

**READING AND WRITING AS TRANSFORMATIVE ACTION
IN MARIA IRENE FORNES' AND ADRIENNE KENNEDY'S PLAYS**

by

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This dissertation examines Maria Irene Fornes' and Adrienne Kennedy's plays, focusing on the female characters' act of reading and writing on stage. Usually, reading and writing on stage are considered to be passive and static, but in the two playwrights' works, they are used as an effective plot device that moves the drama forward and as willful efforts by the female characters to develop their sense of identities. Furthermore, in contrast to the usual perception of reading and writing as intellectual processes, Fornes and Kennedy depict these acts as intensely physical and sensual. Julia Kristeva's and Hélène Cixous' poststructuralist psychoanalytic theories of language and female sexuality, and Gloria Anzaldúa's theory of writing the body are the major theoretical framework within which I explore the two playwrights' works. Since I treat the plays as meta-writing (writing about writing) I also use narrative theory to analyze the narrative structures of the plays, which the two dramatists use to reveal the nature of writing. I conclude that Fornes' plays demonstrate that knowledge and the possibility to create oneself can only result from one's earnest effort to merge language in one's embodied experiences and vice versa. I also conclude that in Kennedy's plays writing opens up a space in which the writer assumes many different identities simultaneously. In this space of writing, the writer uses her body as a medium through which she experiences the others' identities.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Maria Irene Fornes and Adrienne Kennedy are playwrights who defy the traditional realistic drama's conventions and structures. They are both the result of the tumultuous and revolutionary 60's and its avant-garde theatre movements. Fornes is considered as one of the new playwrights of Off Off Broadway movement, along with Sam Shepard and Jean-Claude Van Italic. On August 25th in *New York Times* in 1968, Robert Brustein, Dean of the School of Drama at Yale University at the time, observed that these new playwrights, who represented "the radical development of the New Theater [coinciding] with unrest in our political life [...] share a passion for experimentation, all are original, all possess an individualized vision, and few would have had quite the same freedom had they not found a home at the Open Theater, Café La Mama, Theatre Genesis, Judson Church or any other of the numerous theater hostels studded about the city" (D1). Based in Judson Church, Fornes started her career as playwright within the lively atmosphere of OOB movement: collaborating with directors and actors as a part of the process of playwriting, experimenting with ways to present human bodies for their phenomenological raw energies, attempting new dramatic structures and offering critical views of bourgeois life. Then, into the 70s, she became more attuned to women's experiences within the society, concerned with women's intellectual and spiritual development. Maria Irene Fornes has won 9 Obie Awards throughout her career in theatre. *The Conduct of Life* and *Abingdon Square*, her later

plays in the 1980s, which I examine in this dissertation, were awarded for “Best New American Play.”

Another marker of the theatre of the 1960s is the Black Theater Movement. In 1969, Dan Isaac states in *New York Times*, “The Theater season of 1968-69 will long be remembered as that movement in American cultural history when Black Theater came of age” (D1). Since the focus of the Black Theatre Movement during the 1960s was on “performing works written by blacks primarily for blacks” (D1) with nationalistic purpose to empower collective black identity and aesthetics, Kennedy’s works, which foreground individuality in identity formation and her personal experience not only of race but also of gender and class, were less critically acclaimed within the Black Theatre than she deserved at the time. Even so, her debut play *Funnyhouse of a Negro* in 1964 was acknowledged with Obie Award. The play was awarded for “the most distinguished play.” The importance of her plays within the Black Theater Movement has been revalued recently, especially within the venues of black female playwrights’ avant-garde dramas. Olga Barrios, in her essay “From Seeking One’s Voice to Uttering the Scream: The Pioneering Journey of African American Women Playwrights through the 1960s and 1970s,” maintains that Kennedy, along with Ntozake Shange, Aishah Rahman, and Alexis De Veaux, “[creates] a new dramatic language that abandons the traditional realistic style.” She states, “Kennedy is actually the pioneer in experimenting with an avant-garde theater which opened the door to new venues in creating theatrical concepts later developed by Shange, Rahman, and De Veaux [...]” (Barrios 613). The recent reevaluation of her works led to the Signature Theater in New York naming Kennedy as playwright-in-residence for the September 1995 through May 1996 season. *June and Jean in Concert*, which premiered during this season, won Obie Award for Best New American Play.

Even though they are both the children of the changes in American theater during the 1960s, their plays have little in common. Their dramaturgical principles and styles are different. Fornes sets her characters in a relatively realistic space with visually impressionistic details here and there, and her dramatic events unfold linearly even though in a fragmented way. Kennedy, on the other hand, places her characters in a highly symbolical and psychological space, the inner stage of the main character's mind, so to speak. Kennedy's narrative defies linear structure: the events in her dramas are usually arranged in seemingly disorderly way. Moreover, due to their different backgrounds--one as a Cuban immigrant, and the other from a black middle class family--the foci of their dramatic themes are on different areas, even though both the playwrights are deeply concerned with women's experiences in the patriarchal culture of the U.S. society. Even so, what drew me to these playwrights is their passion for language. Their characters are in love with language: they read in an unusual way and, more importantly, write almost obsessively. The plays take us into staged scenes of reading and writing.

For many of Fornes' characters, reading and writing is vital for their understanding and expressing who they are. In *Mud*, it wouldn't be wrong to say, the whole play is driven by Mae's desire to learn to read, to get acquainted with language. And in a fascinating way, her reading becomes a kind of writing – a creating of her own story out of what she reads. As she reads an encyclopedic passage about a starfish, she embodies the words written on the page and writes her own story out of and into it. In *Sarita*, Sarita repeatedly writes good-bye notes to Julio, her fatal lover, as she endeavors to cut herself from her deadly desire for him. When her actions betray her will, writing gives her a space to grasp what is really happening to her and why those things are happening. With each note she writes, she obtains a better understanding of herself and the situation she is in, and therefore a better control of it. *Abingdon Square* also introduces a

character, Marion, who reads with her whole body and keeps writing in her journal in a search of her “character”—who she is and what she wants. Thus her writing launches her on a journey to an unexplored realm of her desire, toward growth and maturity. Fornes’ more recent plays *Terra Incognita* and *Letters from Cuba* also have at the center of the plays characters who keep writing. In *Terra Incognita*, Amalia keeps writing in her journal the minute details of her trip to Spain almost simultaneously as they are happening. And her personal writing collides with the historical record of the Spanish invasion of Cuba in 1512. At the center of *Letters from Cuba* are the brother and sister, one in Cuba and the other in New York, who constantly write to each other across the border. Their writing gives them an imaginary space where they phantasmagorically cross the border and join each other.

Many of Kennedy’s plays also feature “writers” in them. Clara, in *A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White*, is an aspiring playwright, whose struggle to write is circumscribed by gender roles, racial discrimination and the discrepancy between her fantasy of being a glamorous actress on the Hollywood movie screen and her actual body. The main character in *Ohio State Murders* and *She Talks to Beethoven*, known as the “Alexander Plays,” is Suzanne Alexander, a professional writer. *Ohio State Murders* could be seen as Suzanne’s writing of her past, which centers around young Suzanne’s relationship with reading and writing of English literature; how she was violently excluded from the language and how she writes herself back into it equally violently. *She Talks to Beethoven* simultaneously invites us into and makes us outsiders to Suzanne’s writing of a biography of Beethoven, the European white male composer. Writing enables and progresses this unexpected (at least to me) yet captivating association Suzanne creates between herself and Beethoven. *June and Jean in Concert*, a dramatization of Kennedy’s

autobiography *People Who Led to My Plays*, presents twin sisters who constantly write in their journals, in which they record their present, past and even future events.

It is not only Fornes and Kennedy who have staged characters who read and write. There have been both male and female playwrights who have staged characters doing the act of writing as a search for and an affirmation of identity and selfhood. For example, in William Wycherley's *Country Wife* (1675), the letter writing scenes, in which Margery Pinchwife writes letters to Horner whom she secretly loves, function as important dramatic device of driving and twisting the plot. Indeed she is forced to write, under her husband's physical threat, the opposite of what she desires. But she manages to edit and rewrite the letter behind her husband's back. Moreover, she writes another letter to Horner, in which she more expressly reveals her desire for him. Jon Lance Bacon in his essay "Wives, Widows, and Writings in Restoration Comedy," examines the Restoration Comedy like *The Way of the World*, *The Country Wife*, and *All for Love* in the legal context of marriage during the 17th century which rendered the wife's identity utterly subsumed by her husband's. He finds that the writing action by a female character in the Restoration Comedy was used as an assertion of her identity, separate from her husband. On account of the letter writing scene in *The Country Wife*, he observes, "Beyond the level of plot, the literal act of writing manifests her self-assertion. Denied a separate legal identity, Margery enters into a private contest to decide whether she or her husband will be the author of her personality" (Bacon 433). Thus, Fornes and Kennedy are not the only playwrights who realized and emphasized the power of writing to affirm one's identity. What differentiates them from the classical examples of writing on the stage is that their female characters write not only to affirm their identities but also to invent ones.

In the two playwrights' worlds, identity and the desire do not pre-exist the language. Language is not simply a tool to express who you already are. Rather, it is a simultaneous process that consists of interactive exchange between the writer and the language, in which identities are discovered, affirmed, modified, and created. In their plays, language has performative power in the sense that language not only reflects reality but also transforms reality. By writing, the characters empower themselves to transgress the social boundaries of gender and racial identities, and create new territories for themselves. The language here is immediate and present, close to the body. Reading is not only an intellectual activity but a physical one as well. Mae in *Mud* reacts to the words with the physical sensations of her body. The result of the reading by the Pupils in *Lesson in Dead Language* is the blood stains on their skirts. Writing for Fornes' and Kennedy's characters is a fatal struggle to give meaning to their bodily experiences, which are silenced or denied in the culture they belong to. Fornes and Kennedy, by bringing the female characters' bodily experiences and sensations to the language they read and write, reveal the social and cultural oppressions imposed on the women's bodies and identities *through* language. Simultaneously, they suggest the possibilities to subvert the cultural restrictions and to establish women's subjecthood through creating new ways to write women's bodies—cultural, social, sexual, maternal, yet human and continuously changing bodies.

To sum up, in Fornes' and Kennedy's plays writing happens on two levels. The first level is the character's writing--the motivation, the process, and the consequences of her writing--and the second level is the playwright's writing, that is the structure, the frame, the environments in which they place their writing characters. On the first level of writing, Fornes' and Kennedy's characters write in order to make sense of themselves and the world; their present and past, and even the future. Writing allows them to rewrite themselves against the sociopolitical restraints

inscribed on them; to negotiate their identities among multiple and split selves. By creating a new language in opposing ways to the dominant discourses, the characters practice and realize their subjectivity, and reconstitute their identities and the meaning of their lives.

On the second level, in the scene of meta-writing, the playwrights not only dramatize the act of writing but what escapes and exceeds writing: the things that the body experiences but cannot be written down in language. Using theatre as a media to write about writing, Fornes and Kennedy are able to bring in the body, the sensation, and even a spiritual something to the scene of writing, using them as other kinds of communicative language. Thus, they create a space for “un-heard of songs” (Cixous, “Laugh” 348).

1.1 CRITICAL METHODOLOGY

In my reading of Maria Irene Fornes’ and Adrienne Kennedy’s plays, I will use feminist poststructuralist psychoanalytic theories, especially those of Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva as the major theoretical frame. These two theorists are often associated with *écriture féminine*, but interestingly they themselves deny the title, professing that there is no “feminine” writing per se. Cixous asserts that the way she uses the term “feminine” and “masculine” does not refer to gender division, but rather the attributes of different economies working in languages. Indeed she finds her examples of “writing the body” in male writers. Kristeva also finds the examples of her idea of “poetic language,” which most saliently emanates bodily drives and rhythms in language, in avant-garde writers such as Mallarmé or Joyce. Even so, both theorists look for ways to subvert the ways the patriarchal culture historically control and silence women’s bodies and to find/create language to newly write them so that women can have their bodies back. This project

is all the more significant since the body is the site where a woman's sexuality and identities are exerted, and her subjectivity is practiced. I will first explore the feminist poststructuralist position toward subjectivity and language, which I will use as an overall theoretical frame to illuminate the relationship of the two in Fornes' and Kennedy's plays. Then I will explain the specific points on which Cixous' and Kristeva's psychoanalytical revision of sexual difference and the meaning of the bodies illuminate in my reading of the two playwrights' plays. I will also discuss other theatre critics' attempts to explicate the women's bodily experiences and its relation with identity politics in Kennedy's and Fornes' dramas and how I depart from or further develop the existent academic discourses. Then I will discuss narrative theory and how it provides me with critical terms with which to analyze the two playwrights' works.

1.1.1 Feminist Poststructuralist Position

Poststructuralist views enable me to understand that subjectivity and language and the sociopolitical structures that pre-exist the subject are all interrelated, which Kennedy's and Fornes' plays demonstrate in concrete terms on stage. As feminist poststructuralist Chris Weedon states, language needs to be viewed "as a system always existing in historically specific discourses." She further maintains, "Once language is understood in terms of competing discourses, competing ways of giving meaning to the world, which imply differences in the organization of social power, then language becomes an important site of political struggle" (Weedon 24). And subjectivity is "precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak" rather than "unique, fixed and coherent" (32-3). Thus it becomes important for an individual to take an initiative in giving meaning to her

own experiences in language in order to challenge and change the social structures which are usually constructed in the interest of those in power. Weedon maintains,

Poststructuralist feminist theory suggests that experience has no inherent essential meaning. It may be given meaning in language through a range of discursive systems of meaning, which are often contradictory and constitute conflicting versions of social reality, which in turn serves conflicting interests. This range of discourses and their material supports in social institutions and practices is integral to the maintenance and contestation of forms of social power, since social reality has no meaning except in language. (34)

Although Weedon equips me with concepts and vocabularies of poststructuralism, which are very useful in the analysis of Kennedy's and Fornes' works, I find her discomfort with the body, to be more precise, the biological body, problematic for my purpose. For example, in her discussion of Kristeva's and Cixous' psychoanalytic theories, she seems to erase the parts in the two theorists' ideas that affirm and celebrate the distinctively female bodily experiences such as sexual pleasures, giving birth, birth pains, and the power of creativity and life force that come out of them. Avoiding this side of their thoughts, Weedon seems to try to emphasize only those parts where Cixous and Kristeva are being "deconstructive," where they view masculinity and femininity only as linguistic constructs in a historically and socio-politically particular discursive system. Weedon seems to abhor any hint of "essentialism" fearing that the feminist efforts to open up new possibilities for feminine subjectivity might be hindered by the concept of the female biological body as "natural" and "fixed." According to Weedon, this view doesn't allow any other discursive way to give different meaning to women's subjectivities. She states "We cannot rely on biological femaleness and language as expression, general categories which

suppress the social construction of femininity and language as a site of political struggle” (82).

Weedon’s critical position toward the feminist discourse which emphasizes the sexual difference of the female body is not without reason. Even though the body is a natural and undeniable entity that constitutes a human being, it has been a very slippery and ungraspable concept in the western philosophy. In the binarism of the traditional Western philosophy, mind and reason secure who we are as a human subject, while the body makes you feel like you are not yourself at times because of the embarrassing sexual desire, sickness and all the uncontrollable fluids and whatnots. Furthermore, in the patriarchal society, in which the male dominance had to be maintained as a norm, masculinity was given the status of “rational” and “intellectual” mind while femininity was constructed to represent body and instincts. Thus female body was always sexual, unpredictable, and even dangerous in the eyes of man, and had to be regulated and controlled within the institution of a family. Elizabeth Grosz in *Volatile Bodies: toward a Corporeal Feminism* asserts,

[These] facets of patriarchal thoughts have in the past served to oppress women, most notably the patriarchal rationalization of male domination in terms of the fragility, unreliability, or biological closeness to nature attributed to the female body and the subordinate character attributed to women on account of the close connections between female psychology and biology. Women have been objectified and alienated as social subjects partly through the denigration and containment of the female body. [...] many patriarchal conceptions of the body that have served to establish an identity for women in essentialist, ahistorical, or universalist terms. (xiv)

Weedon’s discomfort with the body is sympathetically understandable considering the place of body, especially female body in the history of traditional Western philosophy as Grosz explicates

above. Any attempt to link subjectivity and body could be “alarming” and “worrying” to the feminists (Grosz, xiv).

However, Kennedy’s and Fornes’ plays demonstrate that the body is where one’s subjecthood is experienced and testified. What women feel in their bodies, how they experience their bodies are the very starting point from which they seek and establish their selfhood and self-knowledge. Sexual desires, sexual experiences, body images, pregnancy and motherhood, whether they can be expressed in language or not, are all crucial constituents of their perception of who women are. The idea of the body as the ground for subject formation is supported by feminist thinkers such as Elizabeth Grosz. She claims:

The wager is that all the effects of subjectivity, all the significant facets and complexities of subjects, can be as adequately explained using the subject’s corporeality as a framework as it would be using consciousness of the unconscious. All the effects of depth and interiority can be explained in terms of the inscriptions and transformations of the subject’s corporeal surface. Bodies have all the explanatory power of minds. (Grosz vii)

Encompassing psychoanalysis, neurophysiology, and phenomenology, Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, Grosz “refigures” body as “the very stuff of subjectivity” (ix). Paul John Eakin, a respected scholar of autobiography, supports this view too. Drawing in various theories on subjectivity and using diverse autobiographies as examples, he confirms that “the subjectivity and selfhood are deeply rooted in the body, that psychology and physiology are intimately linked” (Eakin 20). Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva, based on the poststructuralist view of subjectivity and language, illuminate the relation between subjectivity and body. While they pay attention to women’s bodies, they do so in order to reveal the social and cultural restrictions imposed on them

through language, and to suggest ways to reconfigure the representational system in ways to open the bodily experiences of women to the possibility of multiple meanings and transformation. This is where the two theorists are most helpful for me in examining Fornes' and Kennedy's plays.

1.1.2 *Écriture féminine*

Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva, because of their attitude toward writing, are often dubbed as *Écriture féminine*, a term which began to circulate in the academic discourses roughly around 1970s in France and later in the U.S. It emphasizes the value of writing in women's search for their true and working identities instead of those inflicted upon them by the society and its culture and history. They explore and "re"-discover women's bodily experiences as positive and affirmative sexual differences. *Écriture féminine* philosophers envision revolutionary power that will come about when women honestly and profoundly explore their bodily experiences and energy, letting them erupt into language and using it as a tool to open up their creativity and to celebrate femininity as a positive value and power. This way, women can turn language, which has been the major means the patriarchal society has used to mold and restrict women into "a mere foil for the masculine" (Holmes 220), into their own weapon with which to fight and resist against the very same system. To Cixous and Kristeva, writing that asserts feminine values into the sociocultural discourses and representational systems has the subversive power to challenge the male dominant, patriarchal society that has marginalized women. Though they both share this belief in writing, they serve my purpose in different ways. I will first discuss Helene Cixous' theoretical positions toward women's writing and its relation to their bodies, and the specific points in her theory that supports my reading of the two playwrights. Then I will provide an

overview of Kristeva's seminality and psychoanalytic explication of feminine sexuality focusing on the points that especially illuminate the two playwrights' works.

What Cixous offers me in my analysis of Fornes' and Kennedy's plays is, first of all, her assertion that language has performative power. Language not only reflects reality but transforms it. If the cultural and social hegemony exerts its power through language, that is, the dominant discourses that dictate meanings of our experiences, then, conversely, by changing language, that is, expression, names and narratives, we could dare to change the way we perceive reality and our identities. Then, as its result, we could begin to change the reality itself, even though in a slow progress.¹ Thus, Cixous asserts, "writing is precisely the very possibility of change, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures" ("Laugh" 350). Kennedy's and Fornes' plays demonstrate the performative power of language Cixous believes in. The words Fornes' characters read in books bring concrete changes in their lives, as the words stir new sensations in their bodies, all of which leads to new perceptions of reality. Kennedy's characters, by writing, reshape their memories and, thereby, create new identities. Cixous' theory, therefore, is particularly instrumental in observing how writing empowers the women writers in practical terms in Kennedy's and Fornes' plays.

The language's transformative power Cixous asserts is also related to how Cixous understands identity. Cixous denies the traditional Western philosophical view of identity as unitary, transcendent and fixed. Instead, she asserts that identity is multiple and constantly changing. She states, "Pure I, identical to I-self, does not exist. I is always in difference. I is the

¹ An example of transformative/performative power of language is "the fact that feminists have managed to fight back, have already made many people feel uncomfortable in using the generic 'he' or 'man', have questioned the use of words like 'chairman' and 'spokesman' [...]" (Moi 158). The effort to reveal the sexism in language and to suggest/invent new terms and phrases can produce changes in the social relations. In this sense, Toril Moi supports "Kristeva's view of the productivity of the sign" (158). And I believe "the productivity" here can also mean "the performativity" of language.

open set of the trances of an I by definition changing, mobile, because living-speaking-thinking-dreaming” (Preface xviii). For Cixous, writing provides a writer with a space where one can liberate herself from the fixed position and become many different selves.

Her language does not contain, it carries; it does not hold back, it makes possible when id is ambiguously uttered—the wonder of being several—she doesn’t defend herself against these unknown women whom she’s surprised at becoming, but derives pleasure from this gift of alterability. I am spacious, singing flesh, on which is grafted no one knows which I, more or less human, but alive because of transformation. (“Laugh” 359)

Cixous’ concept of identity and writing illuminates how Kennedy’s and Fornes’ characters seek to affirm yet create their identities through writing.

Another aspect of which Cixous is particularly illustrative for my reading of the two playwrights’ works is her attention to women’s bodily experiences. Cixous argues that women’s bodies have been culturally and socially silenced in the patriarchal society, and it is of vital importance for women to write their bodies in new terms. She affirms,

We’ve been turned away from our bodies, shamefully taught to ignore them, to strike them with that stupid sexual modesty [...] Women must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations and codes, they must submerge, cut through, get beyond the ultimate reserve-discourse, including the one that laughs at the very idea of pronouncing the word “silence” [...]” (“Laugh” 355)

The site where feminine writing finds its beginning and destiny, according to Cixous, is the body.

As soon as you let yourself be led beyond codes, your body filled with fear and with

joy, the words diverge, you are no longer enclosed in the map of social construction, [...]. And you are returned to your innocences, your possibilities, the abundance of your intensities. Now listen to what your body hadn't dare to let surface. (*Coming* 49-50)

Thus, Cixous' "writing the body" is an active practice to go "beyond code" of patriarchy and out of "the map of social construction" and to search for her identity and subjectivity from her own primary level of being. This kind of writing as "expressive language, and the language of desire" will enable a "fresh" knowledge of the world since it will "serve as a medium of discovery of the truths", not "a truth already known", but "a truth yet to be discovered" (Nye 328). Indeed, Fornes' and Kennedy's characters seek to look beyond the surface of the truth already given to them, to find their own terms of truth, using writing as a tool.

Finally, Cixous is helpful for me in that she expands the effect of women's writing to social and political areas—one's relation to others and the ethical vision involved in it. Cixous believes that writing is an act 'to acknowledge the multiple others within me,' and also an act to realize my responsibility toward others. Instead of mastering and controlling, one accepts the difference of others in love and let others live within one. Writing is, therefore, a constant process of exchange between the writer and others. She affirms:

To admit that writing is precisely working (in) the in-between, inspecting the process of the same and of the other without which nothing can live, undoing the work of death—to admit this is first to want the two, as well as both, the ensemble of the one and the other, not fixed in sequences of struggle and expulsion of some other form of death but infinitely dynamized by an incessant process of exchange from one subject to another. A process of different subjects knowing one another and beginning one

another anew only from the living boundaries of the other: a multiple and inexhaustible course with millions of encounters and transformations of the same into the other and into the in-between [...] (“Laugh” 353)

[...] Because I write for, I write from, I start writing from: Love. I write out of love. Writing, loving: inseparable. Writing is a gesture of love. *The Gesture*.

Everyone is nourished and augmented by the other. Just as one is not without the other, so Writing and Loving are lovers and unfold only in each other’s embrace, in seeking, in writing, in loving each other. [...] (*Coming* 42)

Cixous’ assertion on the inseparable relation between loving and writing supports me especially to read the changes the writing brings about in the relationship between the writer and the others in Fornes’ and Kennedy’s plays.

Even though Cixous envisions the reformation of the relation between self and others in a generally political term, she is also criticized for the individualistic tone, and for lacking in politically specific references. Toril Moi states, “Cixous’ poetic vision of writing as the very enactment of liberation, rather than the mere vehicle of it, carries the same individualist overtones. Writing as ecstatic self-expression casts the individual as supremely capable of liberating herself back into union with the primeval mother” (Moi 125). Moi also points out that “Cixous’s global appeal to ‘woman’s powers’ glosses over the real differences among women, and thus ironically represses the true heterogeneity of women’s powers” (125). As Moi suggests, Cixous’ theory of women’s writing is at times an unsatisfactory tool for investigating Fornes’ and Kennedy’s female characters’ location in specific cultural and social contexts not only for their female gender, but as for their class, economic status and race. Therefore, I will turn to American theorist/writer Gloria

Anzaldúa when I need to supplement Cixous with more specific political stance.

