



## SUBLIMATION OF LANGUAGE BY BODY IN NTOZAKE SHANGE'S *FROM OKRA TO GREENS/A DIFFERENT KINDA LOVE STORY: A PLAY / WITH MUSIC & DANCE*

### English

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### ABSTRACT

African Americans have succeeded in music, dance, religion, culture, art and literature. The Harlem Renaissance of 1920s and Black Art Movement of 1960s was a high point in encouraging the art and culture in literature. The Black Theatre, a part of Black Art Movement, presented music and dance of African ethnic group in delicate manner.

Cultural dances play a vast role in African societies. Africans consider dance as the elixir of their lives. The dance reinforces and civilizes them. For them, dance is a magic that harmonize their body, mind and soul. In her choreopoem, Shange considers dance as a fundamental art form of artistic and pious expression. In her play *From Okra to Greens/A Different Kinda Love Story: A Play / With Music & Dance*, Shange has brought together various dance forms, like the adagio, belly dance, vernacular dance and tribal dances of the Asanthi, Yoruba and Ewe groups to celebrate each and every emotional incident in life of the characters. Dance, for Shange, is a significant analysis of movements and emotions.

### KEYWORDS

African dances, Dance therapy, Shange and dance.

Black culture and Harlem Renaissance had a real influence on dance and music. The opening of black musical on Broadway started an interest in black dance in the theatre. Many black American women like Katherine Dunham and Pearl Primus admired the emergence of a black modern dance movement. But the works of Ntozake Shange was entirely different from all the other writers for its diverse culture. Shange presented various art forms in her plays and it all aroused a sentiment through her characters in searching the 'self.'

In view of Shange, dance is a vital art form of aesthetic and religious expression. Her dance spoke about the momentary of life. It acts as a perfect medium for self-realization. For Shange, music and dance are very influential forces of religion. Especially the female protagonists of Shange found comfort and mental ripeness through dance. Only through dance they expressed their mood and emotions. To point this, Kimberly W. Benston states,

But for Shange, dance might better be seen as a reflexive vehicle for inquiring into meaning's possibility, a polemical, if passionate, means of foregrounding the body's presence as it inscribes itself within and against an already highly- semiotized space. It is true that her characters share the preface's ebullient antigravitational instinct, the urge to soar through the moment's messy uncertainties to a possibly idealized origin of Africanness. (87)

Dance acts as a meaningful therapy for movements and emotions. Dance movements motivate intellectual, emotional and motor functions of the body. Dance serves as a healing agent for more than a century. It is used as a therapeutic ritual in the time of fertility, birth, sickness and death beyond ages. During 1970's and 1980's, dance was established as a therapeutic factor.

The subject matter of African dance is all inclusive of every activity between birth and death- the seed which trembles to be born- the first breath of life- the growth, the struggle for existence- the reaching beyond the everyday into the realm of the Soul- the glimpsing of the Great Divine- the ecstasy and the sorrow which is life, and then the path back to the Earth. This is the dance! (Welsh-Asante, 6)

Shange has made use of various dances in her choreo drama *From Okra to Greens / A Different kinda Love Story: A Play / With Music and Dance*. The play is about a sensitive love story of a female character Okra. The female protagonist Okra gives herself to Greens, her male partner, in the form of a gift and both had a complete sense of living. The author has involved five dancers in the play. They do not take part in improvisation of plot but exhibit the mood of the couple. The first part of the choreopoem deals with the meeting of Okra and Greens, their personal life occupies the second section and the main portion of the play.

Okra, a female protagonist, is a black poetess. She meets Greens, a poet. They love each other and at last they get married. In course of time Greens turns disloyal to Okra. He falls in relationship with some other lady. This gap made them to realize the emptiness of life. Finally they reconcile each other by expressing their true love and affection.

The smutting of dance and physical agitations from pain allows Okra's physical body to take their charge literally. She withdraws herself and her self-alienation leads to the life of isolation. As a result of social cruelty and isolation, Okra leads an indefinable misery and psychological suffering. In her isolation, Okra encounters Greens, a black man and they start their romance officially. A sexual pleasure at an earlier stage of marriage allows Okra to escape herself from her social and personal pains.

The overwhelming power of love is accepted by Okra and Greens when they discuss their relationship. Their exchange of love is identified as passionate when they speak of deep kisses, animal sounds, and wet fingers. Greens falls prey to the sexual attraction of glamorous woman and his infidelity allows them a chance to reconsider their relationship. When Greens leaves her, Okra feels the desolate life. During Greens' first absence, she again searches for words to express her pain and her emptiness.

