rodent forms that represent inherited guilt, sexual deviation and moral corruption. She portrays a world that has left its moorings, from the angle of personal, cultural, traditional, philosophical, religious and social perspectives and values. The play accepts the main surrealist ideas and proposes “a recognition and a taking of responsibility for human violence in revolt, in every sense”
This play exposes the influence of the White Catholic world. The play is enacted in the minds of the rat siblings. Costumed with rat head and tail, Blake thinks and acts like a rodent. Kay, half-rodent and half-human, plays second fiddle to her brother. This surrealistic image resembles Tzara's art of Mona Lisa with a moustache. The rodents lament their own fall from their golden place in the kingdom of God. Sister Rat mourns over their plight,

remember...we lived in a Holy Chapel with parents and Jesus, Joseph, Mary, our Wise Men and our Shepherd. People said that we were the holiest children (Kennedy, 1988:57).

3.15.2 Rosemary: modern Medusa

After committing the sin of incest, a sense of guilt and shame pervades the minds of the rat siblings. They believe that Christianity can certainly atone their sin and trust Rosemary, as she is a White Christian. They lie at her feet,

if you do not atone us, Kay and I will die. We shall have to die to forget ...because my sister thinks I am the father of a baby. Rosemary will you not atone us? (Kennedy, 1988: 60).

It is highly interesting to analyse the name 'Rosemary'. Rosemary means a small perennial evergreen shrub. It is a symbol of pleasing personality and pleasant nature. It also emblematizes remembrance and fidelity. In old legends, this term is used as, "where Rosemary thrives the mistress is master". Rosemary in A Rat's Mass remains there forever to catch the victims like Kay and Blake. She is powerful to instigate them to do what she desires. Rosemary is not only unsympathetic to their agony but also allows the Nazi killers to shoot them. The Nazi image had its genesis from Kennedy's own experience. She remembers,

I didn't want the Nazis to come, I didn't want to be a Hitler's child or go to a camp. My best friend said as long as the tower was up we were in danger (Kennedy, 1987:28).
When Jesus, Joseph and the Shepherd come in a procession, they beg, "Will you wait for me again at last spring?" (Kennedy, 1988:60). When God throws dead rats at them, they come to the realization that they are actually rats in the beams of the attic and their end is at hand. Like She, Clara, who is denied admission to the White world in The Owl Answers, the rat siblings are also mercilessly rejected by the White-dominated society.

3.15.3 Quest for an authentic identity

Like Sarah and Clara, the rat siblings meet their end in their search for identity. Kay wishes that they had not committed incest. She laments:

...Blake, did we really go on that slide together? What were those things made us do while she watched (Kennedy, 1988:59).

They are afraid of Nazis marching and invading their house and they feel that they would be executed soon. This fear of death accentuates the necessity for death. They cry in pain, "We want to hand ourselves. The rats" (Kennedy, 1988:57). The rat siblings become more aware of their bestiality toward the end of the play and they fear:

we will become headless and all will cease. The dark sun will be bright no more and no more sounds of shooting in the distance. It will be the end (Kennedy, 1988:65).

3.15.4 Kay's mental breakdown: a sign of body violence

Brother Rat feels guilty of his act with his sister and takes the responsibility for her neurosis. Furthermore, Kay writes to Blake from the asylum.

I hide under the house, my rat's belly growing all day long I eat sunflower petals, I sit in the garden Blake and hang three grey cats (Kennedy, 1988: 57).
To share the guilt with her brother, she sends him gnawed petals with the letters. She hopefully waits for him to visit her in order to escape from the Nazi squad, but he never turns up. The bitter experiences of the sin make her bleed and she cries all the time. She finds blood everywhere on the aisle of the church and on the carpet runner of the church. She says in disgust, "Now there will always be rat blood on the rat walls of our rat house just like the blood that came onto the slide" (Kennedy, 1988:62). The sinful act haunts her all the time and there is no escape. Sexual violence on adolescent Kay results in her mental derangement.