Gloria Anzaldúa's theory of writing and her strong exhortation to women—especially colored women in the U.S. who are marginalized because of their racial differences--to write has a lot in common with Cixous' theory of writing. Her advocacy of multiple subject position, attention to women's bodies and language's transformative power, and therefore her strong urge for women to write in order to empower themselves, are similar to Cixous' visions. However, her position as "the daughter of sixth-generation *mexicanos* from the Rio Grande Valley of south Texas and a self-described 'Chicana *tejana* feminist-dyke-*patlache* poet, fiction writer, and cultural theorist'" (Keating 1) enables her to "[expand] her definition of writing the body [...] and [develop] a writing process that reflects the specific needs of self-identified women of color and other marginalized groups" (121). Furthermore, Anzaldúa's cross-reference to more than two cultures is especially illustrative of Kennedy's identity politics. Therefore, I will draw on her theory of writing in order to account for the ways Kennedy blurs the racial/ cultural boundaries between black and white as a part of the writing process she dramatizes.

Julia Kristeva is another major theorist I refer to in my analysis of Fornes's and Kennedy's plays. The specific points Kristeva illuminates on account of the act of reading and writing dramatized in the two playwrights' works are 1) language includes the bodily drives within it. In other words, the signifying process is the dynamic dialect of the semiotic – "a discharge of the subject's (bodily) energy or bodily drives" (McAfee 15) and the symbolic – "the discourse that uses the normal rules of syntax and semantics to convey meaning" (22), 2) that, a subject, which is constructed in language, is always in the process of making, 3) the poetic language which lets the bodily drives irrupt into language could have a revolutionary power in political realms as well. Kristeva's linguistics is a complex theoretical discourse encompassing

psychoanalysis, linguistics, semiotics, and literary criticism. I will further explicate Kristeva's theory of language and then discuss how specifically it is useful for my purpose.

Kelly Oliver states that “[one] of Kristeva's most important contributions to contemporary theory is her attempt to bring the speaking body back into the discourse of the human science” (Introduction xvi). Kristeva criticizes both structuralist and poststructuralist philosophies of language as “nothing more than the thoughts of archivists, archaeologists, and necrophiliacs” (*Revolution* 27), arguing that language is neither “self-contained, isolated islands” nor “merely moments” (28). The mistake the contemporary philosophies of language commit, according to Kristeva, is that they repress the body, which actually produces language. The body is full of significations.

In establishing her theory of signification, Kristeva posits two major concepts: *semiotic* and *symbolic*. The *semiotic* is “a discharge of the subject's bodily energy and drives” into a language. It is manifested as intonations, gestures, pauses, rhythm and breathing. The *symbolic*, which is different from Lacan's Symbolic, is “orderly communication”: discourse that uses the normal rules of syntax and semantics to convey meaning (McAfee 34). While the symbolic has stable references and makes normal communications possible by guaranteeing the denotative meaning, the semiotic may disrupt or shatter the stability of the symbolic with its multiple and plural meanings but, importantly, it energizes language. Kristeva explains these two concepts in relation to the developmental stages in the acquisition of language, especially the “semiotic *chora*.” Kristeva borrows the term from Plato, who meant by it “receptacle and nurse, that is the container and the producer, of what the universe is before and as anything exists” (McAfee 19). In Kristeva's use of the term, the semiotic *chora* is connected to the maternal body. It is a psychic space full of feelings and instinctual drives, in which an infant has not yet “developed clear

borders of his or her own identity” (McAfee 19). To understand what Kristeva means by the semiotic *chora*, one can imagine an infant in its mother’s arms—not yet perceiving itself as a subject but a subject-in-the-making nonetheless; does not speak yet but still signifies his needs and feelings with crying, breathing and movements, full of bodily drives and energy; not separated from its mother’s body but feels it is one with the mother or the mother’s breasts; not social yet but under the protection and caring regulation of the mother, who does so according to the social and cultural orders; a stasis but in constant motion. The semiotic *chora* is “preverbal semiotic space” preceding the language acquisition, and a preverbal functional state that governs the connections between the body (in the process of constituting itself as a body proper), object, and the protagonists of family structure” (Kristeva, *Revolution* 36). To many psychoanalysts, this is a lost realm – lost in unconscious – because it is a stage before the acquisition of language, before signification. One should break from it in order to become a subject, and to be able to use language symbolically, in other words, to use language according to social censorship. The semiotic *chora*, from then on, should be left behind and repressed in most psychoanalysis theorists’ thinking. Kristeva, however, argues that it is not a lost realm and should not be repressed either.

Theory can “situate” such processes and relations diachronically within the process of the constitution of the subject precisely because *they function synchronically within the signifying process of the subject himself*, that is, the subject of *cogitation*. Only in *dream* logic, however, have they attracted attention, and only in certain signifying practices, such as the *text*, do they dominate the signifying process. (38)

Kristeva maintains that one can traverse into the semiotic and let it irrupt into the symbolic, thereby “exploding the phonetic, lexical, and syntactic object of linguistics” and “exploding the

subject and its ideological limits” (29). This shattering of the discourse is what renews and energizes language, and subverts the established rigid systems of authority constructed and sustained by language.

To sum up, Kristeva shows that the body is a part of the signifying process and that a language already includes bodily drives. And due to the bodily energy and drives in language, the meaning of a text is never fixed or stable. This heterogeneity in language has the possibility to subvert the oppressive relation between the signifier and the signified, and by expansion, the oppressive institutional system that sustains the power structure of the society. Kristeva’s theory of signifying process as the dialectic between semiotic and symbolic enables me to discern the unique relationship Fornes’ and Kennedy’s heroines have with language, which distinguishes them from other characters. Unlike other characters, they are prone to the semiotic aspect of the text. They somehow find ways to reactivate and infuse their own semiotic discharges in the text, which enables them to unsettle the dominant authority even though temporarily. And as writers, they struggle to delve into their dreams, desires and unconscious, which are all related in the two playwrights’ works, and to write from their bodily experience as women, “summoning this timeless ‘truth’ – formless, neither true nor false, echo of our *jouissance*, of our madness, of our pregnancies – into the order of speech and social symbolism” (Kristeva qtd in Oliver, *Reading* 109)

Another important point Kristeva offers me is her view of subjectivity. She argues that the theory of language is necessarily related to the theory of subjectivity. As Kristeva explains the dialectic of the *semiotic* and the *symbolic* in language, she attributes it to the constitution of the subject: “Because the subject is always *both* semiotic *and* symbolic, no signifying system he produces can be either “exclusively” semiotic or “exclusively” symbolic, and is instead

necessarily marked by and indebtedness to both” (34). Because the subject signifies with the semiotic as well as with the symbolic and let the semiotic function as a signifier in the discourse, Kristeva views “subject in language” “as decentering the transcendental ego, cutting through it, and opening it up to a dialectic in which its syntactic and categorical understanding is merely the liminary moment of *the process...*” (*Revolution 39, italics mine*). This means, McAfee explains, “The speaking being is not a stable subject. He or she is something else altogether: a subject in process.” She further clarifies:

The semiotic is the more archaic, unconsciously driven, one might say even ravenous mode of signifying. When it seeps out in signification, as it does in avant-garde poetry, it disrupts the more orderly, symbolic effort at communication. It also displays and amplifies the subject’s lack of unity. [...] No living, speaking being is immune from semiotic disruptions. Moreover, no speaking being could function sanely unless it expresses the semiotic in some way. (39)

Thus, in Kristeva’s model of self, the subject is never stable or unified or fixed but fluid and heterogeneous, always in the process of making. Kristeva’s belief that a subject is heterogeneous is similar to that of Cixous. In this sense, both the theorists illuminate the ways Fornes’ and Kennedy’s characters attempt to imagine, invent and assume different identities through the act of reading and writing in bodily engaged ways.

In addition, Kristeva’s revision of feminine sexuality which she modifies from Freud’s and Lacan’s psychoanalytic models is also useful for me to interpret Fornes’ and Kennedy’s characters’ motivations and emotional states. Kristeva locates the sexual difference between male and female genders in the language acquisition process of infants. By sensitively explicating the different relationship a male child and a female child have with the maternal body as they enter

the language, or the Law of the Father, Kristeva explains the difficulty women have with language (especially with symbolic language), and its effect on the formation of women's sexuality. Kristeva's discussion of depression and feminine sexuality as depressive in *Black Sun*, and her attempt to construct an alternative discourse of motherhood/ maternal body are especially of relevance to Fornes' *Sarita* and Kennedy's *A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White*. Since I will give detailed discussion of Kristeva's concept of feminine sexuality in the later chapters, I will now move on to discuss my location within other critics of Fornes and Kennedy on account of using poststructuralist psychoanalysis framework to examine their avant-garde theater.

That Kennedy pays attention to the bodily experience of women (especially black women in the U.S. society) and that she seeks to modify the hegemonic discourses on black women's identities have drawn the interest of other feminist theatre critics. It is interesting that Claudia Barnett uses Kristeva in order to recognize the experience of pregnancy dramatized in Kennedy's plays. Thus, she supports my view that the women's bodily experiences in Kennedy's dramas emerge clearly when Kristeva's theory of feminine sexuality is applied. Barnett's and my readings are different, however, in that while she argues that Kennedy's characters cannot do anything about their identity crisis, I assert that they can because they write. Barnett states, "Due to ingrained racial and sexual oppression, Kennedy's subjects remain fragmented, existing as bitterly opposed selves, observing their own existence but unable to act, incapacitated by circumstances of birth" (141). In my close reading of Kennedy's plays, in opposition to this, I will argue that fragmentation is a strategy for both Kennedy and her writer character to have an observational distance between her writerly self and the reality, and that through writing they positively experiment on the creation of multiple selves. Elin Diamond also pays attention to Kennedy's unique dramatization of identification process. Diamond uses two theoretical frames

to approach it. First, she uses Freudian psychoanalytic interpretation, “to press psychoanalysis on precisely this question: what social and cultural meanings are embedded in acts of identification” (“Rethinking” 87). Secondly, she turns to Brecht, who, according to her, “sought to subvert identification in the theater” (87). Comparing with Brecht’s techniques to reveal social and cultural ideology of identification, she examines Kennedy’s identification process. She states that Kennedy’s contribution is “the pleasurable possibility of becoming, inhabiting, entering, as well as the particular historicity of that process” (91). What is interesting to me is that this statement is Diamond’s paraphrasing of Cixous. While basically relying on Freud’s psychoanalytic theory, Diamond turns to Cixous in order to explicate the specific identification process in Kennedy’s drama. I will further Diamond’s observance by linking the “the pleasurable possibility” to the act of writing.

Among the critics of Fornes, Randi Koppen is especially relevant to my study. Paying attention to Fornes’ dramas’ formalism—meaning that in Fornes’ theatre, sounds and visual elements constitute the form, generating meaning in themselves--Koppen asserts that psychoanalysis is the efficient theoretical frame with which to read it: “It is a metalanguage which recommends itself by avoiding the traps of modernism while expanding the current limits of a postmodernist thinking on form” (807). She supports her argument with her observation that in Fornes’ theatre, 1) utterance as speech act is performative, and 2) the materiality of the signifier has meaning in itself. She asserts, “[meaning] resides in light, lines and texture” (805). This view of formalism is, in fact, applicable to Kennedy’s plays as well. Thus, Koppen supports my belief that psychoanalysis is the right framework with which to read Kennedy’s and Fornes’ plays. However, even though she asserts that Fornes’ formalism is “return to body,” she does not explain what she means by “body.” Moreover, her focus is more on the dramaturgy of the

playwright, the overall effect she creates on the stage utilizing all five senses as theatrical language. But she does not examine the way the characters use their bodily sensations in their use of language—reading and writing, which I will do in the following chapters.

It is Deborah Geis' approach to Fornes' dramas that is most close to mine because she clearly establishes and explores the relation between the body, language, and identities in her reading of Fornes. Geis draws in Kristeva's concept of "the subject-in-process" which advocates "multiple subject positions" and a feminist take on Brecht's *gestus* "as the radical [...] splitting of the two elements," that is, "the shown (the said) and the showing (the staging)" ("Wordscape" 292). She demonstrates that Fornes' characters use language to "'give voice' to their body," maintaining that Fornes stages her characters' monologues as *gestus*—the splitting between what they say and what they communicate bodily or in gesture—and in this splitting, their body "creates and deploys a 'language'" (307). This language recodifies and newly inscribes the symbolic order. Thus, I will refer to her essay "Wordscapes of the Body: Performative Language as *Gestus* in Maria Irene Fornes' Plays" to illustrate and support my argument.

1.1.3 Narrative Theory

Thus far, I have examined Cixous', Kristeva's and Anzaldúa's theories on language and writing as the basic framework on which I will build my analysis of how Kennedy's and Fornes' characters attempt to write their bodies; how they incorporate their bodily experiences and physical sensations in their reading and writing; and, conversely, how the bodily drives demand reading and writing in particular ways. I will use their theories to identify the changes in Kennedy's and Fornes' characters' understanding of their bodily experiences, their identities and their relation to others, as a result of the act of reading and writing. While these will be major

themes of my study, the narrative structures within which these themes are dramatically laid out are of equal importance to me. I will investigate the narrative structures of Kennedy's and Fornes' drama from two angles. One is the narrative structures that the characters construct to give meaning to their experiences. And the other is the narrative structures that the playwrights craft for their characters to act within, that is, as meta-writing to explore the significance of writing within their dramas of writing. To examine these double narratives I will use narrative theories.

I agree with Susan S. Lanser as she advocates the use of narratology for feminist criticism. She says,

[Narratology] could, for example, provide a particularly valuable foundation for exploring one of the most complex and troubling questions for feminist criticism: whether there is indeed a "woman's writing" and/or "a female tradition", whether men and women do write differently. For given the volatile nature of the question, the precision and abstraction of narratological systems offers the safety for investigation that more impressionistic theories of difference do not. (678)

I do not think that Lanser is necessarily problematizing Kristeva's and Cixous' theoretical position in the feminist criticism. I believe they could complement each other. The "volatile" theme of women's writing, especially in relation to women's bodies, could be more illuminated when narrative theory provides relatively stable frameworks with which to discern the shapes and forms of a new narrative of women and their subjectivity. To combine these two theoretical approaches in my dissertation is my own version of an attempt at a dialect of the semiotic and the symbolic. While Kristeva's and Cixous' way of thinking shed light on the bodily energy in language, narrative theory helps me identify the symbolic side of the writing, which must be a

newly crafted structure, even though temporarily, after the old and institutional “symbolic order’s constitutive rules” (Kristeva, *Revolution* 46) has been transgressed and pulverized. In other words, the narrative theory helps me to discern what kind of narrative has been challenged and subverted and what new narrative has been created. Kristeva herself believes that what distinguishes mankind from animals is the ability to narrate and that human life can be meaningful only when it is narrated. She argues “the possibility of representing birth and death, to conceive of them in time and to explain them to others—that is, the possibility of narrating—grounds human life in what is specific to it” (Kristeva, *Hannah* 8). She also states, “life does not fulfill itself unless it never ceases to inquire into both meaning and action: the revelatory character of action as well as the ability to *produce stories* and become historical, which together form the very source from which meaningfulness springs into and illuminates human existence” (9 *italics mine*).

The basic principle I am taking from the narrative theory is that narrative is the means with which we know and understand the world and ourselves. H. Porter Abbott illuminates this point, quoting Brian De Palma:

Narrative is so much a part of the way we apprehend the world in time that it is virtually built into the way we see. Filmmaker Brian De Palma put this idea even more strongly “People don’t see the world before their eyes until it’s put in narrative mode.” (*Narrative* 6)

The events that are happening in the world are chaotic and do not have meaning in themselves. Only by narrating them, we give order to the events. We give them the structure of beginning, middle and end, and designate the cause and effect. Only when they are narrated, the events begin to have meaning for us. So in our effort to understand the world around us, we put it into a narrative form, a story. When we can make it into a recognizable story, we feel satisfied because

we know what it means to us. With this knowledge, we can move on with life. But when we face some events that cannot be put into a story form, when we cannot discern the beginning, middle and end of it, the why's and how's of it, we feel frustrated and distressed since we do not know what it means to us. We even feel that we do not know who we are any more, how to understand and define ourselves in what kind of narratives among the diverse narratives that construct this world. Thus, Abbott states, "One truism about narrative is that it is a way we have of knowing ourselves. [...] to put the generalization more accurately, it is only through narrative that we know ourselves as active entities that operate through time" (10).

If we know and understand who we are and what our experiences mean through making them into narratives, then does it mean that if we can change the narratives with which we know our identities and the world we will be able to give different or new meaning to our being in the world? If we could discern the master-plot narratives which we are encouraged to adapt to explain our lives but which actually alienate our subjectivity from our experiences, if we could create new narrative form with which to tell our lives, then narrative could be the means with which we could "invent" and "fashion" our identity (Riessman 2) and challenge the "commonsense" way of interpreting the meaning of our experience and the world in which they are circumscribed. Riessman, a social scientist focusing on women's narratives, states:

Nature and the world do not tell stories, individuals do. [...] Human agency and imagination determine what gets included and excluded in narrativization, how events are plotted, and what they are supposed to mean. Individuals construct past events and actions in personal narratives to claim identities and construct lives. (2)

Riessman's statement supports me to assert that this is the point where feminist issue meets with narrative theory since women in patriarchal society frequently encounter the failure of the

existent narrative forms to adequately express what they feel in their lived experiences.

Despite the seeming universality of the discourse form, some experiences are extremely difficult to speak about (Roth, 1993). Political conditions constrain particular events from being narrated. The ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from awareness (Herman, 1992). [...] Under these circumstances, women may have difficulty even naming their experience. [...] (3)

Women in patriarchal society often suffer from the lack of narrative to give proper meaning to their lived experiences. Moreover, because of the hostility the existent narratives carries toward certain experiences that many women actually go through in their lives and because of the negative value they allocate them, women have difficulty in acknowledging their experiences though they are as real as their physical existence in the world. It is partly in this sense that Kristeva and Cixous many times observe that women are exiled from language. Within the current representative system which mostly consists of language, it is not always easy or even possible for women to narrate and give “proper” meaning to their experiences and their being. Thus it becomes a crucial task for feminist narrative theorists to utter the problems of the existing narrative structures and to urge the need to search for new narratives which can better articulate women’s experience. In theatre, Jean Forte, for example, asserts, “The inquiry into what constitutes a feminist playwriting practice today necessarily involves the critic with the investigation of structures of realism and narrative, structures which are implicated in the relation to patriarchal ideology” (19). Arguing that “classic realism, always a reinscription of the dominant order, could not be useful for feminists interested in the subversion of a patriarchal social structure,” she suggests the possibility of new texts that will serve feminist purposes.

A subversive text would not provide the detached viewpoint, the illusion of

seamlessness, the narrative closure, but instead would open up the negotiation of meaning to contradictions, circularity, multiple viewpoints; for feminists, this would relate particularly to gender, but also to issues of class, race, age, sexuality, and the insistence on an alternative articulation of female subjectivity. (Forte 21)

Adrienne Kennedys' plays, according to Forte, illustrate "some of the problems as well as advantage of a totally non-realistic form" (24). Forte provides me with the theoretical position from which to examine Kennedy's plays. While she examines the narrative structure of *The Owl Answers*, I will investigate later plays of Kennedy, focusing on how the act of writing is interrelated with the narrative structure Kennedy builds.

Narrative theory provides me with analytical terms to investigate the formal aspects of both the characters' and the playwrights' narrative construction. Cixous and Kristeva are helpful for me to recognize and explore in depth the particular themes of my interest: language, subjectivity, bodily experiences and women's sexuality. At the same time as I investigate the dramatic characters' writing, I will not lose sight of how it is placed in the overall narrative structure of the drama. In other words, the dramatic frame and the environment of the characters' writing which the playwrights have composed. Thus, the main questions I will seek to answer in the chapters are: How do the characters construct and/or invent their identities and subjectivity through writing? How are the characters' bodily sensations and experiences incorporated into their processes of writing? Does their endeavor to express their bodily experiences in new terms empower them to free themselves from the restrictions of socially powerful discourses? What do the difficulties they face in the process of writing reveal about the social and cultural conditions? What are political and ethical visions suggested through their writing?

1.2 CHAPTER OUTLINES

In the chapters that follow, I look into the different forms of writing in Fornes' and Kennedy's plays. Chapter 2 focuses on how the characters read texts. Reading, here, is another form of writing, in the sense that the characters create their own life stories out the text they read. Then Chapter 3 and 4 focus on the characters' act of writing on the stage. Kennedy's and Fornes' characters mostly write about themselves. Marion in *Abingdon Square*, June and Jean in *June and Jean in Concert*, write diaries. Sarita writes letters with a purpose to know and express herself by putting her past and present in order. Clara writes an autobiography in a movie script form. Since all of these plays deal with different aspects of women's experiences, it is difficult to group them by specific themes. Thus, I group them according to the genre of writing the characters are engaged in, that is, diary and autobiography. Diary and autobiography are both autobiographical writings in which the writer records and express her past and present, thus, it is hard to clearly distinguish the two genres. So I acknowledge that my division of the chapters according to the genre of writing is rather loose and that at times the division gets ambiguous. However, dividing the chapters as diary vs. autobiography has benefits since the narrative features of each genre provide me with the starting point from which to examine the plays. Diary characterizes in the immediacy between the writing and the event as the object of writing. Thus, it usually guarantees the transparency between the writer's self and what she writes in the diary. Thus, I begin to investigate how Fornes and Kennedy utilize and twist temporal immediacy and the diarist's honesty with herself. Autobiography, on the other hand, features retrospective stance toward the events of writing, even though these past events have ongoing effects on the present situations. The writer often uses autobiography writing in order to resolve the problems of the past so that she can fathom her present state and project the future. Autobiography is more

geared toward constructing one's identity through building a narrative of the past. Then, I can begin my analysis of the plays by examining what specific past events require writing, what are the central issues that the writer seeks to resolve, and how these issues are related to women's sexuality and bodily experiences.

In Chapter 2, titled "Embodied Reading," I investigate how the female characters use their bodies or bodily sensations to understand and absorb the literary texts they read. As they do the act of reading on the stage, they involve not only their mental capacity but their physical and emotional capacity as well, of which the process is staged viscerally in Fornes' and Kennedy's dramas. My close reading of Fornes' *Mud*, *The Conduct of Life*, *Abingdon Square*, and Kennedy's *A Lesson in Dead Language* explores how the women characters in these plays forge or fail to forge their own life stories in the texts; how they make the language written on the page come alive in their own lives; how the experience of reading affects their perception and construction of identities; how their bodily engaged reading opens up a way for them to subvert the language system which exclude and repress their embodied experiences. I will argue that Fornes' and Kennedy's female characters break the closedness of the text by engaging their physical sensations and movements in the process of reading. Into the caveat they create, they insert and affirm their own life experiences.

In Chapter 3 "Diaries," I will focus on Fornes' *Abingdon Square* and Kennedy's *June and Jean in Concert* in which diary writing by the female characters plays a crucial part in the unfolding of the plot of the drama. I will investigate how Fornes and Kennedy use the diary writing as a tool for the female characters to delve into their psyches and as a dramatic device to complicate and muddle the boundaries of time and subjectivity in order to forge a new possibility for the female characters to grow and become wiser about themselves and the others.

Because *June and Jean in Concert* is Kennedy's own adaptation of her autobiography *People Who Led to My Plays*, it has, in fact, autobiographical features. Ultimately, Kennedy, through the characters of June and Jean, looks back on her/their past. However, I focus more on the fact that June and Jean are continuously writing their diaries on the stage and include this play in Chapter 2.

I will use literary criticism on women's diary and narrative theory to build and form my analysis of the plays. My argument is that Fornes' female character, Marion, both writes and is written by what she writes in her diary, thus constantly in the process of making and being made of her selfhood. The act of writing a diary rather thwarts her peaceful negotiation and settlement with the reality. Diary writing entails dangerous yet subversive power that pushes her to an unknown world, and to go outside of the safety zone. And the result is growth and maturity in self-knowledge and the relationship with others. In my reading of *June and Jean in Concert*, I will analyze the way Kennedy stages the fragmentation and multiplication of a subject and the way the female characters insert "their history" into the hegemonic narrative of *the* history using a personal writing genre like diary.

In Chapter 4, I will pay attention to the characters who write autobiographies on the stage and how the autobiographies they write demonstrate the process of the individual construction of identity and subjectivity which is distinguished from what is already imposed on them by the society. For this purpose, I will extend the category of writing and include the telling of one's own life in a story form. The plays I am analyzing in this chapter are Fornes' *Sarita*, Kennedy's *A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White*. In *Sarita*, the characters do not write an autobiography per se. Instead Sarita writes letters, and her mother Fela tells a story of her life. Sarita, however, uses the letter writing as a way to tell a proper story that can explain her unique

feelings and choices, apart from the stories of ‘women.’ Unlike her mother, who finds her life story in other women’s common stories, Sarita attempts to write and give a name to her wild desire, which leads to her destruction and salvation at the same time. With *A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White*, I will focus on the way the main character Clara struggles to affirm her identity as a writer, using an autobiographical strategy, out of the entangled network of identities as a woman, a mother, and a daughter, and a black woman in the white society.