Okra is the crooked woman before she finds a male companion and without Greens she again become like crooked woman. Shange's view is that a woman must have a man in her life romantically in order to make her life complete.

Though their relationship began with a sexual encounter, Greens offers his renewed faithfulness through lovemaking. As he asks Okra "to make love tonite" (47), he agrees that the glamour and attraction of other woman do not compare to the persistent force of the affection he feels for and receives from Okra. Okra accepts his apology and infidelity also. She has imagined of being married to "Bob Marley/ for at least 17 years" (47). Okra, she never expresses her romantic fantasies with another lover at any cause. Greens and Okra offer some valuable advices to other lovers like making mistakes and acknowledging them to oneself and to one's partner in order to maintain a satisfying mutual relationship.

In this play *From Okra to Greens/A Different Kinda Love Story: A Play / With Music & Dance*, Shange has applied various traditional African dances in the very opening of the poem. The dance movements are borrowed from the Ashanti, Yoruba and Ewe tribes. Only through these dances, the characters in the play are introduced to the audience. The dancers exit only after reaching the elate point of these dances. These dances act as a symbol of celebration.

Asaadua is the name of the dance of the Ashanti tribes and was once a

popular recreational musical type among the Akan people of Ghana. Yoruba dancers express communal desires, values, and collective creativity in order to emphasize individual talent. Touching while dancing is not common in the Yoruba, except in special circumstances. Master dancers are particular in teaching the dance exactly to the children. The children get improvisation only after performing the dance and receiving the appreciation of audience.

The Ewe people are an African ethnic group. The Ewe has an intricate collection of dances, which vary between geographical regions and other factors. Some dances are Adevu, Agbadza, Atsia, Agahu, Atsiagbekor and so on. The Ewe dances are harmonized with lead drums.

During the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920's, African American Vernacular dance travelled from the ship to minstrel shows to the mainstream. Shange uses this vernacular black dance steps to make fool of Greens. The whole episode of the poem 'you are such a fool' is employed by this vernacular dance form. Okra's anger towards Greens disloyalty is expressed through an improvised dance manner. The dancers display cruelty and vengeance in their dance.

Reconciliation state of mind of Okra is celebrated with ritual Arabic dance moments performed by the dancers. The traditional Arabian dance is mostly done by the women when they are together with other women. This dance is performed mostly to make fun of it and to show the expression of joy. Belly Dance is a type of Arabian ritual dance. This dance has been used throughout generations for celebrating the ceremonies of life and community. To entertain the guests, the women and men of the two families would enjoy a dance along with the professional belly dancer. These dances are also performed in other rituals like child birth and other common gatherings. Traditional belly dance is essentially spiritual movement. Through her finger motions, the belly dancers give out good wishes and blessings to the audience. In *From Okra to Greens* this dance is performed by the dancers who perform the dance by rounding up the couple. Shange has incorporated this dance to bless the couple.

Adagio is a type of aerobics. Shange uses this dance technique for the reconciliation of Greens and Okra. Greens realizes that he has hurt her. He comes back to her to console her. Through the adagio dance, they expressed their reconciliation.

Dance for Shange, like music, serves as a curative agent, a defense mechanism. The belief of African based tradition is that Shange exhibits in her usage of dance, music, poetry, and ceremony. Shange visualizes her home land as the embodiment of a bond system connecting Africans and African Americans. Shange clearly states her dance training in San Francisco in the preface of *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf* (1975).

With dance I discovered my body more intimately than I had imagined possible. ... The freedom to move in space, to demand of my own sweat a perfection that could continually be approached, though never known, was poem to me, my body & bind ellipsing, probably for the first time in my life. (xi)

Shange ruminates deeply on black American dance and states that they expressed their feelings only in physical form rather than verbal communication. Shange's use of various cultural dances in her play *From Okra to Greens / A Different Kinda Love Story: A Play / With Music and Dance* have given a blazing effect to this world. Cultural dances enlighten the world. Through the dance, one can completely feel the emotions of the character. While dancing, mind and body are internally connected. The cultural dances give relief to both the soul and the body. Thus the dance is the treatment for soul and also the human body. It helps to develop the spiritual power and will power too. The readers have the experience of the whole sensation of the cultural dance.

## REFERENCES

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