Blake, on the contrary, has no body violence. Though he feels guilty for the sin he has committed, he still loves Rosemary and never blames her for leading him to sin:

she (Rosemary) said if you love me you will. It seemed so innocent...Now my sister Kay sends me gnawed petals from sunflowers at the State hospital (Kennedy, 1988:63)

He says, "She made me promise never to tell if you love me she screamed you'll never tell. And I do love her" (Kennedy, 1988: 63). He calls himself Kay’s keeper and tells Rosemary that he loves her: "Yet I told Kay I am her keeper yet I told Rosemary I love her" (Kennedy, 1988: 63), but he is not at his sister’s side in the hospital. He even admits to God that he thinks of Rosemary all the time as he loves her and wants her to reciprocate. He never shares this kind of affection and love with Kay and scorns her. He represents all the Black men who sexually exploit their women without any sympathy or love for them. Kay’s agony increases due to the apathy of her own people. The double tyranny faced by the Black girl from the White imperialist world, through Rosemary, and from her own society, through her brother, is well brought out in the sufferings of Kay.
3.16 A BEAST STORY
3.16.1 Surrealistic mood

Kennedy’s unconventional drama borrows its style and quality from Strindberg’s dream play and the works of Tennessee Williams wherein reality is crushed by surrealistic themes and techniques. Investigations of identity, sexuality and death are symbolically delineated. Benston (1976) says that A Beast Story deals with the confused relation between nature and the self, the animal and the social being inscribed into and enacted out of a single consciousness. The play cycles between sensuality and death, that leads to bestiality. Unlike the multi-faceted personalities in The Owl Answers and the selves in Funnyhouse of a Negro, the characters in A Beast Story are reduced to a dark, bare and single figure whose fragmented psyche is evident through her dual nature, ‘the beast’ and ‘Negro’. Clive Barnes (1969) says that the play wraps around the mind like strange tendrils. Beast Girl, Beast Woman, Beast Man and Dead Human form the dramatic family, a Black family who are all trapped in a “timeless struggle of wills, desires and antipathies” (Kennedy, 1974:241). The deconstruction of the stage shows evinces the surrealistic mood of the play. The events of the play are wrapped in uncertainty. The action takes place in a “gloomy house of a minister in a drab section of a midwestern city”.

3.16.2 Sexually repressed Black family

In A Beast Story, the beasts are the members of a Black family obsessed with sensuality. Parent beasts inflict fear on the mind of their daughter to prevent her passage from girlhood into womanhood through sexual initiation. Beast Woman symbolically represents a weapon of defence against male invaders. The mother is obsessed with the blood of her own deflowering. She remembers her daughter’s birth:

I came close to death in that birth. When I tried to hold the baby I became hysterical and broke into weeping (Kennedy, 1974:196).
3.16.3 Mental conflicts

The conflict within the beast family is brought to a crisis when a boy called Dead Human arrives as Beast Girl's lover and husband. Though the girl desires a union with him, her parents' taboos restrain her budding sensuality and she drops her bridal bouquet. Thus, no fruitful union with a man is possible for the Beast Girl as her parents are watching. They make her kill her child with whiskey. The mother thus succeeds in persuading her daughter to slay her husband. Benston (1976) says,

throughout the play, Beast girl is victimized by her family; she is stalked by her lustful father and then raped by Dead Human when she refuses his advances. Later her parents force her to kill her child; in an apocalyptic fit of rage and despair, she murders her husband as well.

He (1976) further comments on the murder committed by Beast Girl in two aspects, namely,

the religious outrage of life's denial and the chaotic sensuality of passion in which death too plays its part. Beast Girl is forced into a criminal position, which is repulsive to her. She accepts her acts as final and yet her obligation remains to herself, a conscience that will not allow her an artificial martyrdom. It is plain that in the background of elemental, sexual struggle between father and mother initiated by Beast Man and Beast Woman and tragically repeated by Beast Girl and Dead Human– the issue of the emergence of woman as an individual.

3.16.4 Symbols

Kennedy's favourite bestial forms, jackal, toad and crow, are once again used to symbolize weakness. The play is enriched with distorted images: it begins with the marriage ritual of the Beast Girl, which is performed by her father. Bad omens and portents such as black sun, crows and toads accompany the ritual. As Beast Girl says,
my father preached our wedding service and a black sun floated over the altar. A crow flew through an open window while my mother played the organ and the black sun floated (Kennedy, 1974:194).