By way of conclusion, the main arguments and findings of this dissertation with respect to Kennedy’s and Fornes’ writing about writing will be presented in Chapter 5.

2.0 EMBODIED READING

In this chapter, I examine the moments of reading captured on the stage in Adrienne Kennedy's and Maria Irene Fornes' plays. I find it quite surprising that the reading activity, which might be considered a non-action, is frequently employed by the two playwrights as an effective plot device and the key dramatic moment in the play. I mean "a non-action" in the sense that we learn, especially in a realistic drama, a dramatic action should be an active verb with a strong objective aimed toward the other person in the scene who possibly has an opposing objective. In Fornes' *Mud*, Mae reads an article from a biology textbook *wholeheartedly*. What in the world is in a biology textbook that "inspire[s]" (27) her? In *The Conduct of Life*, while Leticia tries to memorize a passage from a book, Olimpia, her servant, reads "imaginary words" (76). It is a very short scene but it reveals a lot about these two characters. In *Abingdon Square*, Marion reads a passage from Dante's *Purgatorio* "stand[ing] on her toes with her arms outstretched, looking upward. [...] Her whole body shakes with strain. She perspires heavily" (18). Is Marion crazy? She doesn't seem to be, though. Then there must be a reason for her "strange" behavior. Kennedy's *A Lesson in Dead Language* takes the audience to a classroom where the White Dog teaches the seven girls how to "translate" a Latin text. The White Dog's oppressive lesson on how to read/interpret a text is responded to by the blood stains on the girls' dresses, which get larger and larger, affirming the girls' irrepressible corporeality.

The unique aspect of reading dramatized in Fornes' and Kennedy's plays is that reading

is not simply a mental activity but a sensual and at times stunningly physical activity. The characters in their plays sensitively react to how and where a particular word resonates in their bodies--the emotions and sensual feelings language stirs in them. Even though these feelings and sensations are ineffable and, thus, ambiguous, it is an unavoidable part of their reading experience. And it is through these bodily experiences they find the meaning of the text that is most close to their life and soul. When the characters are immersed in the text this way, or to borrow Cixous' expression, when they "live the language," the text changes their lives and their relationship with others around them, which constitutes a vital part of the plot of the plays. Fornes' and Kennedy's plays show that such reading requires the engagement of the body, as well as the mind, of the reader; in other words, the physical sensations, uncontrollable impulses, drives and desires, and the individual memories engraved in the body are, and should be recognized as, a vital component of the reading process. The intellectual process of the reading activity always coincides with the physical and the sensual. As the characters involve the bodily drives and energy in their process of reading a text, they are able to attempt to experience the text in their own terms, resisting/ transgressing the confinement of the social and cultural norms, which work through the text against the formation of their autonomy and subjectivity. In this way, reading becomes a strong action that helps them to discover and affirm their selfhood and identities. Reading in Fornes' and Kennedy's plays is also an action that reveals the character's personality and her attitude toward life and the world around her: whether she accepts life and the standards of the society "as is," or she has the will to stand on her own two feet.

My close reading of the two playwrights' plays in this chapter is influenced by the theory of writing the body—Cixous, and Kristeva, and by extension, Gloria Anzaldúa. Cixous and Kristeva provide the theoretical bases from which to explicate the subjectivity and its relation to

language portrayed in the two playwrights' works. Anzaldúa asserts the social aspect of the result of the subject's relation to language dramatized in the two playwrights' works. They emphasize the possibility of multiple meanings in a text and the embodied subject that actively responds to it. Here, I will briefly discuss Julia Kristeva's linguistics, which I will frequently refer to in this chapter as an overall theoretical frame within which I examine Fornes' and Kennedy's plays. Kristeva's theory, I believe, can best illuminate the view on language and text, and the relation between a subject and language portrayed in the two playwrights' works and its sociopolitical significance.

The major standpoint Kristeva takes toward textual meaning is that there is "heterogeneousness to meaning and signification" (*Desire* 101) within a text. She attempts to subvert the traditional western philosophy of meaning, which posits an authoritative meaning of a text supported by the unitary and transcendental ego of the author and the reader. According to Kristeva and her fellow poststructuralist thinkers, including Barthes and Derrida, who published their writings in *Tel Quel* in Paris in the 70's, "notions of a stable relationship between signifier and signified" are "the principal way in which dominant ideology maintains its power and represses revolutionary, or at least unorthodox thought" (G. Allen 32). Therefore, Kristeva endeavors to move toward the free play of a text, liberating the text and the subject of language from fixity and unity to *jouissance* and heterogeneousness. To her, a text is "always in a state of *production*" and "the subject, the author, reader or analyst [...] join a process of continual production, are 'in process/on trial' (*le sujet-en-procès*), over the text" (34).

Kristeva's linguistic theory "seminalysis" has two important features especially in relation to my purpose. First, she argues that language, or what a certain word signifies in a text, is not transcendental but always socially specific. Language is saturated with the cultural and social

histories of a specific society, and the ideologies that support the maintenance of its system. Another important aspect of Kristeva's view of language is that she acknowledges "dialogism" of language, meaning "all language responds to previous utterances and to pre-existent patterns of meaning and evaluation, but also promotes and seeks to promote further responses" (G. Allen 19). Language is a two-way communication. This point may be self-evident but quite often easily forgotten. And this "two-way" is multiplied multiple times in a text. Thus in a text, there are multiple voices overlapping each other; the subject of writing is always changing and fluctuating within the social and cultural context of the writing; and, likewise, the subject of reading is always open to plurality and alterity. Kristeva argues:

"We," "me," "I" are formed of multiple facets, and this polyphony—which depresses us or allows us pleasure, which nullifies or glorifies us—resonates in the polysemy of our verbal exchanges, extracts thought from the yoke of the rational, and reconciles an eccentric subject to the pulse of being. (*Revolt* 432)

The idea that language is not neutral or transcendent but that "all texts contain within them the ideological structures and struggles expressed in society through discourse" is what not only Kristeva but also other poststructuralist thinkers profess as well. What makes Kristeva's linguistics distinctive and more useful for my purpose is her view of language as combination of the *semiotic* and the *symbolic*.

[the semiotic processes] include drives, their disposition, and their division of the body, plus the ecological and social system surrounding the body, such as objects and pre-oedipal relations with parents. [The symbolic] encompasses the emergence of object and subject, and the constitution of nuclei of meaning involving categories: semantic and categorical fields. (Kristeva, *Revolution* 57)

Due to the *semiotic*, the meaning of a text is never stable but constantly in the state of production. As a result, the subject of language, since it is constructed by and with language, is always in the process of making as well. Likewise, Kristeva posits two modules in a literary text, which are genotext and phenotext. Genotext, according Kristeva, is “the *semiotic* disposition in a text” (57). Kristeva explains:

What we shall call a genotext will include semiotic processes but also the advent of the symbolic. [...] Genotext is detected in phonematic devices (such as the accumulation and repetition of phonemes and rhyme) and melodic devices (such as intonation or rhythm) in the way semantic and categorical fields are set out in syntactic and logical features, or in the economy of mimesis (fantasy, the deferment of denotation, narrative, etc.) (*Revolution* 57)

While genotext is communicated through the *symbolic*—the grammar and the semantic—in a text (because it cannot be communicated without the *symbolic*), it is “detected” in the “nonlinguistic” and “nonsignifying” elements in the text. It is the “incomprehensible signified” which “is nevertheless communicated,” “[tending] toward autonomy from meaning so as to maintain itself in a *semiotic* disposition near the instinctual drive’s body” (Kristeva, *Desire* 103). On the other hand, phenotext is “what the syntax and semantics of the text is trying to convey” (McAfee 24). It is the “language that serves to communicate, which linguistics describes in terms of ‘competence’ and ‘performance’”. It is the symbolic disposition of a text.” In other words, “phenotext is a structure (which can be generated, in generative grammar’s sense); it obeys rules of communication and presupposes a subject of enunciation and an addressee” (Kristeva, *Revolution* 58).²

² For example, in *Abingdon Square*, Marion reads Dante’s *Purgatorio* with her body stretched toward the ceiling. Phenotext is what Dante wrote with words within the sentence structures, genotext is the musicality of the rhythms and intonations in the phrases and sentences which is accentuated and

Kristeva observes that “the signifying process therefore includes both the genotext and the phenotext” (RPL 58). Then, because of the function of the genotext, the meaning a text produces is unstable and heterogeneous. However, Kristeva observes that not all signifying process “[encompasses] the infinite totality of the process” (58). She maintains:

Multiple constraints--which are ultimately sociopolitical—stop the signifying process at one or another of the theses that it traverses; they knot it and lock it into a given surface or structure; they discard *practice* under fixed, fragmentary, symbolic *matrices*, the tracings of various social constraints that obliterate the infinity of the process: the phenotext is what conveys these obliterations. (*Revolution* 58)

Institutional educations, prevailing ideologies of the society which serve in the interest of those in power, and various myths that support the status quo may attempt to force and legitimate the fixity of meaning generated by texts. It may be as if one absolute and unquestionable voice dictates the text and the reader—the receiver of the message of the text—cannot but accept it as the truth of the text. This is the dismal and repressive vision of a society Kristeva endeavors to resist by envisioning, through her theory of language, the joy of discovering the infinite play of meaning in a text, and the liberation of the subject of language ever changing with multiple facets.

According to Kristeva, the kind of signifying practice which most prominently testifies to her view of language as heterogeneous to meaning is what she calls “poetic language,” the examples of which are found in the literary works of avant-garde writers such as Mallarmé, Joyce, Proust or Céline. Kristeva acknowledges that any language, being the dialectic of the *semiotic* and *symbolic*, has heterogeneity within it. But “the signifying economy of poetic language is

enacted by Marion’s reading it out with her voice and, particularly in this scene, her physical movements. While phenotext of the poem secures the structure within which a meaning is interpreted, the genotext allows the interpretation to be different every time a different reader reads it.

specific,” Kristeva remarks, “in that the *semiotic* [...] tends to gain the upper hand at the expense of the thetic and predicative constraints of the ego’s judging consciousness” (*Desire* 102). The rhythm of the sentences, pauses, breaks and repetitions, and the use of certain obscene words are salient elements that produce meanings in poetic language. It reactivates the instinctual drives and bodily energies repressed in symbolic language, unsettling the unity of meaning, breaking the social codes in language, while communicating itself through the syntax and grammars—the *symbolic*. With poetic language, it is impossible to pin down what object it refers to and to posit a coherence of meaning. And the consequent poetic language bears on the subject is:

“The support of this signifying economy could not be the transcendental ego alone. If it is true that there would unavoidably be a speaking *subject* since the signifying set exists, it is nonetheless evident that this subject, in order to tally with its heterogeneity, must be, let us say, a questionable *subject-in-process*. (103)

What Kristeva, as linguist and psychoanalyst, attempts to do is to establish a theory of language and signification that can account for poetic language, “a nonetheless articulated *instinctual drive*, across and through the constitutive and insurmountable frontier of meaning” (113). Fornes and Kennedy, I argue, embody the poetic language through the dramatic characters they create on the stage. Their characters transform a fossilized text into a poetic language. Regardless of the genre or the kind of the text, they reactivate the repressed semiotic and awaken the bodily energies and desires within the text and, simultaneously, their corporeality as well. That way, they realize the multiplicity of their identities, that is, the subject-in-process. Kristeva, in her search for the theory of language, suggests that a woman may be the right subject who can posit a theory of signifying process that is heterogeneous to meaning because of her position as the Other in the patriarchal society:

It is probably necessary to be a woman (ultimate guarantee of sociality beyond the wreckage of the paternal symbolic function, as well as the inexhaustible generator of its renewal, of its expansion) not to renounce theoretical reason but to compel it to increase its power by giving it an object beyond its limits. Such a position, it seems to me, provides a possible basis for a theory of signification, which, confronted with poetic language, could not in any way account for it, but would rather use it as an indication of what is heterogeneous to meaning (to sign and predication): instinctual economies, always and at the same time open to biophysiological sociohistorical constraints. (*Desire* 113)

Then, Fornes and Kennedy, likewise, portray female characters who are marginalized as the Other in the social systems they belong to, but because they use their instinctual bodies to indicate what is heterogeneous to meaning in a text, they challenge the power structure which suppresses their autonomous subjecthood. By seeking alternative ways to read a text that can open it to heterogeneity, they acknowledge the subjectivity of those who are forgotten, alienated and fixed in a marginal place of a society.

While I argue that Fornes' and Kennedy's plays are illuminated by Kristeva's linguistics, I realize that what the two playwrights embody, through their characters' actions, exceeds "theory." Toril Moi criticizes Kristeva because, even though she attempts to suggest a model of social revolution through her subversive linguistic model of the dialectic oscillation between the *semiotic* and the *symbolic* exemplified in the avant-garde literature, she is "unable to account for the relations between the subject and society" (171). I sympathize with her criticism. Even though Kristeva states that the instinctual body is reactivated through the text, especially the text of poetic language, it is not clear to whose body she is referring. If it is the writer's body, is it

enough that the writer alone tries to break down the social code and revolutionize the language, and therefore, the social structure? If it is the reader's body that is reactivated, then what social political result will it bring? Is the bodily writing or reading the conscious choice of the subject? How can the revolutionary attempt in the text be realized in the actual human relationships? Kristeva does not explain. Fornes' and Kennedy's plays, which I examine in this chapter, explore not only the reading process that supports the heterogeneity in a text but also the subject's reading as action (both conscious and instinctual choice) that leads to active writing as well, and that expands its effect on her relationship with the others around her.

In the following pages, I will first examine Fornes' plays and then Kennedy's *A Lesson in Dead Language*.

2.1 READING IN FORNES' PLAYS:

ABINGDON SQUARE, MUD, AND THE CONDUCT OF LIFE

Fornes: It is beautiful to see someone read to another person onstage, in the same way that it is beautiful to see people playing music and singing for one another. In films of the thirties and forties a way of depicting a sense of well-being at home was to have someone singing while someone else accompanied that person on the piano, to have a duet of violin and piano. It is theatrically beautiful and useful to represent harmony and to let the audience rest a while. (Fornes, Interview by Chaudhuri 105)

Fornes frequently stages a character reading aloud a passage from a book or any written text. This feature has caught the interest of many scholars. Marc Robinson observes that "the work of

reading” in Fomes’ plays “captures in a miniature all the duties and demands of life in the outside world” (109). Robinson³ marks:

Fomes has regularly revisited this primary, almost magical scene of reading from her artistic education. In Mud, The Conduct of Life, and Abingdon Square, among other plays, a woman cut off from more direct avenues of inquiry pores over a letter, an old pamphlet, a scrap of poetry, or, if she’s lucky, a whole book—and won’t relinquish it until she has wrung out the last drop of nourishment. This kind of reading is not mere acquisition of facts, enjoyment of stories, or admiration of beautiful images. It includes everything that happens more actively alongside the book and after it is put down: interpretation, curiosity about the author’s life and personality and finally self-questioning, as the reader watches how the book changes his or her own angle of

³ Marc Robinson, in his analysis of *Summer in Gossensass*, Fomes’ play first produced in 1998, extracts Fomes’ theory of reading. He does not approach this subject from a particular theoretical standpoint, but reaches a conclusion similar to mine. I think it is worthwhile to introduce his arguments in brief. *Summer in Gossensass* is centered on Elizabeth and Marion, both British actresses fascinated by Ibsen’s *Hedda Gabler*. The drama portrays the process in which they acquire the English translation of *Hedda Gabler* and find/create its meaning as they read and rehearse it together. Robinson observes that, in Fomes’s world, reading is more of inquiry than of interpretation. He explains, “Inquiry connotes more curiosity and fewer assumptions than interpretation. It calls up images of direct engagement, even the physical approach of acting—the reader crossing the distance separating him or her from the text and asking to be admitted.” Thus, reading as inquiry means not “rely[ing] on any system” in order to understand the text, but “seeking [the reader’s] own language, one suited to the occasion, [...] capable of preserving their memory” (117-8). He also maintains that reading as inquiry is an endless process even though “the book or play ends” because there is no fixed meaning to the text. He calls this kind of reading “unmapped reading” (121). Elizabeth and Marion in the play, according to him, “keep deferring the moment of ‘passing judgment,’ waiting instead for understanding to deepen into sympathy, and knowledge to expand into sensibility[...].” (121). Finally, “reading is a sensual act in itself, with its own value that survives even a disappointing book” (125). Reading includes passionate and intense bodily reactions from the reader and it engages her emotions as well, just like the two actresses in *Summer* discover and test out the meaning of the text as they rehearse the scene: moving their bodies in the space, making the words and their body work together. Robinson states that “it is in rehearsal that Fomes finds her ideal for all forms of interpretation.” He describes the action of the two actresses: “[...] like archeologists or optimistic beachcombers, hoping to hit upon buried insight if they approach the same square of land from a new angle or cross it at a different speed. Individual words, the placement of pauses, the phrasing of one character’s question, the timing of another’s entrance: Ibsen’s smallest decisions, mere craft in the context of a complete, action-filled play, have an overwhelming, almost magical significance for the women. They ponder the details [...]” (114).

vision, sense of beauty, and moral compass. (110)

As Robinson sensitively observes, Fornes often deals with women who are marginalized in the society because of their gender and economic status. Mae in *Mud* is alienated from society because of her poverty. Marion in *Abingdon Square* or Leticia in *The Conduct of Life*, although they belong to the upper class, still feel inept at ascertaining who they are, due to lack of education, the coerced gender roles of society, and their male partners' restriction on the formation of their selfhood (whether intended or not). Language, for Fornes' characters, is the storehouse of knowledge which they desire to have and the tools with which they can (re)shape their lives. Thus, reading and learning involve a quest for self-knowledge and a transformative process at the same time. But this kind of reading is never easy because reading is not merely an intellectual process but a bodily one. Marion stretches her whole body upward as she recites Dante's poem, and Mae is deeply stirred inside by the words she reads. Only then, the language brings changes to their lives, and, as a result, their souls are newly awakened. Thus, in Fornes' plays, language is connected to the body and to the soul.

Cixous' and Anzaldúa's theory of writing the body illuminates Fornes' view of language and reading, since, in her plays, reading is another form of writing or at least the beginning of writing. First of all, language has performative power. In other words, "language does not simply reflect reality but instead reshapes it" (Keating 5). Language exists before us and, therefore, conditions the way we think and understand our existence and our bodies. But it also enables us to become more than that. Cixous calls language "our unlimited territory which always precedes us" (Preface xix). She states, "Language englobes us and inspires us and launches us beyond ourselves, it is ours and we are its, it is our master and our mistress" (xix). Thus she asserts language's dialogism, meaning that the communication ignited by a text functions in two ways. It

is not only that the text dictates its meaning to the reader but also that the reader adds and creates new meaning to the text. Thus, Cixous states that “to live language, inhabit language,” a reader should never “[remain] a detained prisoner inside a language reduced to a single function, the phatic.” Instead, reading should be active “grafting and multiplying” (xx). Therefore, reading is an experience that never ends because firstly the writer, due to her embodied subjectivity, always exceeds language and secondly because the reader too reads with her body as if “making love to the text.”

The flesh is writing, and writing is never read: it always remains to be read, studied, sought, invented.

Reading: writing the ten thousand pages of every page, bringing them to light. Grow and multiply and the page will multiply. But that means reading: making love to the text. It’s the same spiritual exercise. (*Coming* 24)

Most importantly, reading is not only a bodily process but a spiritual one as well. Fornes’ characters exemplify the spiritual aspect of reading, just as Mae cries to hear words “that speaks so lovingly to [her] soul” (*Mud* 27).

In the following pages, I will examine *Abingdon Square*, *Mud* and *The Conduct of Life*, focusing on the particular manners of the reading patterns of the main female characters: Marion, Mae and Leticia. I will analyze the relationships they make with the texts they read, how they are different from those of the other characters around them and what they reveal about their personalities and desires in life. I will first look at *Abingdon Square*, examining what leads Marion to read in a shockingly physical way and how it epitomizes her struggle to find herself. Then, I will examine Mae’s reading in *Mud*, focusing on how Mae is different from her male partners in terms of her attitude toward language and what effects her “inspired” reading has on

her perception of identity. Lastly, I will analyze Leticia's reading manner in *Conduct*: why she fails to produce a meaning of her own out of the text she reads and its ethical implications.

2.1.1 *Abingdon Square*

Abingdon Square (first produced in 1987 as a Women's Project production at the American Place Theater) centers on Marion, a teenage orphan girl who marries Juster, who is in his fifties. She starts a tumultuous affair with a young man whom she creates as a fantasy lover in her diary but later mysteriously encounters in reality. In this tale of a young girl's growth into sexuality and subjecthood, Act 1 Scene 7 shows Marion's peculiar reading style. She is reading a passage from Dante's *Purgatorio*. She is 16 years old and has been married for about a year to Juster. In the stage direction, Fornes describes, "Marion stands on her toes with her arms outstretched, looking upward. She wears a white camisole and underskirt. Her whole body shakes with strain. She perspires heavily. [...] She rapidly recites [...]" (*Abingdon* 18).

MARION. He girt me in such manner as had pleased

Him who had instructed; and O strange to tell

As he selected every humble plant,

Wherever one was pluck'd another there

Resembling, straightway in its place arose.

Canto II: They behold a vessel under

Conduct of an angel.

Now had the sun to that horizon reach'd,

That covers with the most exalted point

Of its meridian circle, Salem's walls;

And night, that opposite to him her orb
Rounds, with the stream of Ganges issued forth
Holding the scales, that from her hands are dropt
When she reigns highest: so that were I was
Aurora's white and vermeil-tinctured cheek
To orange turn'd as she in age increased.
Meanwhile we linger'd by the water's brink,
Like men, who, musing on their road, in thought
Journey, while motionless the body rests.
When lo! As, near upon the hour of dawn,
Through the thick vapors Mars with fiery beam
Glares down in west, over the ocean floor [...] (131-2)

In the passage Marion is “reading,” Dante, guided by Virgil, moves from hell to purgatory, from the lower part to the upper realm and from darkness to light. And she is reading this passage with her body strained upward, shaking and perspiring because of the ardency with which she is exercising her “self-education.” Because of the physical way Marion reads this passage, Dante’s poem becomes a dance, generating new sensations and meanings.

Right after Marion faints, her aunt Minnie comes into the room, worried because Marion has not answered her calling. Marion responds to her aunt, “I feel sometimes that I am drowning in vagueness—that I have no character. [...] I come to this room to study. I stand on my toes with my arms extended, and I memorize the words till I collapse. I do this to strengthen my mind and my body. I try to conquer this vagueness I have inside of me. This lack of character. This numbness. This weakness—I have inside of me” (*Abingdon* 20).

This “vagueness” and “lack of character” come from her environment which does not provide her with satisfactory answers to her question about who she is. Although married to Juster, Marion seems uncertain of her identity in the system of her married life. In Scene 3, Marion asks to “know about [her] obligations” (*Abingdon* 12) as a married woman but there is no one who can tell her. Her aunt, when consulted, takes her straight to Juster, who “[has] no idea how to run the house.” He continues to answer only about housekeeping: “When I was born my mother ran the house. Then when I was married, my wife Martha ran it. Then when she became ill, Jenny, our housekeeper, took over the running of the house. And when my wife Martha died, Jenny continued running the house until now. I never did” (12). It seems that Marion is suddenly thrown into a role—the runner of the house, which is the socially designated gender role for women. There is only the name of the role, however, but not how to be the name, not how to make it a part of her changed identity. The name, as an empty sign, has been passed from mother to wife to housekeeper and now to Marion. And there seems to be no place for Marion in this chain of passing the name.

In the context of the play, the two scenes that lead to Marion’s reading of *Purgatorio* (Act 1 Scene 7) are quite significant in revealing the urgent need for her to read in that particular way. Scene 5 shows how language affects Marion, and scene 6 shows Juster’s attitude toward language. In scene 5, Marion and her cousin Mary talk about a rumor that a neighborhood couple is having a three-some relationship, including the wife’s sister who is visiting them. Both Marion and Mary are embarrassed at this obscene sexual relationship happening in their vicinity. Two things are revealed about Marion’s characteristic way of thinking and being. First, her mere talking about something and doing it are not two different things. A linguistic expression creates an idea in her and that idea is substantial enough to bring about a corporeal reality. Language and

body are not two separate entities but one.

MARY. I know. They'll go to hell.

MARION. And so will we.

MARY. We?

MARION. For talking about it!

MARY. No, we won't.

MARION. Yes! Because we talked about it, we'll go to hell.

MARY. We didn't do anything!

MARION. Yes, we did!

MARY. What?

MARION. We talked about it and we thought about it. (*Abingdon* 129-30)

Another crucial aspect this scene reveals about Marion is that, for her, to hold one's body is to know that person. As she confesses to Mary what she has imagined about the three people together in detail, she says, "He holds them both. And knows them both" (130). And this description or probably the way Marion says what she is imagining affects Mary so much that she "gasps" and says, "Oh, Marion. I too have sinned" (130)

Act 1 Scene 5 on this account reveals the sexual energy contained in Marion's body, which is so easily stirred by talking and imagining. From the irrepressible curiosity she has about the rumor of the threesome and the vivid images she pictures in her imagination, we encounter the undeniable presence of her sexuality, which is beginning to bud and to seek its release. Marion's desire to know and comprehend things about herself and those around her, her aspiration for education, and her sexual curiosity are all closely related. According to Marranca, "One of Fornes's preoccupations in her work is the evolution of a higher, transcendent

knowledge from sexual knowledge. The body is a body of knowledge” (53). In the social and cultural environment⁴ Marion is planted in--or “trapped in” (Kent 156), she has to repress her feelings. In this state of dissatisfaction, she feels, “I have no character. I feel I don’t know who I am” (*Abingdon* 133). Marion’s attitude toward language, reality and sexuality, though they haven’t found the right expression and therefore haven’t fully emerged into her consciousness, differs from Juster’s in the following scene.

Interestingly, Scene 6 begins with Juster reading aloud, thus contrasting with the way Marion reads, which will appear in the next scene. While he is reading, the stage direction indicates that Michael is reading a book as well and Marion is writing in a diary. Juster reads *My Garden in Autumn and Winter*, a botanical instruction book. The passage he reads is actually full of double meanings; it is about how to fertilize flowers.

JUSTER: (*Reading*) If you wish to see it for yourself, take a pencil and push the pointed end into the open mouth of the flower and downward toward the ovary and the honey, just as a bee would thrust in its tongue. If it is a young flower you have chosen you will see the two anthers bend down as if they knew what they were doing [...] (*Abingdon* 131)

The language here, although referring scientifically and objectively to plants, can converge metaphorically and symbolically to human sexual intercourse. Although Juster may read this passage in an unimpassioned way, perhaps even with an educational purpose about botany for the two young people, it is not easy to miss the sexual implications in the language. It is quite funny that Juster seems to be the only one who is not aware of its sexual tensions, generated by

⁴ I will discuss the social and cultural context of this play in detail in the next chapter.

the language he is reading aloud⁵.

Assunta Bartolomucci Kent argues that this scene clearly shows what Juster sexually expects from and requests of Marion. She observes:

[...] in a delicate, oblique, but nonetheless appalling fashion, Fornes makes it clear that Juster assumes, without considering Marion's tender age or sexual disinterest, that his young wife will fulfill her sexual duties. In scene 6, Juster reads aloud from a gardening text: [...] (168)

Her interpretation has its point. As a young flower, chosen by Juster, she must open herself to him obediently and dutifully but never for pleasure. Thus, his reading and her listening may portray the kind of sexual repression in which she is trapped. I do not believe, however, Juster intends to send out this message as he reads the text. If so, he could not read it aloud. If he knows that he has found an expression for his sexual desire or lust for Marion in this botany text, he would, like Marion, be ashamed to read this text by himself, let alone read it aloud in front of Michael and Marion. Fornes, in her "Author's Note" to the play, tells of the audition she had for the role of Juster:

A man like John Seitz (Juster)—you would think it would be disgusting for a man his age to be in love with this young woman, but his voice was so romantic. Beautiful diction and sweetness. He, too, had a kind of innocence. In auditions he first read with

⁵ Lloyd Rose describes a performance of this scene in *Washington Post* in May 20, 1991: "In one extraordinary scene, the young wife, Marion, lies on the chaise, and her stepson, who is her own age, on the floor, while the husband reads aloud a botany lesson about the fertilization of flowers. The scene is very funny, of course, but it's also painful. The listening Marion, stretched out lithe as a cat beneath her full skirts as she exchanges glances with her stepson and then turns her attention to a diary, epitomizes the maddening hiddenness of women's desire." This production was not directed by Fornes herself so the director's personal interpretation was added to this scene, for example, the position of Marion was changed from the desk to a chaise, which does make a great difference. Even so, I think this review could be an example of the intense sexuality this play can provoke on the actual stage in spite of the minimum stage directions the playwright put in the script.

a kind of lasciviousness and I said to him, “No, the character is very innocent.” And he said, “Oh you think so.” I thought he was one of those smart aleck actors and he said, “May I try again?” Then he read and he sounded even more...almost debauched. So I stopped him and said, “No, he is even more pure than you read the first time, in fact he is the one in danger of having his innocence violated. He is intelligent but it doesn’t interfere with his purity and goodness. He thinks the world is good.” Then he read it again, so perfectly [...]. (122)

This scene shows his innocent attitude toward texts, which is different from Marion’s innocence. In other words, he is comfortably and safely settled in the world of the *symbolic*, to borrow Kristeva’s term, a world where a text has only its symbolic meaning, which is secured by a one-on-one referential relationship between words and things, a world where words on the pages are simply words and do not threaten to invade his reality. Marion may have been attracted to the security and stability Juster offers. However, she has yet to find it for herself; she cannot simply accept his personality as her own. As a teenage girl, she has to set out on her own journey. And her urgent struggle to do so is manifested in her manner of reading a text; she perspires and strains her body until she collapses.

Reading, for Marion, is a desperate endeavor to fulfill the emptiness. The roles of a married woman—the runner of the house, the sexual partner to her husband, the mother to her husband’s son, who is her own age—are nothing but names in her present state. The words, for her, are as physical as reality, but she is already trapped in the world of Juster where words are simply words—the world of the *symbolic*. Her body cries for meaning, but the world around her is cleansed of the body, the dangerous energy which might threaten and subvert the stability—the “noble and pure spirit” (*Abingdon* 11)—of this world. She puts her body into the text. She seeks,

in her own imperative way, to revive the *semiotic* of the text. She turns Dante's *Purgatorio* into her own poetic text that sings and dances about her yearning to rise and fly and see the light for herself. And because it is her body—her bodily rhythm and energy—that is doing the reading, the meaning of the text can never be confined or settled to one stable meaning as Juster would expect of a text. And with this particular reading that stirs both her body and mind, her true journey to know herself and find the right language to express her being begins. Bonnie Marranca states, “Fornes takes a very ascetic approach to life. It is important to live in a state of grace and to save your soul, for there is a sense of heroism in the admission of shame. Her asceticism accepts the dualism of body and soul” (53). She further describes Marion's reading in scene 7 as “practicing the mortification of the flesh” (54). While I agree with her view that Fornes' characters aspire to grace, I differ from her in that I believe that the grace is achieved when they learn and accept their bodies and souls are one. Fornes' female characters perceive their souls through their bodies, and their bodies are where their souls are felt. Thus, I argue that Marion's reading in scene 7 is, just as she says, “to strengthen [her] mind and body” (*Abingdon* 133), not to mortify her flesh. She is filling in the vagueness of empty signs of language with her body.

Stephen J. Bottoms observes, “The desire to find the words by which one can adequately express oneself and one's view of the world, both to others and to oneself, is one of the most persistent tropes in Fornes' writing” (56). For Marion, her particular way of reading Dante's text signals the beginning of a journey “to find the words by which [she] can express [herself]”; right after this scene, she begins to write in her diary a romantic adventure she fantasizes. And then she lives in reality what she has written in her imagination. Marion runs into her imaginary lover at a book shop. Fornes literally turns a text to flesh.

I will look at her diary writing in detail in the next chapter, but for now, I turn to *Mud* and

The Conduct of Life, which have similar female characters who desire to learn the language that can express what they feel and for whom learning and gaining knowledge means a possibility to step out of their limits. These two characters, however, end up differently from Marion in their journeys, for they began with different relationships to the texts they read. In *Mud*, Mae, although she fails to leave the mud she is stuck in, finds the language to speak of and about herself, while Leticia, in *The Conduct of Life*, ends up silent and even more alienated from the others around her.

2.1.2 *Mud*

Mae, the heroine of *Mud* (first produced in 1983 at the Padua Hills Playwright's Festival in California), wants to learn to read and write, though she lives in a hopeless environment: poverty, dirtiness, endless labor, and, what is most painful, namelessness. The fact that she lives and exists is an undeniable concrete reality, but there are no words to give meaning to her being and relation to the world. This lack of language/ name almost negates her existence. She says to Henry that although she has lived with Lloyd since they were little, she does not know “what to call” her relationship to him:

MAE: [...] [Lloyd]’s always been here, since he was little. My dad brought him in.
[...] He got sick and died and he left Lloyd here and Lloyd and I took care of each other. I don’t know what we are. We are related but I don’t know what to call it. We are not brother and sister. We are like animals who grow up together and mate. (*Mud* 28)

She adds, however: “I am not an animal. I care about things, Henry, I do. I know some things that I never learned. It’s just that I don’t know what they are. I cannot grasp them” (28). The hollowness she feels comes from her not knowing the name of what she is and what she knows—

not having the proper language to give meaning to them. Her effort to learn to read and write and gain knowledge, and her constant action of reading textbooks and copying them are to overcome this “hollowness” and to have the language to express who she is and what she knows. Her attraction to Henry, who has a philosophical manner in speaking and who can “barely read” (14) but nonetheless can do so better than Mae or Lloyd, also derives from her desire for language.

MAE. [...] Why is it that some people make you feel stupid and some people make you feel smart? Not smart, because I am not smart. But some people make you feel that you have something inside you. Inside your head. (She moves closer.) Why is it that you can talk, Henry, and Lloyd cannot talk? Why is that? What I’m saying, Henry, is that I want you. That I want you here with me. That I love you. (24)

It seems that Mae is aware that her identity is formed by the people around her and the language used in the relationship. In the present environment and in the relationship she has with Lloyd, who only utters his instinctual needs, she feels constant hunger. She desires the language to shape and form her selfhood and subjectivity, the possibility of which she finds in Henry.

Marranca points out, “Each of [the three characters in *Mud*] exists in varying relations to language.” She also observes:

Mae through her desire to read and acquire knowledge realizes that knowledge is the beginning of will and power and personal freedom. Henry, who becomes crippled in an accident during the course of the play, may learn again how to speak; Lloyd, barely past the level of survival beyond base instincts, has no language of communication beyond an informational one. (48)

While I agree with her observation, I apply Julia Kristeva’s linguistics to these three characters to

further illuminate the significance of language in Fornes' dramatic world. Lloyd's language is closer to the *semiotic* disposition. His language is simple (his sentences are always short and fragmented), full of bodily drives, never past the level of expressing his bodily needs and desires since he is sensitive only to physical needs and sensations. His thoughts are concentrated either on his stomach or on his genitals, like an animal or an infant (indeed, his absolute attachment to Mae is similar to that of an infant to its mother). His speech, while neither articulate nor clear in meaning, almost transparently reflects, in its rhythm and repetition, his emotional difficulty and the physical tension resulting from it. At the beginning of Act 2, Lloyd has returned from clinic, after having been diagnosed with a kind of venereal disease. He shows the medical prescription to Henry.

[Lloyd] reaches into his pocket for a medical prescription and stretches his arm in Henry's direction. He sits to the right. The italicized words represent a stuttering.

[...]

LLOYD. *(stretches his arm to show Henry the prescription.)* They gave me *this*.

They said I should *buy* this. *(He puts the prescription on the table.)* They said I should *buy* it.

HENRY. *(With contained anger.)* You should get the medicine, Lloyd. You should take it and get it over with. You should take the medication and get well. You should not walk around with an illness that's eating your insides. Get the medicine. Do as you are told. *(Mud 30-31)*

What Lloyd really wants to communicate to Henry is that he wants Henry to give him some money to buy the prescribed medicine, and to help him buy it, since he doesn't understand the words written on the prescription. But he doesn't have the ability to put these ideas into words.

His language is interrupted by stuttering and imperative repetition of certain words, which are caused by his frustrations. His stuttering is a bodily manifestation of his internal pains and conflicts. Whenever he has to utter a word which reminds him of a painful memory or embarrasses him because he doesn't understand it fully, his body reacts and he stutters. His language lacks *symbolic* order, but is full of *semiotic* drives.

Henry's use of language, on the contrary, is closer to the *symbolic* disposition but distanced from the *semiotic* in the sense that he uses language but without feeling or "living" its meaning. In the character description, Fornes writes that "he can barely read" (*Mud* 14). But his ability to read is far better than that of Lloyd's or Mae's, and his manner of speech is analytic and "philosophical" (14). Although Mae is attracted to his ability to talk and read, his use of language is contrasted with that of Mae's. While he believes that language is useful only when it is practical, Mae delights in the physical sensations the language creates in her body and the spirituality felt through it. Henry says grace before a meal, "Oh, give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good, for his mercy endures forever. For he satisfies the longing soul, and fills the hungry soul with goodness." Mae responds, "I feel grace in my heart. I feel fresh inside as if a breeze had just gone inside my heart" (*Mud* 26). She asks him to say grace again. When he does, she sobs and says, "I am a hungry soul. I am a longing soul. I am an empty soul. (*She cries.*) I cry with joy. It satisfies me to hear words that speak so lovingly to my soul" (27).

While Mae fully lives the meaning of the words, Henry just utters the words; they are mere *symbolic* means with which to signify ideas, transcendental and fixed. For him, the relationship between the signifier and the signified is so repeated and exhausted that it does not have any important meaning anymore. His words are empty and without the body. Also, his seemingly philosophical discourse is devoid of the compassion for others around him. When

Lloyd asks him to help him get the medicine in his own awkward way, Henry coldly ignores or pretends not to understand his imploring. When Henry finds out that Lloyd has stolen his money to buy his medicine, he acts mercilessly, revealing his lack of compassion for other people, which greatly disappoints Mae. What is remarkable about this scene is that Henry appears “in his underwear, [carrying] his pants over his left arm” (*Mud* 31). What has been hidden under his clothes is revealed here: his old and deteriorating body (Henry is in his fifties). Beneath the surface of his language without full meaning, there is no life and no body. In other words, when he falls and gets paralyzed and when his body loses its basic functions, what is left is his selfishness and meanness. Even worse than Lloyd, he unashamedly discloses his need to parasite Mae’s body so that he can prove to himself that he is still alive.

HENRY. Mae. I still feel desire.—I am sexual.—I have not lost my sexuality.—Mae, make love to me. (*Mae doesn’t answer. He continues touching himself.*) You are my wife. I want you. I feel the same desires. I feel the same needs. I have not changed. [...] —You think a cripple has no feelings.—I’m not crippled in my parts.—It gets hard. (*He puts his right arm around her waist.*) Mae I love you. (*He holds her tighter. He starts moving his pelvis against her.*) (37)

By showing how his miserable body betrays his empty language and his lack of compassion toward others near him, Fornes illustrates that language divorced from the body is only empty and devoid of meaning: it is exploitative and oppressive toward others.

Between the two male characters, Mae aspires to her own language. Though she has lived “like an animal” with Lloyd, she longs for *symbols*. While she wants to learn the language of the world—the school and the hospital and so forth—and to be able to communicate properly in society, she appreciates the direct and physical sensations words create in her body and uses

them to understand the meaning of words in her life, just as we see her moved by the words of grace. She seeks both the *symbolic* and the *semiotic*. Her search for language is epitomized in the scene where she reads a passage from a textbook about a starfish:

[...]She sits and reads with difficulty. She follows the written words with the fingers of both hands. Her reading is inspired. Lloyd listens to her and stares at the book.

MAE. The starfish is an animal, not a fish. He is called a fish because he lives in the water. The starfish cannot live out of water. If he is moist and in the shade he may be able to live out of the water for a day. Starfish eat old and dead sea animals. They keep the water clean. A starfish has five arms like a star. That is why it is called a starfish. Each of the arms of the starfish has an eye in the end. These eyes do not look like our eyes. A starfish's eyes cannot see. But they can tell if it is night or day. If a starfish loses an arm he can grow a new one. This takes about a year. A starfish can live five or ten years or perhaps more, no one really knows. (*Mud 27*)

What is there to “inspire” in a grammar school textbook? Though the stage directions given here are simple, it is not difficult to imagine the excitement and the intensity of concentration Mae’s whole body goes through in this reading; the joy of being able to know and transform the words on the page through her voice; the wonder of realizing the relationship between the black signs on the paper with the thing they generate in her imaginative mind. She becomes aware of her soul and her creativity. Deborah R. Geis talks of this moment: “When [...] Mae struggles to read a passage about the starfish aloud from a book, it is the very clumsiness and concentration of her effort that allows the audience to feel the *physical* process by which she tries to transform her world” (“Wordscape” 300). Fornes said in an interview:

[...] in *Mud* I looked for a grammar school text to bring to a rehearsal of a new scene where Mae was learning how to read. I picked up a book on mollusks in a thrift store. At rehearsal I looked through the book and chose the starfish. I handed it to the actress playing Mae and asked her to read it as someone who is just learning how to read. She did and I was amazed that the description of the starfish's primitive eye is an accurate and poetic description of Mae's mind. (Interview by Delgado 259)

Just as Fornes realized in the accidental but blessed moment, the scientific and objective language in the textbook becomes a poetic language which empowers Mae and revolutionizes her world due to the "*physical process*" she puts into the text. Because of her body and the physical process she goes through as she reads, the text joins the ephemeral and ever-changing realities of the speaking subject of the reader. The meaning of the text is no longer dictated by one authoritative voice. The literal meaning of the word *starfish* is opened up to its multiple realities, its inexhaustible meanings as it goes through Mae's body.

Due to this physical reading, Mae finds and, furthermore, produces a unique meaning that fits her own life experience and, according to Geis, "acquires an identity and even a corporeality as she reifies herself through the text" ("Wordscape" 300). Geis further suggests: "[her] point of 'entry to discourse' is [...] the act of reading from her textbook" (301). As a matter of fact, however, Mae fails to leave the mud in which she is stuck and to find a new life. Lloyd shoots her in his desperate attempt to stop her. But her final speech right before death leaves a greater echo than a mere failed dream.

(Lloyd appears in threshold carrying Mae. She is drenched in blood and unconscious. Lloyd turns to Henry.)

LLOYD. She's not leaving Henry.

(Henry lets out a whimper. Lloyd places Mae on the table. Mae begins to move.)

MAE. Like the starfish, I live in the dark and my eyes see only a faint light. It is faint and yet it consumes me. I long for it. I thirst for it. I would die for it. Lloyd, I am dying. (*Mud* 40)

Geis, stating that this closing speech indicates “her text *has* given her a language,” interprets this moment as follows:

This is a moment in which Mae experiences a brief flash of the lucidity she has longed to attain. In the speech, her identification with the starfish of her text (present to some degree in the earlier passages) becomes manifest, but it is infused with a voice that clearly comes from her own associative and poetic powers and thus moved *beyond* the mechanical prose of the biology textbook. **This linguistic recourse allows Mae the power of self-demonstration, the ability to articulate her bodied subjectivity.** (“Wordscape” 301, **bold font** mine)

The language she has learned and tried so hard to “retain” (*Mud* 26) enables her to narrate her life and, therefore, to turn her life and this dying moment into something meaningful rather than wasted and forgotten. It thus suggests the transformative power of language. Also, because of the way the sentences are arranged, her death is almost her willing choice and not so clearly an untimely forced one. Mae says, “I long for it. I thirst for it. I would die for it.” And then, “Lloyd, I am dying.” Her desire for a light is so strong that she declares that she would die for it. Indeed she dies for a light. Bottoms observes:

What is perhaps most fascinating about these final lines, however, is that she seems, performatively, to be taking responsibility for, and thus ownership of, even her own death. She makes no mention of the fact that Lloyd has just shot her, only that her

desire for more light has “consumed” her. In one sense, moreover, this is completely true. Mae has by this point learnt for herself *how to effect real change* with the words available to her. (58 *emphasis mine*)

2.1.3 *The Conduct of Life*

The Conduct of Life (first produced in 1985) presents a dismal picture of the oppressive regime in Cuba in 1980s. Leticia, wife to a sensual but heartless soldier Orlando, loves her husband but is betrayed by him. Orlando kidnaps a girl from the street, named Nena, and hides her in the basement of their house to sexually exploit her. Leticia, although she insists upon social justice and the value of mercy, fails to see the injustice and violence happening under her roof. Leticia is similar to Mae or Marion in that she wants an education and to read books. But she is different from them in that, while Mae and Marion, through reading, launch a journey to growth, Leticia fails to do so. Of course, I cannot say Mae’s or Marion’s attempts to grow and change are fully successful. Mae is killed and Marion goes through madness and self-destruction because they desire language. Nonetheless, they at least learn some valuable lesson about themselves, and by the end of the journey they come to possess grace. But unlike those two characters, Leticia’s language becomes more and more segregated from her actions, and she fails to own the language she learns.

Leticia’s desire for education is quite strong. She tells Alejo, friend both to her and her husband Orlando:

LETICIA. [...] I’ll tell you why I asked you to come. Because I *want* something from you.—I *want* you to educate me. I *want* to study so I am not an ignorant person. I *want* to go to the university. I *want* to be knowledgeable. I’m tired of being

ignored. I *want* to study political science. Is political science what diplomats study? Is that what it is? You *have to* teach me elemental things because I never finished grammar school. I would *have to* study a great deal. A great deal so I could enter the university. I would *have to* go through all the subjects. I *would like to* be a woman who speaks in a group and have others listen. (*Conduct* 70, *italics mine*)

The imperative repetition of the word “want” or the phrases like “have to” and “would like to” shows how strongly Leticia wants knowledge and education. Fornes shows, however, that Leticia’s thirst for knowledge does not derive from within herself. It rather centers on Orlando. In the same scene, Leticia’s speech I quoted above is preceded and then concluded by her almost obsessive love for Orlando. When he is in the room, she argues against him because of their different political convictions or economic values. On the surface, it may seem that she is countering him. However, what she is really doing is trying hard to draw his attention to her and to prove to him she is worth loving and listening to. Then, when he is absent, she complains to Alejo not about Orlando’s taste in sports or economic value but about his not loving or respecting her. Her request to Alejo to teach her follows her earnest effort to understand and identify Orlando: “[...] He is deaf. He is an animal. Nothing touches him except sensuality. He responds to food, to the flesh. To music sometimes, if it is romantic. To the moon. He is romantic but he is not aware of what you are feeling.” She despairs, “I cannot change him.” Then she tells him, “[...] I want something from you.—I want you to educate me” (70). When Alejo asks her, “What’s the use? Do you think you can change anything? Do you think anyone can change anything?” her response is: “Why not? (*Pause.*) Do you think I’m crazy?—He can’t help it.—Do you think I’m crazy?—Because I love him?” (70) Hence, her goal in education is to change

Orlando or his attitude toward her, to ultimately earn his respect and attention. In other words, her desire for knowledge is not derived from her desire to acquire subjectivity, but to be a desirable object for Orlando.

Likewise, Leticia's reading lacks autonomy. She is bound by the text and restrained by its single authoritative voice. Unlike Mae or Marion, she does not read in order to find from the text some meaning that can be applied to her life or to acquire a language with which to express her subjectivity. Though she strives hard to know the text, that is, trying to memorize the text, she is not in touch with the embodied meaning of the text.

Leticia stands left of the dining room table. She speaks words she has memorized. Olimpia sits to the left of the table. She holds a book close to her eyes. Her head moves from left to right along the written words as she mumbles the sound of imaginary words. She continues doing this through the rest of the scene.

LETICIA. The impact of war is felt particularly in the economic realm. The destruction of property, private as well as public may paralyze the country. Foreign investment is virtually... *(To Olimpia.)* Is that right? *(Pause.)* Is that right!

OLIMPIA. Wait a moment. *(She continues mumbling and moving her head.)*

LETICIA. What for? *(Pause.)* You can't read. *(Pause.)* You can't read!

OLIMPIA. Wait a moment. *(She continues mumbling and moving her head.)*

LETICIA. *(Slapping the book off Olimpia's hand.)* Why are you pretending you can read? *(Olimpia slaps Leticia's hands. They slap each other's hands. Lights fade to black.)* *(Conduct 76-7)*

Although she can read and now even tries to memorize the text so that she can *own* it, Leticia seems no different from Olimpia, the housekeeper with “a speech defect” (71), in the sense that she does not comprehend what the text could mean for her life and her relationship with others. She is only frustrated by the difficulty of the text and pours her anger upon Olimpia. Leticia’s memorization of the words of the text is like Olimpia’s mouthing of imaginary words. Just as Olimpia is pretending to read, Leticia, too, is *pretending* to read. The text Leticia reads in this way neither changes her life nor influences others.

Instead of acquiring the language to express her life experience, Leticia mechanically tries to memorize the words as they are on the page. She asks Olimpia to check if she is memorizing it correctly: “Is that right? [...] Is that right!” (*Conduct* 76). It is quite ironical that Leticia’s attempt to master the text only makes her a slave to the text. This kind of reading does not allow the reader to respond to the text with her thoughts and emotions. It only gives the reader a severe test which asks for one correct answer. There is no space for the reader to be creative about the text or her life. It silences and alienates the reader from the language she reads. Leticia does not find pleasure or delight in reading but only pain and frustration. Thus, unlike Mae or Marion, Leticia does not acquire language as a tool with which to express her desires or to narrate and, thereby, give proper meaning to her experiences.