They are visible as external symbols that bring a premonition of their forthcoming death to the married couple. Beast Girl has to overcome her husband’s advances. She says,

I cut the throat of a pigeon poult to keep myself untouched. He is spending all his days grieving (Kennedy, 1974:195).

Beast girl is left in a mood of self-hatred as she is forbidden by her parents from leading a normal sexual life. She realizes that suppressed desires lead to bestiality and death,

my father built a crib...saw me in the crib... My mother...hardly slept at night and suffered endless wakeful fits. She was constantly tired, giving the feeling of someone in continual child labour. Above the bed hung a doleful picture of the Virgin and Child (Kennedy, 1974:197).

As the play progresses, Beast Girl seems to pass through the moments of self-accusation and remorse. The only way to get rid of her parents’ inherited guilt is violence. The murder of Beast Girl’s husband and child does not help her to escape from the situation. Beast Girl is haunted by the nightmares and visions of her lustful father,

my father comes toward me, saying something I do not comprehend. His face exudes a yellow light. The sky turns black (Kennedy, 1974:199).

This deviant behaviour is labelled as madness. It is an outcome of the character’s inability to confront the patriarchal set-up. Phyllis Chesler (1973) argues that madness is a label used for people, whose behaviour radically departs from what is socially prescribed. What we consider madness, she suggests, is either the acting out of the
devalued female role, or the total or partial rejection of one's sex role stereotype. A woman's madness is an intense experience of female biological, sexual or cultural castration. This leads to a final destruction in Beast Girl. Her unreasonable actions and the murder of her father in the final moments lead her to despair, but the mother watches complacently.

3.17 SHE TALKS TO BEETHOVEN

3.17.1 Dreamy world

In She Talks to Beethoven, the central character Suzanne Alexander writes about and speaks to Beethoven, the famous seventeenth century musician, in a meditation that merges time into the present. It is framed and interspersed with radio broadcasts about Suzanne’s husband, David, who is missing under mysterious circumstances. He has received threats and has disappeared to protect his wife.

Mr. Alexander is still missing. Alexander travelled with Fanon in Belida. His wife, also American, the writer Suzanne Alexander, is recovering from an unspecified illness. It is known that she was writing a play about Ludwig van Beethoven when she was stricken (Kennedy, 1992: 6).

Although the play is set in Legon, near Ghana, West Africa, Suzanne’s writing concerns Beethoven’s life in Vienna, Italy. The Ghanaian string music is juxtaposed against the strains of Beethoven’s Fidelio. Time and space fluctuate between Vienna, Austria (1803), and Legon, Ghana (1961), the colonised African-American space. The play becomes surrealistic as it happens in the mind or the fantasy of the writer and the dialogue between the writer and the composer merges distance and time in a bond of mutual understanding. We notice a highly surrealistic touch when the nineteenth century musician from Austria comforts and consoles the frustrated Black women in Ghana in twentieth century. Kennedy is expert in connecting the reality with imagination. She (Mahone, 1994) says,
the hardest thing was to decide when to set it. What year am I going to place these things in? Very often, I'm all at sea about that: what part to make your imagination, what to take from reality, and how to put those things together.

Beethoven confesses his deafness and his need for ‘conversation books’ to her. Suzanne’s absent husband David returns to her side as she reads Beethoven’s death scene from a manuscript. Unlike Kennedy’s earlier plays, the protagonist finds comfort in her desperate situation. Though she is separated from her husband, she never felt forlorn Beethoven safeguards her in her hallucination. She says to her husband when he returns:

Suzanne. David, you sent Beethoven until you returned. Didn’t you? David’s voice. (Not unlike Beethoven’s.) I knew he would console you while I was absent (Kennedy, 1992:23).

It is highly interesting to note that Kennedy has a habit of creating ‘voices’ in her play, an early example being the father’s voice in Funnyhouse of a Negro.

3.17.2 Black and White: artistic miscegenation

Kennedy believes that the composer is a Black and this is the secret message that the statue of Beethoven, which she keeps in her room, conveys to her. She has stated in her Memoir People who led to my plays,

soon I would understand that I was in a dialogue with the photographs, prints, postcards of people. They were my alter egos (Kennedy, 1987:96).