Throughout the course of the play, Leticia’s actions become more and more discordant with her speech. Although she declares that she would “run in front of the bullets and let the mad hunters kill [her]” (*Conduct* 69) and save a deer, she does not do anything to stop Orlando’s violence against Nena. In her telephone conversation with her friend Mona, she worries that Orlando is participating in the torturing and exhibiting of the dead bodies. She seems agitated and even infuriated as she exclaims, “Sometimes you see blood in the streets. Haven’t you seen it?”

Why do they leave the bodies in the streets,—how evil, to frighten people? They tear their eyes out and you can see the empty eyesockets in the skull. How awful, Mona. He mustn't do it" (85). But she does not see Nena—the victim of Orlando's merciless hunting game and abuse who dwells under the same roof with her—even when she is right next to her.

[...] *Leticia enters and sits center at the table. Nena starts to get up. Olimpia signals her to be still. Leticia is not concerned with them.*

LETICIA. So what are you talking about?

OLIMPIA. Ingrown nails. (*Nena turns to Leticia to make sure she may remain seated there. Leticia is involved with her own thoughts. Nena turns front. Light fades to black.*) (86)

In the last scene of the play, Leticia finally “learns how to conduct her life” (Worthen 68). As Orlando tortures her in front of Nena and Olimpia, repeatedly asking her whether she has a lover, Leticia takes a gun and shoots him. What is significant in this scene is that her learning comes through her body. Only when she experiences the pain of the tortured and the abused in her own body, she finally realizes who Orlando is and what he has done to her and other victims of oppression and violence. Rod Wooden, playwright, writes of this scene:

But tenderness cannot be admitted here, either as a lie *or* as the truth. Leticia cannot answer. And Orlando cannot ask another question, because without an answer to this one, there *is* no other question. So in lieu of the question, he puts his hand inside her blouse. He has done this before, in other rooms, to other victims. Leticia knows this; suddenly *knows* it, the thing she has so often spoken about. Suddenly she knows Orlando, what he is, and she knows herself, what she is. She is a victim, just another victim. (73)

After she shoots Orlando, however, she “puts the revolver in Nena’s hand and steps away from her” (*Conduct* 88). She only says, “Please.” Whether Leticia is asking Nena to kill her or to take the responsibility for shooting Orlando is not certain here. In either case, however, it is apparent that Leticia fails to be responsible for herself and others who she could have helped and who could have had a meaningful relationship with her. Although Leticia, like Mae, hopes to gain knowledge and “acquire new tools,” Bottoms observes, “she is also unthinkingly implicated in the abuses of the social structure she abhors. Her language, and thus her mindset, is too individually oriented, too bourgeois, to enable her to see far past her own immediate (dis)comforts” (58).

The rigid way she is bound to the single fixed meaning of the text reflects her attitude toward life and others: her lack of compassion for the real people in her life. Since she keeps the language and her body alienated from each other, the knowledge she gains through language cannot bring about the changes she hoped to make. Gloria Anzaldúa asserts that “For if she changed her relationship to her body and that in turn changed her relationship to another’s body then she would change her relationship to the world. And when that happened she would change the world” (“Dream” 71). Fornes demonstrates through Leticia’s failure that reading without physical engagement with language binds the reader to the fixed meaning of the text, to the fixed position of an anonymous subject, and as a result, confines her within her individual boundary, without meaningful relationship with others. Thus, *The Conduct of Life* suggests that how one reads a text is a metaphor for how one lives her political life. Unlike Mae or Marion, Leticia does not let the language engage her bodily experiences. In her reading, the words and her body are kept separate; therefore, the words she reads do not effect changes in her life. She cannot renew her own relationship to herself, to her body, to others, therefore to the world.

Mud and *Abingdon Square* demonstrate the features of Fornes' "ideal" reading. Reading is an inquiry about their life and the world, and a process that involves active bodily engagement. The result of this kind of reading may not guarantee a happy ending but the reader, like Mae and Marion, acquires wisdom and grace, and the ability to narrate and, therefore, know who they are. They become stronger heroines of their own lives. In contrast, Leticia fails at a "productive reading," missing the "brilliant unpredictability" of a text (Robinson 128). As she binds her intellectual capacity to the fixed meaning of a text, she turns blind to the problems and pains existent both in herself and in the society. In her dramatization of reading, Fornes makes the audience witness the process in which a written text becomes a living speech. She shows the audience the signifying process that the bodily drives and energy are constantly engaged in the production of meaning. Fornes shows how the "objective" and "legitimate" meaning of the text is opened to heterogeneity. Fornes creates a beautiful moment on the stage in which an over-familiar text turns into a poetic text.

2.2 KENNEDY'S *A LESSON IN DEAD LANGUAGE*: YOU SHOULD LEARN HOW TO READ AGAIN

A Lesson in Dead Language is a short but dense play written in 1964 (premiered in 1968 at the Royal Court, London). It is about seven girl pupils taught "Lesson I bleed" (*Lesson 43*) by the White Dog (the teacher who is wearing a mask of a white dog on the head) in a class room. Like Kennedy's other early plays, it is enigmatic and difficult to understand. It does not have a linear plot to follow though it seems to tell a story. It is full of symbols, most of which seem quite personal to the writer, and, therefore, do not easily convey clear meaning to the reader or

audience. The play feeds the audience with necessary information only piece by piece in a strange order which fits the world created in the drama but not the world from which the audience comes. The play attempts unusual identification between things or people that usually do not belong together, making the audience doubt their common sense about the identities of people. In spite of these difficulties and through the complicating mixture of symbols and words and sentences, I was enthralled by the exploding power of the blood stains on the girls' white organdy dresses, which are getting larger and larger as the play progresses. By the end of the play, Kennedy indicates, "[Their] skirts are covered with blood" (46).

Maureen Curley and Philip Kolin in their article on the symbolism in *A Lesson in Dead Language* nicely sum up other analysis of the play:

Commentators have focused on "the politics of womanhood" in *Lesson*. Exploring "bleeding, menstruating, sexual initiation, or deflowering," Rosemary Curb argues "that the blood-soaked dresses may suggest sexual violation but more likely menses" and believes the lesson shows an "unusual chain of causality leading to the pupil's collective guilt as conspirators plotting to overthrow the European ancestral authority." Agreeing, Claudia Barnett adds: "The girls' crime is simply that they have been born; their punishment is that they may give birth themselves [...] their white dog is an imagined scapegoat." (170)

Although all these interpretations are valid and shed light on the various aspects of the play, I find them unsatisfactory, though not wrong. Why does it have to be "guilt" that the blood signifies for the girls (Curb 150)? If this blood is nothing but the girls' "internalized guilt and violence," does it mean that they are passively accepting what the dominant culture projects upon them as the Other of the society? If so, even though this is a politically accurate portrait of

a girl's psyche in a heterosexist society (Curb 154), this interpretation cannot account for the horrifyingly strange, unspeakable yet undeniable, power I felt from this blood. Instead, I want to read this play as a narrative battle over how to read "I bleed" and the blood itself as visual affirmation of the girls' bodily experiences. The White Dog's reading of "I bleed" denies and silences this blood. The pupils, however, resist the White Dog by attempting to read this blood from another context, to find a way to inscribe their own experience of blood.

The White Dog's drill constrains the polyphonic disposition of a text by legitimizing only one interpretation of the text, which she forces on the girls. By making them repeat after her or dictating what to write, the White Dog obstructs the dialogic communication that can be generated by a text, and as a result, controls the Pupils' bodies and represses their freely developing thoughts. The White Dog "[stops] the signifying process" at one thesis, and "[locks] it into a given [...] structure" (Kristeva, *Revolution* 58). The girls resist. They attempt to affirm the reality of their bodies, that is, women's bodies, which the White Dog's discourse threatens to erase. In this way, the act of reading Kennedy dramatizes in *Lesson* attests to Cixous' statement that the existent texts in the patriarchal culture render the women's bodies absent and that women should write their bodies into texts. By doing so, Cixous asserts, women can subvert the socially institutionalized discourses oppressive for women.

We've turned away from our bodies, shamefully taught to ignore them, to strike them with that stupid sexual modesty. [...] Women must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetoric, regulations and codes, they must submerge, cut through, get beyond the ultimate reserve-discourse, including the one that laughs at the very idea of pronouncing the word "silence," the one that, aiming for the possible, stops short before the word

“impossible” and writes it as “the end.” (“Laugh” 355)

No matter what the result of this battle is, whoever wins it, the real blood from the girls’ bodies is there, breaking the coerced silence and unsettling any attempt at fixing the meaning of “I bleed.” Thus, Kennedy’s play exemplifies the reader’s role—to be an active participant of the process of the invention of identities that the multiple voices in a text open up—which Cixous emphasizes:

[...] carving out a pass: the door, the route, wanting to go ahead, to keep exceeding the language of a text: to break with it and to make it a point of departure; to confront culture, meaning, what is required; to not be spoken; to spar; to play; to make the repressed ones speak. (*Coming* 23)

Kennedy’s strategy to “confront culture” is to deconstruct the dominant narrative by transposing them with ambiguous and fragmented ones. In this way she not only subverts the existent narratives of women’s bodies and identities within the dramatic world she constructs, but also unsettles the audience/reader’s preconceived ideas about how to read/approach a text—specifically here the text of women’s bodies. Thus, in my reading of the play, I will focus on the narrative twists and fragmentation with which Kennedy challenges the existent narratives and the audience’s previous reception of them.

I have to admit, before I move on, that I am an outsider to some aspects of the cultural and social contexts of the African American girls’ embodied experiences laid out in *A Lesson in Dead Language*. Furthermore, due to Kennedy’s style that intentionally blurs the categories of identity with the use of her personal symbols, I believe “[being] always left outside” (Kerr D3) is a common feeling many of Kennedy’s audience experience with her plays. However, Kennedy does allow her audience to connect with her world through emotions and feelings. Ben Brantley, *New York Times* reviewer, observes, “Ms. Kennedy has carefully forged an emotional bridge that

one cannot avoid crossing, regardless of race, age or sex” (C11). In my reading of *Lesson*, as an outsider to the black culture in the U.S, I will look to Tony Morrison’s essay and novel as a reference which provides me with a perspective within the same culture where Kennedy comes from. On the other hand, Kennedy’s identity politics is not to establish a black identity clearly demarcated from the white one, but to imagine and invent an identity that overrides the barrier. Therefore, I believe that I do not necessarily limit my interpretation to the purview of African American experience. I will rather try to expand the specificity of the experiences Kennedy dramatizes to include the other groups of women marginalized in the hierarchical system of the patriarchal society.

Tony Morrison’s essay “Playing in the Dark” elucidates the two ways of reading, which I apply in my reading of *Lesson*. In this essay, Morrison talks about two modes of reading that she went through in her life as an African American woman writer: one is reading as a reader, and the other is reading as a writer. “Reading as a reader” means to read texts as one “[has] been taught to do” (1005) in school and in the society, applying the assumptions about what certain texts are supposed to mean in the cultural context she belongs to. When reading this way, a reader accepts who she is expected to be as a persona (regardless of her individuality) in the hegemonic representative system. Thus, Morrison confesses; “As a reader my assumption had always been that nothing ‘happens’: Africans and their descendants were not in any sense that matters, *there* [...]” (1011). On the contrary, “reading as a writer” is to read “trusting in my ability to imagine others and my willingness to project consciously into the danger zones such others may represent for me” (1005). She further talks about her experience of reading as a writer:

As a writer reading, I came to realize the obvious: *the subject of the dream is the*

dreamer. The fabrication of an Africanist persona is reflexive; an extraordinary meditation on the self; a powerful exploration of the fears and desires that reside in the writerly conscious. It is an astonishing revelation of longing, of terror, of perplexity, of shame, of magnanimity. [...] (1011, *italics mine*)

She observes that in the American literature an Africanist character is a historical and cultural construction that serves to supplement and affirm the self of the white character, and the white writer as well. Reading as a reader, she accepted the status quo reflected in the novel because that is what she had been taught to do. But as a writerly reader, she discerns the consciousness that builds the fictional world. She recognizes the imagination that exploits an African American subjectivity in order to establish and ascertain the white ego.

In her novel *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison visually exposes and subverts this white consciousness behind the popular literature. Jacqueline Allen Trimble in her dissertation on Adrienne Kennedy mentions in a passing way how Morrison gives her reader “a reading lesson” in *The Bluest Eye*.

[Morrison] prefaces The Bluest Eye with an excerpt from the Dick and Jane reader, which features happy middle-class children and a smiling father and mother. She quotes it three times: once as it appears in the reader; the second time without punctuation, and the third with neither punctuation nor spaces between the words. Portions of the unpunctuated, reader paragraph appear as headings for chapters throughout the novel. Morrison uses the seemingly innocuous passages as a reading lesson in how subtly the most fundamental exercises are used to teach certain tenets of the culture. [...] She ties in a lesson in how to read a text to a lesson in how to read a culture. (8-9)

I was intrigued by this passage and read *The Bluest Eye*. The first part was very simple sentences that describe a very familiar picture of a happy family, with a slow and lyrical rhythm. The second part was rather alarming. Without punctuations, the sentences looked and read quite breathlessly. I began to doubt the meaning of what I just read in the first part. The third part was shocking. Without any spaces or punctuations, it looked like a big heap of jumble, only full of noises. The discomfort and embarrassment I felt was almost a physical sensation. The visual of the unpunctuated passage psychologically wiped out my brain and made it a clean slate. I certainly doubted if the reading method I had known so far was the right one. I had to learn to read again. Every time a reader paragraph was put as a heading of a new chapter, I tried so hard to read and interpret it but failed each time. I had to read the chapter with this doubt about my reading ability. Thus what was silenced and hidden behind this ideological picture of a family began to reveal itself to me; the ugliness and the beauty of it. Thus in her “lesson on how to read culture,” Morrison makes her reader doubt the consciousness behind the “seemingly innocuous” reader and read it again from another point of view. She provokes her reader to witness the cultural assumptions she has carried all along and presses her to reconsider “how to read.” In order to do so, she makes the best and innovative use of the form possible in the genre of a novel.

My argument is that Kennedy is doing a similar thing in *A Lesson in Dead Language*. She questions the authority and validity of what is taught in a classroom, the very site where institutional education is practiced, especially the teaching on how to read a text; not just the words written on the page, but also the cultural assumptions and the conscious mind that creates and justifies such reading. In *Lesson*, Kennedy particularly focuses on the theme of woman’s body, especially bleeding. She reveals how one is taught to read the text of a woman’s body as a sign of collective guilt and shame; how the delightful awe about their bodies pubescent girls’

experience as they enter womanhood is stifled into silence by the institutional education. As to the black woman's body read as a symbol of guilt in the Western patriarchal society, Rosemary Curb provides a persuasive explanation, quoting feminist scholars:

Racist sexist culture always privileges white over black, male over female, European over African, human over animal. Black and white women have also become culturally and symbolically separated, thanks to the classist "cult of true womanhood." According to Paula Giddings, white women were thus reduced to "an image of frailty and mindless femininity." Barbara Omelade notes that "the white man's division based on race meant that he alone could claim to be sexually free... [and] the goodness, purity, innocence, and frailty" of white women was contrasted with "the sinful, evil strength and carnal knowledge" of black women. [...] This male projection of guilt not only blames the victim of her own violation but positions her as an original-sinning Eve. (147)

Curb further argues that "black women are invited to internalize the white European Victorian value system that projects carnality on them." Her illumination on the representation of the black women's bodies in the Western cultural symbolic system is valuable. However, I argue that we should also note that white women, or any women living under the patriarchal social system can be a victim of the dichotic identity division—the binarism that designates women's identity either as a noble and innocent woman devoid of her sexual body (for example, Virgin Mary or good mothers) or as a whore who is nothing but her sexual body as an object of male desire. In this sense, other women marginalized in the patriarchal society share what the girls in *Lesson* go through.

Kennedy dramatizes this educational system which inflicts collective guilt upon (black)

women, and which teaches (female) students to construct their identities upon this guilt. The figure of White Dog and the oppressive ambience of the classroom certainly invite and force Pupils to internalize this collective guilt about their bodies, about their bleeding. As I already mentioned before, where I depart from Curb's reading of this play is that Pupils have not internalized this teaching (perhaps *yet*), therefore passively reflecting it. They do something too. In a classroom where the White Dog (the teacher) teaches them to feel guilt and responsible for the blood shed in the western civilization because they are women and their bleeding is the evidence for it, the Pupils dream of other ways to read their bleeding, other narratives to express their experience of bleeding. Every time the White Dog seems to have the upper hand, the blood stains on the Pupils' dresses become larger and louder, escaping the control of the White Dog's narrative framing of bleeding. And just as Morrison makes her reader doubt the way she usually reads a text, Kennedy, at the end of the play, directs the challenge to the audience, as if asking "So how are you going to read this?"

The setting of the play is quite oppressive and dark. The statues of Jesus, Joseph, Mary, two Wise Men and a shepherd literally surround the Pupils. All of them are "larger than the Pupils" (*Lesson 43*). The White Dog, "also larger than the Pupils," sits at the desk. She dictates today's lesson: "Lesson I bleed." The Pupils repeat the White Dog: "I bleed." Thus, the audience knows that the lesson is about "bleeding." From the "slow and dull" manner with which the Pupils repeat the White Dog, we feel that the Pupils are not that excited about the lesson. The White Dog continues her lesson, "The day the white dog died, I started to bleed. Blood came out of me." Although very short and fragmented, because of the way the sentences are ordered, there is a kind of narrative lurking in this passage. H. Porter Abbot asserts that it is "human tendency" to "insert narrative time into static, immobile scenes" and it seems "almost automatic, like a

reflex action” (*Narrative 7*). He maintains that “We want to know not just what is there, but also what happened.” Thus, with the minimum information given in the White Dog’s lines, we, the reader/audience, are automatically “tempted to look for a story,” (*Narrative 8*) the cause and effect relation, the order of what happened. It seems that the white dog’s death is somehow related to the event that “I started to bleed.” Perhaps “I” caused the death of the white dog. Perhaps that is why “blood came out of me.” Therefore “blood” is the sign that “I” am guilty of killing the white dog. The Pupils again repeat the White Dog: “Teacher, the white dog died, I started to bleed. The white dog died, I started to bleed” (*Lesson 43*). Though not clearly marked in the script, it sounds like “Teacher: the white dog died,” subtly implying that it is the *teacher* who *says* that the white dog died. The Pupils seem to repeat the White Dog without questioning her—again for the second time. But they repeat the sentence without “the day,” thus reducing the intensity of the cause and effect link established by the White Dog. And by repeating it, they change the impression originally given by the White Dog. Then a strange insertion by the Pupils happens and their narrative deviates from the White Dog’s. “Where are the lemons?⁶ I am bleeding, Mother.” What do the lemons have to do with bleeding? Why lemons all of a sudden? The narrative structure the White Dog has built is threatened here. What the lemons actually symbolize may or may not be important. What is important here is that it signifies that something

⁶ The symbol of lemons has been explored well by Curley and Kolin: “The lemons also simultaneously evoke religious symbolism and the physiology of womanhood. According to George Ferguson, ‘The lemon is a symbol of fidelity in love, and as such, is often associated with the Virgin Mary.’ The lemon forges a link between the innocent black girls and the Virgin, represented by the statue and in one pupil’s refrain: ‘I am bleeding, Mother.’ Losing their lemons immerses the girls in a world of faithlessness. But the symbolism goes deeper, embracing St. Joseph. Anna Chupa describes the rituals of the St. Joseph’s Day altars which we can apply to Kennedy’s play: ‘It was good luck to steal a lemon from the altar leaving hidden coins behind for the poor... a lemon blessed on St. Joseph’s altar will not turn black and is a symbol of good luck. Lemons are for young married women who want to become pregnant.’ In this context, the girls’ votive intentions are thwarted by losing their lemons and the happiness and love such fruit promises. Anatomically, too, the lemons might be a figuration of the girls’ ovaries, and the bitter taste of womanhood before them” (171).

other than the White Dog's drill is happening and it is unsettling the narrative world which the White Dog is trying to construct.

The first conflicts of narratives are over as the girls "put down their imaginary pens, sit erect with folded hands" (*Lesson 44*), signifying that they are again ready for the next section of the lesson. Then, White Dog continues; "Now will the one who killed the white dog please come forward from the senate?" (44). The White Dog reveals what she intended to narrate from the beginning: she makes it clear that the girls are, or at least one of the girls is responsible for the death of the white dog. She also provides another piece of information—the location of the event, that is, the senate, Rome, the quintessence of Western culture. This sudden introduction of the place is associated with Caesar and his death which, the White Dog claims, is another death the girls are responsible for. The White Dog urges again, "Will the one who killed the white dog please come forward....And Caesar too, the one who killed Caesar" (44). At first no one moves and then "one Pupil raises her hand." The Pupil says, "I bleed, Teacher. I bleed. I am bleeding, Mother" (44). She seems to confess that she is guilty of the white dog's death, or, as Curb claims, has internalized the guilt the White Dog accuses them of. But strangely, the White Dog "*ignores the Pupil*" (44) and repeats her demand. My interpretation is that though the Pupil and the White Dog use the same word "bleed," the contexts within which they use the word are different. The "I bleed" the White Dog wants to hear is "I bleed because I killed the white dog and Caesar. Bleeding is the sign of guilt and shame. I accept it," but the girl's "I bleed" is more like an exclamation of wonder or a question about what she is actually experiencing in her body; the dynamic energy yet unnamed. This becomes clearer when, after "a silence," another Pupil raises her hand and speaks, and then it becomes a group chant;

Pupil: I bleed, Teacher, I bleed. It started when my white dog died. It was a charming

little white dog. He ran beside me in the sun when I played a game with lemons on the green grass. And it started when I became a woman. My mother says it is because I am a woman that I bleed. Why, Mother, why do I bleed?

(They raise their hands.)

Pupils: *(In unison)* My mother says it is because I am a woman that I bleed. Blood comes out of me. (44)

In the Pupil's line, she speaks about her own experience of "I bleed" with more details which differentiates her narrative world of "I bleed" from that of the White Dog. First of all, it is not about "the" white dog but "my" white dog. The White Dog's "*the* white dog" is not individualized or specified. It could be associated with the White Dog herself, thus alluding to a symbol of the tool of the hegemonic institutions. It could also be linked with Caesar, thus representing the white male culture. "The white dog" is anonymous, and colorless; a sinister being from the White Dog's rather dark narrative world. The girl's "my white dog" is, however, from a more concrete context of the girl's own experience. It is individualized—charming and little—and from a colorful world where there is the bright sun, yellow lemons and green grass⁷, which is in contrast with the dismal white and black world the White Dog pictures. Moreover, in the Pupil's speech, the order of the sentences are changed from "The day the white dog died, I started to bleed" to "It started when my white dog died." The main subject of the event moved from the white dog to "It"—bleeding. Thus the story is not about the white dog's death, but about the beginning of the girls' bleeding. Besides, "it" started not because of the white dog's death, but because "I became a woman." In the narrative the girl constructs, her white dog is associated with

⁷ Curley and Kolin suggest: "With the green grass, Kennedy implies the garden, a prelapsarian sexual safe zone, a pastoral landscape of the mind contrasting with the martinet terrors of the schoolroom" (Curley and Kolin, 170).

the beginning of her womanhood, not with Caesar or the white male culture. In the Pupil's individual narrative world, it is her mother who explains the meaning of her bleeding. The Pupil further wants to find and demands to know the symbolical place of her bleeding in a larger discursive system; her question is now directed to "Mother." At this bold question, all the Pupils join her and their unison sounds quite celebratory and joyful. By saying "Blood comes out of me" after "My mother says it is because I am a woman that I bleed," they make it sound as if "blood" is an autonomous being which can't be controlled by their will. Though it comes out of *my* body, "I" do not have a control over it. It seems, however, that the girls think that bleeding is something perhaps secretive but definitely fun and exciting: they "giggle tensely" (44).

Again, Tony Morrison and her novel *The Bluest Eye* provide me with an exemplary perspective from which to read the girls' experience of menstruation and its significance for them. In the novel, Morrison speaks through a young black girl, Claudia, who "[has] not yet arrived at the turning point in the development of [her] psyche which would allow me to love [Shirley Temple]" (*Bluest* 19); in other words, who has not yet been assimilated to the perspectives of the adult world. In a world where everyone says "blue-eyed Baby Doll" or a white girl like Shirley Temple is beautiful while a black girl like Claudia never gets to be praised as beautiful, Claudia hasn't yet accepted or negotiated with the standards of judgment of the white male dominant society. One day, she is sitting outside her house with Frieda, her sister, and Pecola, a girl who is temporarily living with her family after her own family dispersed out of poverty, when Pecola suddenly starts to bleed, that is, to menstruate.

"That's ministratin'"

"What's that?"

"You know."

“Am I going to die?” she asked.

“Noooo. You won’t die. It just means you can have a baby!” (27-8)

After Pecola’s terror, and a good deal of fuss by the girls as they try to wash the blood stains and to help Pecola wearing the “napkin” under the leadership of Frieda, Mama finally intervenes and closes the case. She takes Pecola into the bathroom and washes her. Claudia and Frieda hear outside the door; “The water gushed, and over its gushing we could hear the music of my mother’s laughter.” (31-2). Perhaps bleeding or “ministratin” is nothing to be afraid of or ashamed of but something to laugh about as if singing. The three girls “wonderful” day is completed with a feeling of awe and softness.

That night, in bed, the three of us lay still. We were *full of awe and respect* for Pecola. Lying next to a real person who was really ministratin’ was somehow *sacred*. She was different from us now—grown-up-like. She, herself, felt the distance, but refused to lord it over us.

After a long while she spoke very softly. “Is it true that I can have a baby now?”

“Sure,” said Frieda drowsily. “Sure you can.”

“But... how?” Her voice was hollow with wonder.

“Oh,” said Frieda, “somebody has to love you.”

“Oh.”

[...] (32, *italics mine*)

In the eyes of Claudia, who “has not yet arrived at the turning point,” menstruating is something wonderful and even miraculous. In the passages quoted above, there are things that escape language but that certainly exist there inspiring the feeling of “awe and respect” and even

“sacredness” among the girls, especially in Claudia. And this experience or this phenomenon of bleeding bonds the girls and even Mama.

Kennedy’s girls certainly share with Morrison’s girls similar feelings about bleeding but they are entrapped in a classroom where the teacher, the White Dog, and the statues encircle and press them down. Thus their giggling and their own stories are continuously suppressed. Now the White Dog makes another move in her narrative of blood; she links the guilt to punishment, and punishment to bleeding. The White Dog says, “Since we do not know the one that killed the sun, we will all be punished. We will all bleed, since we do not know the one, we will all be punished” (*Lesson 44*). In her narrative, bleeding is the result of their crime and the sign of punishment. There is, however, a strange appearance of the word “the sun,” which was originally in the Pupil’s narrative. Does it mean that the White Dog’s narrative has been invaded by the Pupil’s words even though in a very small way? At this, the Pupils stand up and the audience sees that “*They each have a great circle of blood on the back of their dresses*” (44). Does this signify that the girls’ attempt at creating another narrative of bleeding has been crushed by White Dog? White Dog dictates; “Write one hundred times, ‘Who killed the white dog and why do I bleed? I killed the white dog and that is why I must bleed. And the lemons and the grass and the sun. It was at the Ides of March’” (44). At this, the Pupils seem to obey her, writing “Who killed,” and then “I killed” on the blackboard.

This temporary yielding, however, is interrupted by one Pupil, as she raises her hand and speaks, “He ran beside me and the sky was blue and so was Mary’s robe.” The Pupil’s narrative creation has not ended yet. Another move to find a narrative for their bleeding is attempted here and various voices and narratives are mixed all at once creating a sort of cacophony. The Pupils now begin to associate their bleeding with the death of the biblical people present in the

classroom in the form of statues. The statues begin to speak as a chorus, repeating what Pupils have said and adding some new information, with confusing “I” as the subject of their story (who is this “I” after all?). Although the stage direction indicates that the statues are speaking “from offstage” (*Lesson 45*), it seems that it is actually the Pupils that are speaking.

STATUES. (*Voices from Offstage*) It started when Jesus and Joseph, Mary, the two Wise Men and the shepherd died. I found their bodies in the yard of my house. One day they disappeared and I found their bodies in the yard of my house tumbled down. (45)

And then the next segment of the Pupils’ and the statues’ lines weave another web of narrative centered on bleeding. They seem to repeat what they said before but there is another move made in the development of their narrative.

PUPIL. (*Raises her hand.*) I played a game with lemons in the green grass. I bleed too, Caesar. Dear Caesar.

PUPILS. My mother says it is because I am a woman.

STATUES. (*Offstage voices again.*) That I found the bodies on the grass at the Capitol at the foot of Pompey’s statue. (45)

It seems that the Pupils’ “My mother says” is completed by the statues’ “That I found...” while, previously, “My mother says” was followed by “that I bleed.” Thus a strange logic is established here: “My mother says it is because I am a woman that I found the bodies on the grass at the Capitol at the foot of Pompey’s statue.” What does this mean? Step by step, little by little, their narrative of blood associates in an unexpected way the bleeding, womanhood, Caesar’s and the biblical people’s death. Then this cacophonous chaos of narrative is punctuated with one Pupil’s speech, “They were the friends of my childhood. I bleed too, Caesar” (45). Because of the past

tense in “They were the friends of my childhood,” there is a feeling of nostalgia about those days when Jesus, Joseph, Mary, the two Wise Men, and the shepherd were all her friends. Thus bleeding signifies the departure from the innocent world where the biblical people were loving and kind friends to her. Entering womanhood, or to be more exact, the already inscribed discourse of womanhood as taught by the “teacher” and even “my mother”—another woman like “me”—leaves them feeling only lost and unsatisfied, and with realization that religion is only another ideological institution in service of those in power. This feeling of loss somehow enables the Pupil to have empathy with Caesar and his bleeding; “I bleed too, Caesar.” Through bleeding the Pupil identifies with Caesar. What do the Pupils’ bleeding and Caesar bleeding have in common? At this rather alarming identification between a girl and Caesar, the emblem of the white male power, the classroom falls into silence and “No one writes” (45).

So far in *A Lesson in Dead Language*, through the exchanges of the ambiguous and enigmatic speeches between the White Dog and the Pupils, a certain structure can be detected. The White Dog gives a lesson, and the Pupils respond to it, not in an obedient manner. This bartering forms a segment. And each segment brings in a new element to the narrative each part endeavors to make on the theme of bleeding. Thus, each segment is an expansion of the previous one. The White Dog gives a lesson on how to read the meaning of women’s bleeding within the white male dominant society and culture, and the Pupils respond to or strike back at this with their own story of bleeding. Now the last narrative battle over the meaning of bleeding unfolds. The White Dog weaves another narrative of guilt and punishment, now manipulating the Pupils’ narrative. This time the new element added to the narrative is a new character: Calpurnia, Caesar’s wife.

WHITE DOG. Calpurnia dreamed. Dear Caesar, I bleed too. (*A silence. The Pupils*

stare at the WHITE DOG.) Calpurnia dreamed a pinnacle was tumbling down.
(*Another silence. The WHITE DOG stares at the pupils.*) Calpurnia dreamed. I
am bleeding, Mother. Does no one know where the lemons are? Since no one
knows, then we will all bleed and continue to bleed. (*Lesson 45*)

The White Dog repeats the Pupils' "Dear Caesar, I bleed too" but changes its context by saying it after "Calpurnia dreamed." Although the two sentences are separate in the script, it sounds as if "Dear Caesar" is now spoken by Calpurnia. Thus, the Pupils' story is now turned to Calpurnia's dream, and, as a result, within the White Dog's narrative the Pupils are identified not with Caesar but with Calpurnia. Because of the order of the sentences laid out, it is as if the White Dog explains why Calpurnia bled and that it is because she dreamed "a pinnacle was tumbling down," which in Plutarch's *Lives* or in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* symbolizes Caesar's death. This way, the bleeding signifies that the mere dreaming of "the overthrow of white European ancestral authority" (Curb 150) is guilty enough. In the last part of her speech, the White Dog quotes what the Pupils said before and put it into a different context—Calpurnia's dream. By doing so, the White Dog changes the meaning of lemons from what the Pupils meant by them (what exactly she means by "lemons" is not clear, though. Could it be "conspirators" which follow in the next bit, associated with the lemons' bitter and sour taste?) and, again, imputes the murder of Caesar to the girls. Within her story the Pupils accept the guilt and bleeding as the sign of guilt and punishment. Do the Pupils succumb to this harsh lesson? My answer is 'No.' The Pupils "return to their seats" but "[we] again see the *greater* circle of blood on their dresses" (*Lesson 45*, emphasis mine). Claudia Barnett, agreeing with Rosemary Curb's interpretation of bleeding as "guilt" and "death", maintains: "[the Pupils] recognize their guilt without understanding it, and they see themselves as culpable, making the obvious connection of blood and death but failing to

recognize any positive associations between blood and womanhood” (147). I do not think the Pupils are so passive and unable to voice their minds as Barnett believes. The way the Pupils have incorporated their own memories and doubts into the narrative of bleeding certainly supports me to argue that they do confront the White Dog and exceed the White Dog’s linguistic control over their identity by attempting to find their own language to explain the meaning of bleeding. In this light, I can interpret the circle of blood on their skirts not as their acceptance of collective guilt, but as a silent but piercing cry of their corporeality that cannot be contained or confined in the language of the White Dog. The fact that now the “greater” circle of blood is followed by a Pupil’s bold question supports my view: “Does no one know where we played a game of lemons in the sunshine? Is it in the senate?” (*Lesson 45*) It seems that she asks for someone who would verify what she experienced; someone who could support her story, who witnessed her joyful game of lemons. She also questions the validity of the White Dog’s accusation of them for murdering Caesar. It may not be them. Nobody actually saw them playing in the senate. She further asks: “Teacher, why does no one know who killed the white dog? Mother, why does no one know? Why doesn’t Caesar know who the conspirators are?” (45) By questioning, the Pupil exposes the arbitrariness of the accusation in the White Dog’s narrative. She also shows that she is aware of the social surveillance and the punishment for freely speaking out about her subjective experience.

SAME PUPIL. [...] 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. I asked her who made me bleed. The conspirators, she said.

PUPILS. (*In unison.*) Who?

SAME PUPIL. The conspirators. And she said everything soon bleeds away and dies.

Caesar, too.

PUPILS. Everything. And now Caesar, too. Dear Mother.

(A silence. [...]) (45-6)

It is significant here that it is her mother who imposes restriction on the girl's desire to "talk about" her experiences in her own terms. The girl's mother may not teach her to read bleeding as a sign of guilt, but she certainly passes down to her daughter the internalized fear planted by "the conspirators." She may or may not be aware that it is the conspirators of the white male society that falsely and arbitrarily construct the meaning of bleeding. But, apparently, she has accepted it by normalizing it: it happens to everyone, everything. The pupils are taught not only in school to accept the collective guilt as their doom but also at home, by their own mothers. "[These] daughters seem fated to repeat their mothers' victimizations" (Barnett 148) since they will be sent to the Asylum if they refuse to. It seems they have no other choice. But the story does not end here.

The White Dog dictates "Calpurnia dreamed a pinnacle was tumbling down" (*Lesson 46*). The Pupils repeat this in a "loud whisper" over and over. Still, the way the girls read and interpret this sentence is different from the White Dog; "Dear Caesar played a game of lemons in the sun on the green grass and my white dog ran beside. Jesus and Joseph and Mary, two Wise Men and the shepherd were friends of my childhood. Dear Mother" (46). In their world, the impossible identifications are still dreamed and longed for. Their reading is again suppressed by the statues: "They look up at the statues. They put their heads down" (46). After "another long silence", the White Dog dictates again, "Calpurnia dreamed," as if mocking their vision. At this, the last burst of the Pupils' revolt.

PUPILS. *(Suddenly lift their heads and say:)* I bleed. I bleed. Ever since I became a

woman. I bleed. Like Caesar will I bleed away and die? Since I became a woman blood comes out of me. I am a pinnacle tumbled down.

(Silence. They stand slowly. Their skirts are covered with blood. They stare at the White Dog, who stares at them They hang their heads wearily. [...]) (46)

At this point, the meaning of “I bleed” certainly has changed or intensified after so many repetitions of this phrase throughout the play. Now “I bleed” seems to mean much more than “menstruation, sexual initiation, and childbirth” (Barnett 147). It expresses the extremity of pain of becoming a woman in a society which is oppressive and hostile toward women. Not to be allowed the language to express the experience of her body, to be taught and forced to read her bodily reality from an exterior context and, to be alienated from her own body is the pain of being a woman. Thus, in “Since I became a woman blood comes out of me,” “blood” may not be menstrual blood, but the blood she has to bleed as the society, the conspirators, murder her like Caesar. Even though the blood is a part of her body, she is now separated from it. She cannot claim the meaning of it as her own. The society claims it. This leads to her final realization, “I am a pinnacle tumbled down.” It is not that I am guilty of tumbling down the society, but that I am the victim of this society which does not answer my questions, and which does not acknowledge my corporeality, my identity. This acute awareness again subverts the White Dog’s lesson. In a story in which they were destined to be the other and the guilty one, they find a way to become the subject. Instead of being one of “everything,” she still stays as “I.” Instead of simply accepting as true and normal the designated role in the White Dog’s lesson, they figure out what has been done to them; the violence and the horror forced upon their womanhood. Within this classroom, however, the Pupils’ realization does not lead to any apparent revolution. “They hang their heads wearily” (*Lesson 46*). But, to me, the blood that covers their skirts now creates a

strange contradiction with their weary heads. I argue that the blood demands the audience—the reader of this drama—to read it in a new way since it has been exposed that the White Dog’s narrative of guilt is not “the truth” and the Pupils’ effort to find the right narrative for their bleeding has not been completed yet in any satisfactory way. The blood could be the girls’ anger and fury against the oppression of the society; or it could be the uncrushed part of the girls’ *jouissance* and power that seeps through as it is described as “bright;” or it could be what is still left behind not yet expressed and named in language.

The stage direction implies that what has happened so far may be a dream, or in the mind of a pupil in a split moment;

([...] The stage becomes darker. Then a light comes slowly and fixes on a PUPIL to the right, rear, a PUPIL wearing a school dress. Her back is to us, her hands folded. Then a light to the WHITE DOG, who turns slowly about a full circle, revealing a blank human face. She holds a great Latin book. The statues are revealed as statues of Romans. PUPILS still stand, skirts covered with bright blood, heads hung. A silence. A bright light.) (Lesson 46)

The Pupil’s school dress, the White Dog’s human face and the Latin book all indicate that we are now back in reality. What we have seen so far could be the girl’s nightmare or the girl’s psyche which reveals her fear, anger, doubt, and desire triggered by the oppressive classroom environment and the content of the lesson in “dead” language. Now as the witness to the “real” reality (the girl’s nightmare) underneath the surface of reality (the classroom reality), the audience is challenged once more and for the last time. The White Dog asks; “And what is the answer?” She demands; “Translate what I read.” And the Pupil in the school dress, after a long pause, says “very slowly, as if translating,” “Calpurnia dreamed a pinnacle was tumbling down”

(46). So what does this *mean*?

Kennedy asks the audience how they are going to read this after witnessing the innermost landscape of the Pupils' psyche. Through the clashes between the White Dog's dictating lesson and the Pupils' resistance to it, Kennedy succeeds in stripping off the cultural assumptions clung to the language of bleeding one by one. Now the text "Calpurnia dreamed a pinnacle was tumbling down" is laid bare in front of us. We cannot read it from the context of the white male culture any more, which we were used to, since it has been revealed that it is nothing but the White Dog's lesson, ambiguous as can be. Constantly challenged and doubted by the Pupils, the White Dog's power is not absolute. She is only a slave to the culture, "in a position of a dog begging" (*Lesson 43*). The Pupils' undying effort to read bleeding on their own terms, however, has not completed successfully yet. Perhaps there will never be a perfect success at finding the right way to tell a story about bleeding. Then, the final reading is up to the audience as a witness to the blood that covers the girls' dresses, as witness to all these clamoring war of languages.

So far, I have read Kennedy's *A Lesson in Dead Language* as a narrative battle over how to read the meaning of "I bleed." Reading *Lesson* in this way, I observe that there are three folds of action going in the course of the play. First, Kennedy exposes the cultural assumptions and the ideologies of the patriarchal society taught within the educational institutions. Secondly, she explores the possibilities to subvert it. And thirdly, she challenges the audience by making them, on the one hand, a witness to the violence done to the pubescent girls' psyche, and, on the other hand, the final interpreter of the text of women's bleeding. Each aspect testifies Kennedy's intellectual yet subtle dramaturgical skill in dealing with the difficult task of revealing and refuting the arbitrariness of the "truth" authenticated within the hegemonic discursive system—and opening up a space for a change.

On the first level, she lays bare the oppressor's desire to fix the oppressed in the place of a scapegoat—the sinner responsible for all the wrongs in the society—within the established system. She exposes its flipside as well: the anxiousness as it is based on ambiguity and the need to repeat it obsessively as its result. Homi Bhabha explains:

An important feature of colonial discourse is its dependence on the concept of 'fixity' in the ideological construction of otherness. Fixity, as the sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism, is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition. Likewise the stereotype, which is its major discursive strategy, is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place,' already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated... as if the essential duplicity of the Asiatic or the bestial sexual licence of the African that needs no proof, can never really, in discourse, be proved. [...] For it is the force of ambivalence that gives the colonial stereotype its currency: ensures its repeatability in changing historical and discursive conjunctures; informs its strategies of individuation and marginalization; produces that effect of probabilistic truth and predictability which, for the stereotype, must always be in *excess* of what can be empirically proved or logically construed. (94-5)

In *A Lesson in Dead Language*, Kennedy dramatizes the force of "ambivalence": the horror it can produce in the mind of the colonized; the anxious repetition necessitated by the fact that it can always be disproved; and the harm which the effect of probable truth can do to the psyche of the colonized. The possibility to subvert it is also explored as she demonstrates that the authenticity of the White Dog's dictatorial lesson is always threatened by the Pupils' narrative of bleeding and

their actual bleeding which escapes any narrative that attempts to fix its meaning, and yet of which the sheer existence ever so dynamically ignites the desire to narrate it. The Pupils disclose the fact that what the White Dog attempts to establish as the truth in her narrative can be always questioned, negated and changed. Every time the Pupils digress from the White Dog's lesson, because their corporeality and their lived experience cannot be confined within the given language, she has to repeat what she already said, including, manipulating and taming what has newly irrupted in the picture. And it doesn't seem that this dialogical process will ever end since the blood that keeps effusing from the girls' bodies will always be there requiring a language to express it, and the Pupils will always experience it in ways that are never the same.

Another remarkable aspect of Kennedy's dramaturgical strategy found in *Lesson* is her refusal to suggest any fixed meaning of bleeding as a closure to the narrative battle staged in the course of the play. She exposes the ambiguity of hegemonic discourse on women's bleeding and, through the Pupils, evokes alternative discourses of bleeding based on women's individual experiences. She doesn't allow any finality to any of the narratives attempted in the drama, but leaves it ambiguous and open. In other words, she brings to light the fact that women's bodies and sexuality have been wrongfully named in the history of the Western culture, but leaves it still unnamed. Thus she unleashes its power and lets it be unrestrained, ungraspable and wild. Into the many pores of the indefinite and the unnamed she opens up in the play, the audience is invited. Through the chaos and the pain of not being able to know for certain, the audience learns to "un"read and to question what they have been taught. Thus, Kennedy reverses the point of lesson from how to read "bleeding" within the hegemonic discursive system to how to read the western culture and society through women's experience of bleeding. The irreducible gap between the hegemonic assignment of meaning to women's bleeding and the "wonder"-ful bleeding

experienced by women questions the narrative truth circulated and validated in the institutional education system. It becomes the very site where the possibility of revolution begins.

3.0 DIARY

In this chapter, I focus on diary writing dramatized in Maria Irene Fornes' *Abingdon Square* and Adrienne Kennedy's *June and Jean in Concert*. In both plays, the main characters write diaries on the stage. Marion in *Abingdon Square* writes her fantasized romance in her diary as if it were really happening. Kennedy's June and Jean record their everyday lives with child-like enthusiasm. In the two plays, diary writing is used as a fascinating dramatic device that questions the boundary between reality and fiction, self and other, and individual and society.

Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia A. Huff, the editors of *Inscribing the Daily*, state that "the diary, as text, as a form of women's self-inscription, as a window to our historical and contemporary lives, and as a theoretical tool, allows us to question epistemological and critical assumptions" and that "the content and form of diaries disclose how we construct knowledge, and by helping us understand how we relate to ourselves, to others, and to our culture through the mediation of language" (1-2). Fornes' and Kennedy's characters seem to use a diary as "a form of self-inscription" in a world which otherwise silences their voices. "Through the mediation of language" they seek to affirm their individuality and be more than what the society around them allows them to be if only in imagination. Thus, the diary in *Abingdon Square* and in *June and Jean in Concert* is not only a private action of recording the progress of the formation of the selfhood but also reveals the social and cultural context the characters belong to. In this

way, the diary serves as a site where the social and individuality intersect at times in conflicting ways.

Fornes and Kennedy put on stage not only the fact that the characters write but also the process of writing and the clashing encounters of their writing and their social circumstances. Through diaries, the characters do not only accomplish what they knew they would—imaginative excursion into an unknown world or affirmation of each small piece of their everyday lives otherwise forgotten or belittled—but come across what they did not expect: madness and death. No matter what they can achieve in the personal realm a diary allows them, the women in Fornes' and Kennedy's world cannot avoid or hide from the concrete environment that conditions their lives with rules, from politics and ideological assumptions that quite often are hostile to the weaker and the lesser of the society, and from the relations they have with the other. Thus they get hurt, go through madness as a result of stepping into the space the diary writing opens for them: the realm of creativity, imagination, and subjectivity. In fact, it is quite ironical that the writing project which the characters set out in order to establish selfhood and affirm their existence becomes the very force that thwarts their assumptive beliefs in life. The diary, which is the most private form of writing, leads Fornes' and Kennedy's characters to be engaged more intensely with the world and with the other than ever.

The diary, on the most simplistic level, seems to reveal most transparently the self's thoughts, feelings and desires and to promise the greatest "availability to projects of self-perception" (Abbot, *Diary Fiction* 25). However, H. Porter Abbot in *Diary Fiction: Writing as Action* asserts that when the diary writing is used as a narrative device in a fiction, it often reveals the opposite: how unknowable I am to myself; how uncontrollable life is within the complicated social networks and human relationships. "In diary fiction of any psychological

pretension,” Abbot explains, “the diarist is usually concerned, with greater or less intensity, to see himself through the agency of his diary,” but “the diary because of its lying and misrepresentation, becomes a lens through which the artist can **catch glimpses of his unrepresentable self**” (*Diary Fiction* 25-7 **emphasis mine**). My interest lies in the way Fornes and Kennedy unveil the unrepresentable side of the self through the agency of the diary. I argue that the very point Fornes and Kennedy depart from the usual image of diary writing we have of on the stage is that they acknowledge and emphasize the opaqueness of language as medium between the diarist and her self. In the traditional or more popular plays, the diary usually guarantees the transparency between what is written on the page and the *truth* of the writer. For example, in the last scene of the popular Korean play *Crying for Love, Deceived by Money*⁸, the falsely accused wife proves her innocence with her diary, which she wrote during her husband’s absence. In the diary she wrote her true faithful love for her husband and what was really happening around her. Her husband, after reading her diary, repents that he misunderstood her. Never for a second does anyone doubt the truth of the diary. Or, in *The Diary of Dana Ma*, a radio drama, a teenage girl Dana writes a diary. “Dana’s only friend is her diary and as she writes it the diary finds a voice—the drama has the voice of the diary speaking aloud as Dana is writing” (Mahoney 1). In this drama, Dana’s honesty with herself is guaranteed in her conversation with her diary. And she calls her diary “my shadow, my sister...my twin sister” (Mahoney 5). In Fornes’ and Kennedy’s plays, to the contrary, this transparency of language between the writer and her self, between the language and the truth of the reality is questioned and problematized. It is because the language is viewed as already saturated with social and cultural idioms, because the writer herself is limited in experiencing and knowing the meaning of

⁸ This play, written by Sungyu Lim, was the most popular one of all the plays in the 1930s in Korea.

her experiences, because the meaning she attempts to write and capture is always deferred, and because the identity of the writer never stays the same.

What distinguishes diary from other autobiographical writings is the temporal location of the writer from the event she is writing. While the autobiographer writes at a point at which the events she writes about have been over and finished, the diarist writes daily events in progress. She is right in the middle of the action that is unfolding: she doesn't have the retrospective distance which the autobiographer has. H. Porter Abbot, in his analysis of "diary fictions," lists immediacy as one of the temporal functions of a diary as a literary device in fictions. He calls it "the effect of immediacy" and explains it as "the illusion of being there, of no gap in time between the event and the rendering of it" (*Diary Fiction* 28). Thus the suspense, another temporal function of diary according to Abbot, arises since the writer does not know the meaning of the event yet and she does not know how it will end or what changes it will bring into her life. The reader, or the audience in our case, is thus invited to partake the process of writing—the phenomenal, physical and material happenings the writer experiences. While Abbot's descriptions about the diary fiction's general characteristics hold truth to Fornes' and Kennedy's plays in many ways, the two playwrights have their own twists on this device. Especially, Kennedy uses the diary writing on the stage to create an effect of presenting memory in the making, simultaneously shifting and multilayering the past, present, and future. She utilizes the effect of immediacy the diary brings up to the expectation of the audience/reader in a disturbing way to portray the process of remembering and rewriting of the past.

In the following pages, I will examine how a diary is used in the development of the plot and as a vital part of the character's actions. In Fornes' *Abingdon Square*, the pursuit of self-perception through this linguistic device, the diary, leads Marion to encounter the hitherto hidden

side of her desires, then causes her to be more aware of her relationship to others. In Kennedy's *June and Jean in Concert*, I will examine how Kennedy takes advantage of and thwarts the "effect of immediacy" made available through the diary as a dramatic device. While I examine the theme of diary in the two plays, my main interest will be how the diary writing influences and is influenced by the ways the characters experience their bodies within the social environment, and how the playwrights structure the narratives in ways to explore the bodily experiences that may escape linguistic expressions. Also, I will pay attention to how the characters change their identities and (re)build subjecthood through writing, and the result it brings to their relationship with others and the world.