She further says,

I did not understand that I felt torn between these forces of my ancestry...European and African...a fact that would one day explode in my work (Kennedy, 1987:96).
The tension between the Black and White characters burst into verbal or body violence in her earlier plays, but in this play Suzanne is identified with the White composer, and she also perceives him as a Black man. The artistic miscegenation does not explode into a traumatic experience but blooms into an aesthetic, spiritual and moral collaboration. They share their secrets, worries, pains, sufferings and they also discuss each other’s works.

Kennedy makes use of Beethoven’s opera *Fidelio* as background music, which becomes a prominent and powerful force in this play. She translates his opera into her African experience. Through Suzanne’s memory, *She Talks to Beethoven* is inscribed in the pain and ecstasy of Beethoven’s opera. Like *Fidelio*, this play is also a work of great faith in human love and freedom, revealed through the two artists of different time and place. Both the works are based on the same concept of human love that is to be expected from each person in racial relations. Beethoven’s *Fidelio* deals with a Spanish noble, Florestan, who is unjustly imprisoned. It is similar to the situation of Suzanne’s husband David, who flees because of threats against his life; his flight protects his wife from the danger. Both the wives remain faithful and take steps for the rescue of their husbands. Florestan’s wife, Leonore, disguises herself as a young man and frees her husband who is sentenced to death. Similarly, Suzanne makes her husband alive through her creative works and in her imagination. His absence plays a vital role in the play as his voice is heard at crucial times. She brings him into her dialogues with the Italian composer and makes him a living character.

**3.17.3 Happy ending**

In this play, Kennedy draws upon her own pleasant memories of musicians and music teachers at school and transfers her love of music to Suzanne Alexander. However, in her earlier plays, Kennedy extends biography into aesthetics, magnifying the self into selves. By engaging in a conversation with Beethoven, Suzanne becomes fused with the Italian composer. Their dialogue is acknowledged as sharing the Black
heritage. The play honours the works of David, Suzanne and other creative Black artists. The relationship between Suzanne, a Black woman and Beethoven, the Italian composer, transcends the dichotomy of the White and Black. The sickness, disease, pain, separation and horror that war produces in Kennedy’s earlier works have been dissolved here. Suzanne is one of the rare Kennedy protagonists who have been healed and saved finally.

3.18 THE DRAMATIC CIRCLE

3.18.1 The film club: a mere fantasy

The Film Club and The Dramatic Circle are two other plays in The Alexander Plays, which deal with the psychic breakdown of Suzanne Alexander as her husband, David has been absconding for a year. Suzanne’s sister-in-law, Alice Alexander, takes the roles of actor, director, narrator of the play like Tom in Tennessee William’s The Glass menagerie. The action of the play is unfolded through the monologues of Alice Alexander who has organised a film club to view Bette Davis’s movies. Here again, Kennedy’s fascination for this voluptuous Hollywood star is revealed. As the action shifts between Legon and London, Kennedy once again explores the power of popular culture, the fantasies of European culture and the movies of Bette Davis.

3.18.2 The dramatic club: surrealistic atmosphere

The play The Dramatic Circle is a continuation of The Film Club in which Alice Alexander speaks of the events of 1961 and discusses Suzanne’s neurotic symptoms because the latter has always missed her husband. Alice says,

my brother had written me when he had been travelling with Frantz Fanon…I realized now some of the symptoms of Fanon’s patients were like Suzanne’s symptoms. She had always missed David…(Kennedy, 1992: 83).
In both the plays, Kennedy has introduced an important character, Dr. Freudenberger, “a London Doctor”, who is designated as a psychiatrist. He is modelled upon Freud, a famous psychoanalyst. His original name in the play is Sebastian. The story is modelled upon Stoker’s Dracula. The story is about a vampire who uses supernatural powers on innocent people and sucks their blood. Finally, Jonathan Harker confronts Dracula and destroys him after many adventures. The atmosphere is terrifying as it is created by passages taken from the novel.

Dracula drinks her blood for the first time. She receives a blood transfusion. The wolf, Berker, escapes from the zoo, breaks a window providing a passage to Lucy again. Lucy dies (Kennedy, 1992: 101).

3.18.3 Dracula: an imitation

Suzanne’s psychic breakdown makes her dwell in a hallucinatory world and she makes repeated forays into her past. Freudenberger’s association with the reading of Bram Stoker’s Dracula (1987) in the play is linked with Freud’s major publication on Studies on Hysteria. Like Dr. Seward in the novel Dracula, Freudenberger is both a doctor and a lover to his patient. He says, “The moment I met Suzanne I fell in love with her...I was struck by Suzanne’s fragile beauty” (Kennedy, 1992:106). Lucy is a patient and lover to Dr. Seward in the fiction too and in this play, Suzanne is the lover to Freudenberger. Like Dracula himself, Dr. Freudenberger prowls the Alexanders’ house in midnight. His white hair and moustache resemble that of Dracula. Alice says, “I had seen a figure and it had looked like Dr. Freudenberger and his hair had been white” (Kennedy, 1992:96). A reader can find the intermingling of several elements of Dracula in this play such as Jonathan Hawker’s secret diary, Dr. Seward’s diary, case notes and Lucy and Mina’s letters.

Alice wonders whether Freudenberger is focussing on Bram Stoker, reminding her that Suzanne’s breathlessness is a prelude to death. He finally confesses
that his nocturnal appearances are intended to prepare Suzanne for the changed appearance of David Alexander. He says,

I had a premonition that David, like Jonathan Harker, was going through bad times and she, like Lucy, would become the victim of an unfair, tragic plot. I’d hoped that my dramatic circle would help her and you on this difficult journey (Kennedy, 1992:106).

The sleepwalking scene of Suzanne is compared with the scene of Sarah’s somnambulating mother in Kennedy’s earlier play *Funnyhouse of a Negro*. Suzanne’s terror over her husband’s absence is transformed into an artistic depiction of her mental breakdown.

### 3.19 TIME AND SPACE

What sustain the dramatic action and plot of the play are time and space. They help in understanding the play’s context. Nevertheless, in the experimental surrealistic theatre, the traditional concepts of time and space are violated. The revolutionary playwrights create a utopian space where racial discriminations and injustices are eliminated. Kennedy is least bothered about time and she does not stick to the parameters of a traditional play. Her plays, as already mentioned, are a mixture of real and surreal settings, images and symbols that form a referential axis to her themes. Time is short, disjunctive, disrupted and brief. She also adopts transforming dream settings that buttress the action of the play. Thus, her plays mirror certain surrealistic devices, thereby reflecting Ionesco’s style. It also keeps pace with dream and hallucination. In *A Rat’s Mass*, the church procession of Jesus, Joseph, Mary, Two Wise Men and the Shepherd suddenly transforms into the killing by the Nazi squad. The same device is followed in *She Talks to Beethoven* where Beethoven, the seventeenth century Italian composer joins with the twentieth century writer Suzanne Alexander and they are in the quest of new a creation. They break time, colour and gender barriers. Black Africa and White Vienna have become one.
What most impressed Kennedy as a child is the tormented and hysterical alienation of the woman of her race who seemed not to belong anywhere. She makes use of the surrealistic elements of dreams, images and symbols and considers her work "as a growth of images". Violent nightmares and traumatic experiences are her richest sources. Kennedy's portrayal of personality fragmentation is reminiscent of Alice Gerstenberg's double personalities in Overtones. Furthermore, all her characters speak in the same cold, formal educated voice with no character differentiation. She (Mahone, 1994) says of her own writing:

when I'm writing, if I'm really tired or something, one of the things that's sustaining me is the feeling that I'm writing my letter to the world. For that instant, if I'm sitting in my living room, I'm taking stage center.

To conclude, the cryptic quality of Kennedy's plays is both tantalizing and confusing. The characters are simultaneously several beings in her surrealistic world. Kennedy's complex characters, strange style and her frequent use of surrealistic setting and symbols give the feeling of ritual, surrealistic dramas freed from literal representation. Although her vision is unique, introspective, psychological, bizarre and nightmarish, Kennedy is in the tradition of other poets of the theatre. Ruby Cohn (1982) praises Kennedy as a rare playwright who never forces her talent. Absorbing expressionist subjectivism and surrealist dream imagery to form her own unique timbre, she has shaped the most exquisite plays of this prolific period. Intensely personal, her plays are contemporary renderings of the search for an identity under schizophrenic splits, a catharsis through the tragic events. Like W.B. Yeats, Kennedy portrays dramatic situations that reflect not political and social conflicts in the playwright's contemporary situation, but archetypal human struggles.