3.1 FORNES' *ABINGDON SQUARE*:

YOUR BODY, THE STRANGER IN THE MIRROR

Abingdon Square centers around the character Marion from the age of 15 to 24, from the year 1908 to 1917. The play begins when Marion marries Juster, who is an affluent 50-year-old widower with a son, Michael. At first, the play seems suspiciously like a clichéd story of a young girl married to an old man. In addition, Michael is the same age as his step mother. At the age of budding sexuality, this young girl is going to be involved in a turbulent sexual relationship with... well, who could this be? Here is a Fornesian twist to this somewhat familiar structure of character relationships. Marion falls in love with a man who is not her husband, of course. However, the man she falls in love with is her own creation. She writes in her diary of an imaginary love affair with a delicate and poetic young man named 'F.' Surprisingly, Frank comes into her real life when she encounters him at a book store (although his real name is

Jonathan, he is her Frank). Another surprise is that her real transgression happens in a possessed moment with yet another man, a glazier who happens to fix a window in her living room. Though she gets pregnant with the glazier's son, whom Juster thinks to be his, she leaves Juster for her Frank, and then spends time in the streets and bars. Thus far, the story sounds like that of a fallen woman driven by her passionate sexual desire. Fomes, however, looks deep into Marion's psyche and her needs, both physical and spiritual, in a sympathetic way. Marion does not just fall but rises and matures into adulthood, self-knowledge, responsibility and compassion toward others.

Abingdon Square, in spite of its spirited portrayal of a woman's awakening to both her sexuality and her subjectivity, with rare insights, has not drawn much scholarly attention compared to Fomes' other plays like *Mud* or *The Conduct of Life*. Diane Lynn Moroff in her book *Fomes: Theatre in the Present Tense*, discusses the play briefly as an example of how Fomes grounds her characterization in the physicality and sensuality of the characters. She observes that "meaning evoked by what characters say to one another is mediated by what the spectator sees the characters do to one another as they act out their sensuality" (Moroff 117). I agree with her general overview of the importance of the relationships as a site where the characters' human dignity is tested out, and "the body as the site of that drama" (118) in Fomes' plays. I do not, however, find her grim interpretation of the play does it justice. She concludes "[Marion] is an agent only when acting *against* others, imaged via her instigated sexual encounters, each of which tell the story of a woman reduced to a kind of physical hysteria in efforts to achieve a self" (122). Moroff seems to focus on Marion's selfishness in her pursuit of sexual satisfaction. Her reading of the play is too limiting to encompass the rich allusions and resonances pertaining to Marion's spiritual growth depicted in the play. Bonnie Marranca, a more

sensitive critic of Fornes, pays attention to the compassion and love Marion achieves at the end in her relationship with Juster (Juster has a stroke and Marion, realizing her deep love for him, takes care of him), which I find to be a more illuminating reading of the play than Moroff's. Marranca considers the play as "a kind of learning play" in the sense that Marion moves out of "the absorption of received ideas" and reaches "a higher, transcendent knowledge" through her bodily experiences (25). Thus "the body" in Fornes' plays is "a body of knowledge" (25), Marranca affirms. Her reading encourages me to approach *Abingdon Square* as a story of a woman's journey toward not only her self-knowledge but also "the state of grace" in her relationship with others. It also confirms my belief in the importance of the body in the process of a woman's identity formation in Fornes' plays. Assunta Bartholomucci Kent in her book *Maria Irene Fornes and Her Critics* introduces the play as dealing with "women's (as well as men's) irrepressible need for the kind of self-creating 'play space' [...], and the emotional damage caused to a woman and those around her when her need to experience and build a sense of self are denied" (168). While her introduction is a succinct summary of the themes of the play, her discussion of the play is basically a plot summary, leaving much to be examined.

The critics I have briefly noted above do notice the importance of bodily experience for a woman in her pursuit of self-knowledge in Fornes' theatre. They also recognize how Fornes warns against blind acceptance of "rote language" as it is depicted as an obstacle to an individual's expression/discovery of his/her desire. But they do not go further to examine how these two factors, the body and the language, are complexly interrelated in the world of *Abingdon Square*. I argue that the language Marion speaks and writes reflects the social restrictions on her body that prevent her from seeing her body. Once she begins to write, however, though limited by the very language she uses, her body awakens and takes over the writing.

When Frank, Marion's textual creation of her desire, actually comes into her life, she stops writing in the diary but lives out the story she has started. Now it is her body that writes and completes the story. When her body begins to write, her embodied experience of her own sexuality deconstructs and perverts the language that has veiled her from the heterogeneity of her identity.

The argument I stated above is based on the principle of *écriture féminine*. Hélène Cixous, one of the philosophers of *écriture féminine* scholars/philosophers, believes that when women write their own bodies, they break out of the patriarchal ideologies forced upon their sense of identities. Since it is mainly via language/discourse/narrative that the patriarchal culture fabricates the ideological images of woman that can serve the power structure of the status quo, it is of vital importance for women to creatively subvert the given linguistic structure. Through writing, women should be able to imagine and make a new space for their heterogeneous and ever changing identities. That way, women can break down the binary oppositional system—male/female, mind/body, reason/ passion, subject/ object, etc.—which has fixed women's place in the margin of the society. And their bodies are the rich source for the limitless creativity and possibility.

Although Cixous' encouragement for women to write is inspiring to many women, some critics find "women" in her theoretical discourse problematic. As she tends to find the source of the authentic voice of women in the mythical realms and in the images of an archaic mother, the female body at times becomes a primeval space outside culture: "woman" becomes an essentialized concept. In other words, she overrides the differences among women according to the specific social and cultural contexts they belong to (Moi 125). In this sense, AnaLouise Keating's explication of Gloria Anzaldúa's "writing the body" as an extension and supplement of

Cixous' is illuminating where Cixous is ambiguous. According to Keating, while Anzaldúa "associates writing's transformative potential with the body," "the female bodies she describes have specific ethnic, cultural, and economic markings rarely found in Cixous' écriture feminine" (123). When I see *Abingdon Square* through Cixous' eyes, I can only notice Marion's bodily energies repressed by and erupting through language in general terms. Whereas with Anzaldúa, I can locate Marion in a specific social context so that I can discuss the particular markings inscribed on her body through language.

Hence, I will begin my reading of *Abingdon Square* by examining the social context in which Fornes puts Marion. I will look into the ways Marion's body is alienated from her and how the language she and others around her use betrays this alienation. Then I will discuss the importance of Marion's diary writing and Frank's embodiment as Fornesian dramatization of writing the body. I will also look into the changes Marion's diary writing brings about in her self-knowledge and her relationship with others. I will discuss the ethical responsibility that accompanies Marion's search for herself.

You see it but you don't.

In an interview, Fornes talks about the social settings of *Abingdon Square* that inspired her for the characterizations of the play.

I kept thinking of the change from 1910 to 1920 (*the play begins in 1908 and ends in 1917*). It's only ten years but so different. I was thinking of the women and how much their clothing changed. Suddenly you have jazz, the Charleston, and women dancing with dresses above their knees by 1917. ("Author's Note" 121)

As Fornes observes, the time from 1910 to 1920 was a turbulent era with two cultures clashing

against each other: Victorian traditions and twentieth century modernity. Although Fornes does not particularly portray the clash of the cultures as motivation for Marion's actions, it is certainly necessary to consider the moral values of Victorian traditions as the social context in which Marion perceives and expresses herself at the beginning of the play.

The Victorian period is marked by its strict sexual morality (especially for women) which served to maintain the male authority in the familial and national power structure. "Publisher's Note" for *Women and Victorian Values, 1837-1910* introduces the characteristics of the period as follows.

During the Victorian and Edwardian periods society was underpinned by rigid moral and social values; with ideal forms of masculine and feminine behavior. Moral respectability and domesticity were important ideologies of feminine behavior. The 'woman's mission' was that of a supportive wife, dutiful daughter, and caring mother, and the women's domestic role was seen as an important and pivotal part of society. It was especially important that the mothers should teach their children the values of Christian morality, which formed the foundation of society. For men society dictated they take the authoritative role as head of the household. The public sphere of society was controlled by male authority, with very little room for women. (*Women and Victorian Values*)

The Victorian traditions of the division of female and male roles in the family and the strict sexual morality based on Christianity are clearly reflected in the characters' dialogues in *Abingdon Square*. In scene 2, Marion promises her stepson Michael to be his mother since he needs "a guide, a teacher in life" even though she is the same age as he (*Abingdon* 126). She recites the hope and joy she feels about her marriage to Juster in a prayer-like formal language,

heavy with Christian allusions. In scene 3, Marion inquires of Juster what her “obligations” are as the runner of the house. In scene 5, when Marion and her cousin Mary share the neighborhood gossip about a threesome affair, they repent to God just thinking about illicit sexual actions. What is interesting, however, is that while what the characters say reveals the ideologies of the Victorian values and morality they have internalized, what they do in the context of the scene is highly sexual. The discrepancy between the dialogue and the physical action at times are even comical. They say and think as they should, as they have been educated and language veils their perceptions of what their bodies are really doing.

In her long speech in scene 2, Marion attempts to describe her hopeful expectations and happiness she feels about her prospective marriage with Juster. The phrases she adopts in this speech are strongly based on Christian rhetoric: “I would’ve died had [Juster] not come to save me. I love him more than my own life and I owe it to him. [...] I hope I can make myself worthy of the love you’ve bestowed upon me” (*Abingdon* 126). The image of Juster’s house in her description is that of a church: “In this house, light comes through the windows as if it delights in entering” (126). The literal content of this speech is religious and spiritual. In contrast, however, the context of this speech is highly physical, almost sexual. Right before this speech, Marion and Michael playfully struggle over a piece of chocolate.

[...] It is a sunny afternoon. Marion enters running from the left. Michael is chasing her. They run around the room laughing and screaming. He grabs her and takes a piece of chocolate from her hand. He unwraps the chocolate and puts it in his mouth. She chases him. She grabs him and they fall. He covers his mouth. She tries to pull his hand away. (125)

Two budding teenagers are grabbing and holding each other. Although they fully innocently tell

each other “I love you” as mother and son, the audience cannot help seeing the sexual energy between the two adolescents. Furthermore, just as the stage direction indicates, she “speaks rapidly as if in an emotional trance” (126), the rhythm and pace of her speech conveys her breathless excitement that overflows from her body perhaps partly due to the sexual arousal caused by the physical contact with Michael.

In this way, the language is deceptive in the world of *Abingdon Square*. In a society that denies the reality of women’s bodies and, instead, oppressively molds them into the socially institutionalized roles, there is no language that adequately expresses it. They experience one thing, but say another because the discursive structure within which they have to express themselves has been constructed in ways to cover up and distort their experiences. Thus, they see their bodies but they don’t really see them. In other words, they see the realities of their bodies as mediated by language. The gap between the reality of her body and the language that denies it leaves Marion feeling vague and empty about herself.

Her efforts to overcome this vagueness culminates in the scene where she attempts to merge the words and her body in one as she reads a passage from Dante in an attic, stretching out her arms and legs, perspiring with exhaustion. Since I already analyzed this scene in detail in the previous chapter, I will pay closer attention to Marion’s speech at the end of the same scene. She implies, as she confides to her aunt Mini, that it is the conviction her mother put in her mind that compels her to overcome this vagueness.

MARION. I feel sometimes that I am drowning in vagueness—that I have no character. I feel I don’t know who I am. Mother deemed a person worthless if he didn’t know his mind, [...]. She always said “a person must know what he ought to believe, what he ought to desire, what he ought to do.” [...] (*Abingdon* 133)

Though her mother's teaching is the motivating force for her not to be resigned to the circumstances, the subject in her mother's legacy is all male, "he." In English grammar, most often "he" represents all human beings, including "she." Even so, when all subject positions are already occupied by "he," Marion is unable to find a place for herself to be a subject. Moreover, the "ought" used repeatedly in her mother's teaching implies that his/her identity and desires are already given to him/her. A person should know, accept, and carry out what he/she has been ordained to be in the society he/she is born into. In the following section I will examine what Marion attempts in order to move out of the vagueness that ails her and to establish her selfhood.

Marion's Diary: "a pocket-mirror"

Marion is often seen writing in her diary in Act 1. In scene 5, when Mary whispers the neighborhood sex scandal in her ear, Marion writes in her notebook. In scene 6, when Juster reads out a passage from a botanical instruction book, describing how to fertilize a flower (which I analyzed in the previous chapter), she writes in her diary. It seems that her diary is where she tests out her real thoughts against the confusion due to the discrepancy between the language and her reality of the body. In the structure of the play, the scene where Marion is discovered writing in her diary her imaginary love affair comes after she begins to recognize the energy in her body. In the Dante scene, we witness how she suffers in her desperate effort to feel her body in the language. In the following scene, Marion is learning to dance with Michael to rag music. When Juster returns home, she asks him to dance with her. She is happy and proud to find in her the ability to dance, in other words the body that she owns. She says to Juster: "You just listen and the music and the words will tell you how to move. I learned. I am sure you could learn too. I never thought I could learn and I did" (*Abingdon* 134). But Juster refuses, saying "No, no I'm

sure I can't. You dance. I'll watch you" (134). Thus, either within the given language (books, for example) or in her real life (her husband), there is no satisfactory way for Marion to experience her body, her sexual body, that is awakening. So, she creates an imaginary lover and keeps a journal of their meetings.

Writing the body, asserting woman's identities as experienced in the body, is not an easy thing to do. First because the body is already culturally and socially inscribed and secondly, because the language with which a woman has to write is inherited from the culture, already saturated with ideologies, according to Cixous and Anzaldúa. Even though a diary is the most private form of writing, one can be deceiving oneself by writing what she thinks she ought to be instead of really questioning what she wants to be. Marion, while launching on an adventure (even though imaginary) of self affirmation, limits it to the purview of the romance novel.

Even in her fantasy world, she does not see her imaginary lover everyday because "[a] married woman cannot see her lover often" (*Abingdon* 135). Furthermore, Marion avoids the physical aspect of this illicit affair even if it is only imaginary.

MICHAEL. Where do you meet?

MARION. In the street. In a parlor.

MICHAEL. Does he come here?

MARION. No!

MICHAEL. And then?

MARION. We talk.

MICHAEL. Have you kissed?

MARION. No! (135)

Is she simply enjoying the titillating anticipation of the final union with her lover as in a romance

novel? Or could it be that even in her imaginary world, she cannot be utterly free from social restrictions? Or, could it be that, somewhat incongruously, while she dreams of and tempts an extramarital relationship, she still cannot give up her self-image as a modest married woman? Or all of these? She seems to be making recourse to the tradition of the romance novel in order to fantasize her erotic love life without utterly transgressing the moral boundary. Is she sly or too innocent? She writes as an outlet for the excessive sexual energy for which she has no outlet but her diary, yet she makes it look like everything she yearns for is only for her soul, nothing physical, as a good woman should in an upper class family in 1910. Her imaginary lover “has a delicate face and delicate hands. His eyes are dark and his hair is dark. And his skin is white. He looks like a poet. He looks the way poets look. Soulful” (*Abingdon* 136). Thus, although she admits that she is “mad” when Michael calls her so, her laughter and “I know” sounds anxious and uneasy. She does not fully understand what she is doing.

H. Porter Abbots, in his book *Diary Fiction: Writing as Action*, deliberates on the analogy of a diary as a “pocket-mirror”:

In *The Counterfeiters*, the fictional diarist, Edouard, describes his diary as a “pocket-mirror.” The analogy is a good one because it allows us to formulate a double-question: does the diarist catch herself in her mirror or does she use it to put on her makeup? That a writer can in all sincerity perform the latter operation while she believes she is performing the former is hard to deny. It is the very mystique of the diary—its illusion of sincerity—that can make it a particularly treacherous form. (47)

It seems that Marion is using her diary for the latter use. Perhaps because the mirror she is using now is given to her by the culture—in the form of a romance novel. Since it is already shaped according to the social norms and ideologies, it cannot, does not reflect her whole body: only

certain parts of her are reflected, veiled and disfigured. Even in the most private form of imaginative writing, she cannot dare to explore her naked desires.

Then, does it mean that it is impossible for women to write at all? Of course, not. Judy Simons, critic of women's diary literature, observes that women diarists often turn in their diaries to the rhetoric of contemporary popular literary genres to find a discourse that can emblemize their personal situations (256). The result is that they may get confined within the oppressive patriarchal ideologies that produced the female stereotypes in the popular literature. Yet, Simons asserts that women diarists not only adopt the preexistent models from the popular culture but appropriate them as well, quoting Sidonie Smith:

“[...] Subversively, she rearranges the dominant discourse and the dominant ideology of gender, seizing the language and its powers to turn cultural fictions into her very own story.” Women use the diary, then, not just to explore the varieties of female selfhood provided in preexisting models, but to promote an alternative series of identities for themselves that can counteract those models. (257)

Likewise, according to Keating, both Cixous and Anzaldúa “open new theoretical spaces *within* existing cultures” (143). Cixous maintains that women's writing happens from *within* the culture. They have to “steal” from the culture and invent new identities.

Women must steal what they need from the dominant culture, but then fly away with their cultural body to the ‘in between,’ where new images, new narratives, and new subjectivities can be created. (Shiach 23)

The way to fly away and create, in other words, to develop alternate forms of discourse is to incorporate women's bodily experiences into their writing. In order to do so, women must “reclaim their own bodies” (Keating 119).

Abingdon Square, I argue, is an example of theatrically imaging how “writing the body” can be done; what it is like to incorporate our bodily experiences into text and what changes such writing would bring about to the ways women are represented/written in the society; how it blurs the binary system that has served to fix women’s place in the margin of the society. Fornes invokes Frank from the textual world to the corporeal world. Marion experiences what she writes with language through her body. To put it another way, her body takes over the writing project. From the moment her body begins to write, meanings are unfettered from their fixed places. Her subjectivity shifts and multiplies.

Writing the body: Living the story she writes

Marion runs into her imaginary lover in a book shop. In one evening, seven months after their first conversation about Marion’s diary, Marion describes to Michael the moment she found him.

MARION. I took a book and buried my head in it. I was afraid. I thought if he saw me he would know and I would die. I saw him leave. For a moment I was relieved he hadn’t seen me and I stayed behind the stacks. But then I was afraid I’d lose him. I went to the front and I watched him but then I lost him because I didn’t want to get too near him.—I went back there each day. To the bookstore and to the place where I had lost him. A few days later I saw him again and I followed him. Each time I saw him I followed him. I stood in corners and in doorways until I saw him pass. Then I followed him. I was cautious but he became aware of me. One day he turned a corner and I hurried behind him. He was there, around the corner, waiting for me. I screamed and he laughed. He grabbed me by the arm. And I ran. I ran desperately. [...] (*Abingdon* 138)

The arrangement of short sentences and obsessive repetition of certain words expresses the shock, horror, and excitement Marion felt when she saw her writing coming to life in the body. He “grabs her by the arm.” Now it is her body that experiences his embodied existence.

As Frank intrudes Marion’s reality, the two different levels of universes—the one in which the writer lives and the one which the writer has created by writing—clash with each other. This is termed as “metalepsis” in narrative theory. A writer creates a character in the text she writes; the character in the text comes into the writer’s life. This intrusion, reversely, changes and affects the writer: The writer begins to be written by the text he writes. In some cases, the writer/his character dyad is doubled and even tripled—the writer writes a character, and the character writes another character, etc. Thus the boundary between fantasy and real, between subject and object is blurred. If our understanding of our identities are constructed through language (that is, texts), metalepsis exposes the process and shows how our identities are fabricated. It also dramatizes how this process can be disrupted.⁹

Frank in *Abingdon Square* is not entirely a creature from Marion’s fantasy, though. He has a concrete material grounding in the same universe as Marion’s reality. He has his own father and his own concrete life, which Marion did not know. His real name is not Frank but Jonathan. Marion, nonetheless, never calls him by that name and even Fornes always indicates him as Frank in the stage directions. He is neither fantasy nor reality. Perhaps it is “mysterious” as Scott Cummings describes it (177). I argue that this “mystery” functions as the “in-between” which Cixous or Anzaldúa imagines as the space where woman’s writing the body can happen from

⁹ Debra Malina, narrative theorist, explains the significance of the artistic exploitation of metalepsis in post modern literature: “Metalepsis dramatizes the problematization of the boundary between fiction and reality [...] it provides a model of the dynamics of subject construction in an age that has witnessed both the deconstruction of the essential self in favor of a subject constituted in and by narrative and the complication of a simple, teleological model of narrative with an emphasis on the form’s repetitive, self-undermining and even violent aspects” (2).

within the preexistent culture. In the world of *Abingdon Square*, the artistic world Fornes creates, the presence of Frank displaces the boundary between the text and the reality, the mind and the body, the subject and the object. Frank disrupts the fixed meaning of a text and opens it up to limitless possibilities of meaning. And it can be terrifying.

It is Marion who wrote him. Then he must represent her thoughts. She should know her thoughts. She assumed that “I know every part of him. I know his fingernails—every lock of his hair” (*Abingdon* 136). But, when he actually appears in front of her, he is full of surprises: he appears and then disappears; he waits for her, grabs her; and he even “stands in the garden outside the window” of the living room in Juster’s house (139). But when Michael asks her “Does he come here?” in the previous scene, she says “No!” (135) Then, he is not exactly as she wrote him. What do we make of the difference between what she wrote and what she is actually experiencing now? What does what she wrote in her diary represent then? Just an endless cycle of questions, and no easy answers. Marion feels afraid. She feels she has lost her mind.

Now that Frank has broken out of the pages of Marion’s diary, she begins to understand writing is way weightier than she thought it would be. Writing is not a matter of imagining and fantasizing her life in terms of someone else’s romance, but of a choice of real action without knowing what awaits her. In Act 1, she ends up deciding not to act. In the last scene of Act 1, Frank comes to her house to see her, thinking that Marion is Juster’s daughter. Marion tells him that she is married to Juster. She asks him to leave.

MARION. What madness. It’s my fault. I know it’s my fault. I’ve been married since I was fifteen and I’ve never done anything like this. I love my husband and I’ll always be faithful to him. I won’t hurt him. He doesn’t deserve this. Please, leave or I’ll start crying and they will hear me and they will come in and find me like

this. (*Abingdon* 141)

In the speech above, Marion, to fight off the “madness,” reminds herself of who she is and what she is. The problem is that this choice makes her feel, Fornes tells us, “absent as if something had just died inside her” (140). Although Juster puts his arms around her at the end of this scene, Marion feels cold: “It’s getting chilly” (141). It is significant that in the previous scene Juster complements her: “You look beautiful. You look like a painting” (138). She has made the right choice socially, morally. However, by doing so, she killed the life in her. Instead of becoming alive as a living sexual body, she stays as a beautiful painting, a mere sign of a good woman. Fornes challenges the audience/ reader by throwing a question: then, which is the real sin?

Then Fornes makes a provocative choice as playwright. Marion’s actual transgression happens quite accidentally, in a “possessed” moment. Fornes stages it in a very short but intense scene in Act 2.

10th Street. Three months later. April 1915. It is late morning. A glazier is standing on a ladder in the up left corner. He wears belted overalls. He hammers points on the upper part of the window. Marion enters right. She carries a vase with flowers. She stops to look at him. He continues working. She walks to the right stand. She looks at him again. She is transfixed. He turns to look at her. Their eyes lock. She cannot turn away.

GLAZIER. Could I have a drink of water?

MARION. Yes. (*She does not move. He comes half way the ladder and waits.*)

GLAZIER. Well? (*He goes close to her. He puts the vase to his mouth and drinks water through the flowers. She stares. He lets out a long laugh.*)

GLAZIER. (*Referring to the drinking of the water.*) May I?

She does not answer. He laughs again. She stares at him. She is possessed. He picks her up and takes her upstage. They disappear behind the sofa. She emits a faint sound. The lights fade. (Abingdon 142)

This scene is surprising and even puzzling to me. It is not Frank but a total stranger that makes love to her, who comes out of nowhere and never comes back into her life again. When the story of this play has centered around the relationship between Marion and Frank, Marion making love to a stranger is odd. However, I realize, it has to be this unexpected man, not Frank, that Marion should experience her sexual pleasure with in order for her to experience her identity as her own woman. The playwright's discussion of this scene supports my view. Fornes talks about this scene as follows:

Some people thought the scene when Marion lets the glazier—who she does not know—take her behind the sofa was today's morality not the early 1900s. But people were no more moral then than now. At the time people didn't talk about sex because they spoke more Puritanically and they didn't warn their daughters about men and the daughters were always chaperoned. Marion is in the house, she's not chaperoned. She's never been told if a man comes and throws you on the floor, what is the next move you should make. And Marion's no saint. She enjoys it. He's not violent. She thinks this is a nice game. ("Author's Note" 122)

It is a "game" and a joy. Nothing is prefigured, planned or expressed—in words. Just laughter, possessedness and pleasure. Before any linguistic mediation intervenes to explain or give meaning (as given by the society and culture) to what she feels or wants in her body, her body seems to be the only thing that occupies the space in this moment. And this stranger—the glazier—is cheerful and kind: he just laughs, takes her in his arms and gives her pleasure. It is

neither inside nor outside the social. It is somewhere else, a pure *jouissance* completely Marion's. Marion's sexual experience with Glazier is illustrative of Anzaldúa's conviction that women should recognize themselves as an embodied subject. According to Keating,

Anzaldúa maintains that before she and other multiply oppressed women can even *begin* writing their bodies, they must recognize and reclaim their identities as embodied subjects. Yet she stipulates that to do so is not easy: "Because our bodies have been stolen, brutalized or numbed, it is difficult to speak from/through them" (124)

Marion's body is there in different ways than she has known. Though this action is not without guilt, the awakening of the knowledge of her female body—the pleasurable sex and childbirth as its result—makes her stronger than before. Marion acquires more agency than before. She goes out of Juster's house and secures a space just for her and Frank in Abingdon Street.

Breaking down the binary system, opening up to heterogeneity

I briefly mentioned above the scene where Juster compliments Marion's beauty: "You look beautiful. You look like a painting" (*Abingdon* 138). In the same scene Juster is playing chess with Michael. Right after this remark, he asks his son to decide what move to make. As Juster waits, he talks about or teaches the difference between the Western and the Oriental way of learning: the former is to act first and count the consequences, and the latter is to meditate and consider the consequences and then act or not. Juster asks Marion too which way is the best way to act. Later,

Marion lifts her skirt to see her toes and takes six steps looking at her feet.

MARION: Six steps and the sky did not fall. (139)

Does she mean that now that “I have experimented with taking six steps and the sky did not fall, I will ‘just do it’ like Michael said” or “Even though the sky did not fall with my six steps, I know I can never go further than that?” Considering that she decides in the next scene not to go outside Juster’s house with Frank, the latter might be what she means. Marion is reduced to a silent sign of femininity hollowed out of her bodily substance, caught in the web of the binary system of meaning (Oriental/ Western, passion/ reason, female/male). Symbolically, Juster and his house becomes the prison of language and discourses that oppresses Marion’s self discovery, though Juster never consciously intends so.

However, the moment Marion goes “outside” Juster’s house—continues her affair with Frank, in other words—when her body takes over the writing, everything seems turned upside down. Marion loses the stable ground on which to make meaning of what is happening to her and who she is supposed to be. Susan Seller explains the significance of the spatial metaphor of inside and outside in Cixous’ fictional writing, which I find to be applicable to Marion’s situation as well.

Inside is security but also death of the self; outside is reality but also alienation and struggle as the *I* endeavors to negotiate between life and death, self and other, true and false. Refusing outside, by fantasizing the union of inside, is a way of avoiding anguish, though it bars the self from the possibility of production and exchange.
(Sellers 51)

Now that Marion acknowledges her bodily need and spends time with Frank, she feels: “I am impure. I lie each day. I am rotten and deceitful” (*Abingdon* 146). Of course she tells a lie to be with Frank: she has to deceive Juster and those who believe her to be the “beautiful painting.” In order to be honest with her bodily desires or her newly found self, she has to deny the veracity of

the language which has defined her identity within the society and culture. This denial places her in a void of meaning from which it is difficult to speak with conviction. Marion expresses this feeling as “I lie.” She is alienated from the old system of meaning of the patriarchal society. On the other hand, isn’t it the language / narrative of the patriarchal society that has lied about/to her?

Marion hopefully believes that once she can be with Frank “day and night,” this confusion will all be gone. But on the contrary the situation becomes worse. Juster finds out that she rented a space in Abingdon Square to be alone with Frank. He orders her to leave his house without Thomas, her baby. Even though she can be alone with Frank now, she is on the verge of going mad. She tells Mary:

“I am in a state of despair! Thanks to Frank. How could I not be. Have you ever lived with someone who speaks one way and acts another!—Someone for whom words mean nothing?—Or if they mean anything, they mean something different from what they mean to you? My life is a puzzle.—I don’t know where I stand. I am constantly asking: What do you mean?—What is it you mean? What does that mean to you? Why did you say that?—Why did you do that? [...]” (*Abingdon* 148)

She continues, “[when] I sinned against life because I was dead, I was not punished. Now that life has entered me I am destroyed and I destroy everything around me [...]” (148). While she was inside (Juster’s house/ the society), she could enjoy the security but she felt she was dead. Now that she has come outside, all that she believed in, all that guaranteed her identity is tumbled upside down. She is thrown into meaninglessness and chaos.

It seems that the chaos seems to be what other adulterous women in literature symbolically experience. Tony Tanner in his book *Adultery in the Novel: Contract and Transgression* examines the symbolic meaning of adultery in bourgeois novels. Though the

novels he deals with are the product of particular social and cultural contexts of 18th and 19th century, his analysis provides me with the point of departure from which I can locate the significance of *Abingdon Square* as a 20th century drama dealing with the same subject. Tanner posits marriage as the fundamental contract the constitution of the other social systems and institutions is based upon. Then he views language as the epitome of the symbolic systems of the society, hence transmitted with its ideologies and assumptions that artificially, not naturally, sustain their existence and authoritative power (Tanner 59-60). Committing adultery means, then, crossing the boundary and entering the extra-social. When the female characters in these novels like Anna Karenina or Maggie in *Mill on the Floss* are within the society, the concepts and classifications of the society, which are constructed through language, give them identities and allow meaning to enter their existence. Now that they are out in the extra-social territory, even though they are freed from the oppressive concepts and classifications (though temporarily), they are also devoid of the language that would endow meaning to their existence. It is as if there exist only two territories: the social and the extra-social. The adulterous women who transgress the boundary between the two territories either see the artificiality of the social and therefore the meaninglessness of the whole universe, or want to return to the social because they cannot bear there being no proper names for themselves outside the social. Once having become an anomaly, however, they have to persevere without a name or branded with a scarlet letter even though they return. In the world of the bourgeois novel Tanner examines, there is no alternative territory for them, thus, they end up in silence or death. These women do not have, are not allowed to have, the ability to become a subject that can make meaning. In the following paragraphs, I will examine how Fornes' heroine is different from her counterparts.

Marion is suffering a similar destiny. As I examined above, she feels lost as to who she is.

Everything is out of her control. She wrote Frank, but she can't fix him in the place she wants him to be. She is not any more what she believed/wanted to be when she was 15 years old. Having betrayed her husband for another man, having a child by yet another man, she is not "a mother" or "a wife." She exclaims desperately, "I have a bad destiny, Mary. I have an evil destiny. It constantly thwarts me.—Nothing comes to me at the right time or in the right way" (*Abingdon* 150). Furthermore, she has no other vocabulary to describe her present state but the word "uncivilized." It echoes Juster's use of the term: "Each day we have to restore mankind to a civilized state. Each night the savage takes over. We're entering the war" (145). Marion defines her state with the same word as Juster, thus indicating that she still perceives things within the same dichotic world view which suffocated her. Unless she finds a way out of the language of this dualistic worldview, Marion seems to be eternally condemned.

Fornes, however, turns this despair to hope, this void to an opportunity for heterogeneity and fullness of meaning. When language is unleashed from its fixed meaning, it could shake and even endanger our sense of identity. But this could be our chance for "production and exchange," our chance to create and invent our identities as shifting and ever changing, as Cixous or Anzaldúa envisions. Fornes would agree with them. Marion does not resign. She asks questions. She challenges. Marion goes to Juster's house and confronts him: "How can you do this? How can you put me through this? What do you gain?" (*Abingdon* 152) She asks if all the punishments she receives for transgression are just. If so, according to whose law? Then, surprisingly, the next scene shows Marion doing "an act of grace" (Rhul 202) to Juster. Juster comes to Abingdon Square with a gun to shoot Marion. Juster changes his mind and puts the gun to his head. Marion calmly takes his hand down from his head. "[He is] moved by her kindness" (*Abingdon* 152). He has a stroke and falls down. While he is unconscious, she takes care of him. She not only saves

herself but Juster as well from death. The distinction between victim and victimizer, savior and saved is blurred, overturned, negated.

Juster: Marion's Other

Marion's journey of learning, however, is not complete without Juster's. Marion's writing the body not only opens her subjectivity to fullness of meaning, but also Juster's as well. Fornes pays equal attention to Juster in a deeply sympathetic way, showing us how Juster goes through his own journey of learning ignited by Marion's writing the body. Marion's discovery of herself, in fact, happens and is accomplished in her relation with Juster, her other.¹⁰

Actually, from Act 2, we get to see and hear Juster a lot more than in Act 1. Act 1 seems more focused on Marion. In Act 2, however, scenes with Marion and scenes with Juster alternate. Thus we witness not only Marion's changes but Juster's as well: how he falters and how his equilibrium is shaken profoundly once he loses Marion. He has lost the Marion that he used to know and has to face the Marion that is utterly unfamiliar to him. What is all the more interesting is that Marion and Juster are becoming more and more like each other after the separation. They repeat each other's speeches and behaviors knowingly or unknowingly. In scene 22, Juster questions Marion about the place she rented to be with Frank and asks her "What are your

¹⁰ "The other" may be a loaded word in different theories. Here, I use this word under the influence of psychoanalysis theorists, as Cixous or Kristeva, whose theories are based on and working against Freud and Lacan. The way Kristeva explains the meaning of the other in *Stranger to Ourselves* applies well to Cixous. According to Kristeva, the other is not someone outside but is a part of the self within the self. The other or what we project onto the surface of the other—in other words, "a stranger" or "a foreigner"—is none other than our own unconscious repressed and buried deep down in order to establish self as "unitary and glorious" citizen-individual in our modern society. Kristeva states, "Strangely, the foreigner lives within us: he is *the hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our abode, the time in which understanding and affinity founder*" (*Stranger* 265, *italics mine*). Only when we begin to face and acknowledge our own "incoherences and abysses" within ourselves, we can begin to know who we are. Only when we seek continuously to find a way to make peace with the "strangeness" within ourselves, can we live with the others without oppressing them or negating their existence.

plans?" (*Abingdon 146*) Marion retorts back at him, "In regard to what?" (147) Later in the same scene, Michael, his son, tries to dissuade him from divorcing and driving her out of the house without her baby and asks him, "Father, may I intercede?" (147) Juster replies sharply, "In regard to what!" as if he is learning language from Marion (147). In scene 23a, after he pours out to Mary his pain of losing Marion, Juster is at a beer parlor, with "a glass of beer in front of him" (148). Right after this tableau, in scene 24, Marion drinks vermouth with Mary. In scene 25, Juster is at a beer parlor with Michael, showing him a revolver which he carries with him all the time, and tells him "I don't know if I will shoot her or if I will shoot myself." In scene 26, Marion tells Mary, "I will shoot him. I imagine I shoot him and I feel great satisfaction." He calls her insane, she calls him insane. Just as Marion followed her lover in spite of herself, Juster follows Marion though he knows it would only torment his soul. And the two, who seem to move farther and farther away from each other, mirror each other. In the end they are brought to confront each other face to face, realizing how deeply they love each other. Thus it becomes quite apparent that *Abingdon Square* is not just about Marion's journey of learning and maturing but also Juster's as well. Fornes shows that it is not only Marion who has been caught in the web of culture, but also Juster.

What is significant about Juster's changes caused by Marion is that Juster begins to use language differently as he feels Marion's estrangement. In Act 1, his speech is short and controlled, almost perfunctory. He is balanced, civilized, rational and "innocent," not tainted with the impurity of the maddening effect of language's ambiguity. In Act 2, however, instead of his usual formal conversations, Juster *has to* talk for very long about himself and about Marion. It is his desperate effort in his own way to make sense of Marion, and at the same time, to protect with language his selfhood which Marion's madness threatens.

His first long speech is, thus, necessitated by his first notice of Marion's estrangement—the feeling that Marion “is not herself” (*Abingdon* 145). Then again, what is this “herself” he talks about? Does he know Marion for who she really is, including her repressed desires and yearnings? If his belief that he knows Marion is false, and this belief has sustained his idea of who he is, then is Juster who he believes himself to be? Suspicious of Marion's betrayal behind his back, after a quite ambiguous but provocative accusation of people in general, he continues:

(He sits down and puts the towel on his lap, he takes one of his shoes off.) I take care of my feet. My socks are in a good state of repair. When they wear out I pass them on to someone who needs them *(taking off his other shoe.)* Others mend their socks. I don't. I don't mind wearing mended clothes. My underwear is mended. So are my shirts, but not my socks. *(With both feet on the floor.)* I have always wanted to give my feet maximum comfort. It is they who support the whole body yet they are fragile. Feet are small and fragile for the load they carry. I wear stockings that fit so they won't fold and create discomfort to my feet. If I treat my feet with respect, my brain functions with respect. It functions with more clarity and so does my stomach. I digest better. In the morning at the office, I look at my mail. Then I call my assistant. I discuss some matters with him. Then I call my secretary. She comes in with her stenographer's pad and sits down on the chair to my right. I collect my thoughts for a few moments. Then I stand on my feet, walk to the window at my left, and from there, standing on my feet, with my stomach properly digesting my breakfast and my brain as clear as the morning dew, I dictate my letters. (145)

In this awkward yet painful moment, this long speech is quite bizarre. Why does he talk about his feet and stomach all of a sudden? I find the keys to understand where this speech comes from

in Deborah R. Geis' analysis of Fornes' *The Conduct of Life* and in the playwright's own direction of the actor who played Juster in the play's first production. Geis argues that the monologues in Fornes' plays are linguistic *gestus* of the characters, meaning that Fornes' monologues show how the characters use language in order to establish and "create" their subjectivity and their relationship to the world and others. In *The Conduct of Life*, Olimpia, the house maid, has a somewhat similar monologue to Juster's. When Leticia, her mistress, interrupts Olimpia at her job, Olimpia goes into a very long monologue about what she does in the kitchen from morning until evening. And the conclusion to this monologue is that she wants a steam pot. Geis elucidates the point of this monologue as follows:

Here, the gestic quality of Olimpia's monologue is shaped out of her insistence on transforming domestic space into narrative space to affirm her place in an environment where (as the servant) she is marginalized. [...] Olimpia's language *is* her behavior. Perhaps more so than any of Fornes's characters, Olimpia depends upon her discourse (which embodies her actions, and vice-versa) to establish that she even exists—hence her monologue's repeated invocation of the actual and grammatical subject, the "I." ("Wordscape" 304)

Similarly, Juster's monologue repeatedly calls upon the "I" or "my," thereby re-establishing his existence, the certainty of his being by narrativizing his subjectivity. Other than the numerous invocations of the "I," what draws my attention is his careful and intentional focus on his body parts—his feet, his stomach, and his brain—as if he has to recollect them. In this sense, Fornes' direction in the rehearsal to the actor who plays Juster is significant.

[...] She stands behind him, with her hands on his shoulders, occasionally moving her hands along his upper arms as she speaks: "Now *hold your body carefully*. If you let

your body go, it will be poisoned. Here in your brain [touching his head], it's like a generator...making electricity at a tremendous speed. It's good, in a sense, because it's keeping you alive. You walk fine, you can climb the stairs, you can wash your hands. Somehow the energy is so intense that, although you can see, you're not able to focus so much on what's going on. You see Michael when you come in but he's a little fuzzy. You can speak to him, to others; it may sound a little mechanical but to you it sounds normal.

“You are even able to notice it is a little somber in the room when you enter. You are talking to them but once you enter this room [...] it's too much of a shock if you actually talk to another person one-to-one. If you do, you may fall apart. You can even tend to your own mechanism so you can take your shoes off. It feels good. But don't relax too much because you might fall apart.” All during these comments, Fornes kept her hands on the actor's shoulders and arms, as she remains standing behind his chair.

(Cole 148, *italics mine*)

Juster is feeling that his whole body is “falling apart.” He can't quite grasp what is going on around him, to Michael or to Marion, or he knows but doesn't want to know because the shock is too great. Words escape him in a moment like this. And he feels it in his body: he may “fall apart.” So he tends to his body. In this uncanny moment, the only way he can protect himself is to feel his body intact and he is using language in order to do so. He consciously convinces himself of his being with recourse to his bodily sensations. Thus, perhaps for the first time, he is coordinating language with his body.

Paul John Eakins, in his analysis of autobiographies, argues that “self, memory and the body are intimately connected” (19), and that “our human identities [are grounded] in our

experience of our bodies” (1). Thus he paraphrases Decartes’ famous statement “I think therefore I am” to “I feel my body therefore I am” (11). Before, Juster knew that the words he uttered would carry out their function to communicate the meaning as he intended to the person he is speaking to, just like dictating his letters to his secretary. His words now, on the contrary, are floating in the air without any designated receptor or any clearly intended meaning, quite like his disturbed consciousness of his bodily existence in the space. By naming his body parts, he can feel their existence, and from thence, he attempts to re-establish his routines, his familiar self. Thus, this strange monologue seems to be Juster’s poetry, in his own awkward way, similar to Marion’s reading of Dante.

Another change in Juster’s use of language after Marion leaves him is that most of his speeches are his attempts at narrativizing Marion’s changed behaviors. Riessman in *Narrative Analysis* states that “narrativization tells not only about past actions but how individuals understand those actions, that is, meaning” (19). She also observes that the women, whose narratives are the object of her studies, “narrativize particular experiences in their lives, often where there has been a breach between ideal and real, self and society” (3). Likewise, Juster narrativizes both Marion’s behavior and his behavior provoked by hers as he struggles to make their meaning within his reason and value systems. However hard he may try, he cannot reach a satisfactory conclusion in any of the narratives he makes. All he can come up with is “she does hate me, and she has made me hate her” (*Abingdon* 148) or “She’s gone berserk. She’s gone wild like a mad woman. She’s insane” (149), which he helplessly repeats. While Marion was as he knew her or arguably as he scripted her—“preciously beautiful, modest,” “thoughtful and respectful” and “with no vanity” (147), his world was in balance. He knew his world and where it was going. Once Marion opens up to the truth of her feelings, she does not stay as a beautiful

painting in Juster's world any more, causing his world to be out of balance. He cannot understand his world anymore, so he continuously and repetitively attempts to narrativize. It almost feels as if it is Juster now who feels the urge to write. Though he does not literally write in a diary, through his speeches and narrativization, he keeps writing, making meaning out of the events around him. He may be learning that he cannot fix Marion in any of the writing he attempts.

Just as Marion needs the crucial moment to reclaim herself as an embodied subject, Juster has to see himself as a subject with a body, which happens in scene 29. Fornes heightens the significance of this scene, yet reduces the unnecessary "drama" by staging his scene in analepsis: the scene begins with the sound of a gunshot but it goes back to the moment before Juster shoots the gun and reenacts what happened as Juster narrates and simultaneously acts out how he shot the gun. The audience not only pays attention to "how" it happened but also learns it from Juster just as he "writes" it.

[...] There is the sound of a gunshot. The lights come up. Juster stands downstage facing up. He wears an overcoat and a bowler hat. His right arm hangs, holding a revolver. Marion is up center. She faces him. Her arms are halfway raised and her mouth and eyes are open in a state of shock. Mary enters running from the left. Marion turns to look at Mary. Both Juster and Marion go through the motions he describes.

JUSTER. I came in. I said nothing. I took the gun out and aimed at her. She stared at me. Her courage is true. She stared at death without flinching. **My eye fell on the mirror behind her. I saw my reflection in it. I am much older than she. Much older. I looked very old and she looked very young. I felt ashamed to love her**

so. I thought, let her young lover kill her if she must die. I turned the gun to my head. She moved toward me calmly. She put her hand on mine and brought it down away from my head. She said, "Please." I was moved by her kindness. I turned to look at her. And again I was filled with rage. My finger pulled the trigger. (*He shoots again. Marion runs upstage and returns to her position at the start of the scene.*) That was the blast you heard, the gun was pointing at the floor. Everyone here is perfectly all right. (*Juster begins to choke. He turns front slowly. He starts to walk backwards gasping for air. He falls unconscious on the sofa. His eyes are wide open.*) (*Abingdon 152, emphasis mine*)

As Juster faces Marion, he sees himself in the mirror. As I have built the analogy of mirror image between Marion and Juster, he sees himself through Marion at the same time. Just as Marion was brought to face herself reflected on the mirror of the diary she wrote—that is, Frank¹¹—Juster is seeing himself through Marion. Then what he sees in the mirror is not as he thought himself to be. Both Marion and Juster see in the mirror a familiar yet surprisingly strange face which undeniably belongs to themselves, most significantly in Juster's case, the reality of his body.¹²

Cole reports on "rehearsal of a crucial scene between Marion and Juster":

Fornes says to the actors: "I never saw this before but..." Speaking as director

¹¹ In scene 15, Frank comes to Juster's house to see Marion. Fornes stage direction for this scene is: "*Marion sits in a chair facing the window. Frank stands in the garden outside the window. Marion's manner of speaking reveals sexual excitement*" (*Abingdon*139). And then "*Frank walks to her*" (139). Because of the way the set is arranged—the window between Marion and Frank—this scene looks as if Marion is looking at a mirror and Frank is coming out of the mirror: He is Marion's own image, a creature from Marion's mind, her own unconscious, and the strange and repressed reality of her sexuality.

¹² Ruis Woertendyke, in his review in *Theatre Journal*, also observes the parallel between Marion and Juster: "[...] but old and gentle Juster cannot repress his conflicting passion of love and betrayal. He does not know on whom to use his pistol, however, and loses his self-assured identity. He reminds us of Marion when she was first becoming aware of her sexuality. She is "drowning in vagueness" and does not know who she is, and does not know how to stop what she feels. Juster feels the same things, but unlike Marion, he has been too long immersed in his image of himself and cannot break the social mold that has formed him. Instead of shooting someone, he has a heart attack."

refusing interpretative closure, she offers two unscripted options to the actor playing Juster: “It’s not in the play but I think Juster does take on lovers from the street. I’m not sure whether he is actually doing these things or is having nightmares about them, but in any event he is confronting his own sexuality.” The “I” here is indeterminate. Fornes speaks also as symbolist poet/playwright for whom nightmarish dreams are as indicative of reality as literal experience. (155)

I am not certain if the “crucial scene between Marion and Juster” here refers to scene 29, but Fornes’ explanation that “he is confronting his own sexuality” applies here well: it is succinctly materialized in the scene. He painfully realizes the reality of his body: his aged body, his desiring body, his sexual body, which he has never confronted honestly. The shock is so great that he wants to kill his body. Juster’s stroke symbolizes his inability or failure to face his bodily reality. He cannot accept what his body tells him about himself: he is just not what his rational thoughts and willful beliefs make of him. Sarah Ruhl, playwright, observes about Fornes’ use of the dysfunctional bodies in her plays:

[Fornes] constantly brings to our attention the physical limits of the will. Juster has a stroke, Henry falls down, Minnie gets a swollen tumor—these unfortunate acts (not of our own doing, but acts of Job’s God) have nothing to do with intention. But life is, all the same, full of moments in which our bodies receive the message that the will is not the prime mover. (201)

This play, however, does not end in tragedy. Surprisingly, Marion shows “kindness” to Juster. When he aims at her with his gun, she does not run away or scream but calmly embraces his despair. Is it because she knows so well what it is like to see the strange face of her desire and sexuality; because she understands well how horrifying the feeling of “I don’t know where I

stand” (*Abingdon* 148) can be? Through the journey of acquiring self-knowledge, Marion has acquired the compassion and grace to show kindness to the other: Juster. Juster also learns to face the reality of his body, therefore, his brokenness, his imperfections, and his humble need for Marion’s love.

Openness toward the other

Later, Marion is sitting on the couch in Juster’s house with Frank behind her. Frank wonders if she will continue to take care of Juster even if he never comes to. She tells him, “When I reach out to touch him I don’t know if I’m reaching outside of me or into me” (*Abingdon* 153). Juster is the other outside her but at the same time, he is inside her. He is the object for her to love, but at the same time, he is within her, the subject of the act of loving. The distinction between subject and object is blurred. And yet, Marion doesn’t seem to be subjugated to Juster. Furthermore, when she freely and willingly responds to Juster’s “I love you” with “I love you too” (154), holding him in her arms, the word “love” escapes or exceeds all previous meanings of love. It is not simply sexual or erotic love, driven by physical desire and passion. It is not entirely familial love devoid of sexuality because of the inhibition against incest. As she holds him in her arms, she is the daughter, the mother and the wife to Juster. What kind of love is this? Though she is now back in the marriage in which she was once restless and vague, she doesn’t seem to be resigned or subjugated. What is more, it doesn’t seem that she will have any exuberant sexual pleasure again in this marriage, yet it is what she left this relationship for. But certainly, she does not seem to be unhappy or dispirited. Rather, she is busy doing an “act of grace” (Ruhl 202), having more agency than before.

Marion has acquired the femininity or the feminine subjectivity Cixous speaks of as the

potential of writing the body. Cixous posits two kinds of subjectivity: masculine and feminine. While masculine subjectivity represses and kills the other in order to establish and to protect the boundary of the unitary and transcendent self (on which the patriarchal ideology is based), feminine subjectivity is openness toward the other, acceptance of the other in “me.” According to Susan Sellers,

For Cixous this willingness to enable to sing the other, rather than appropriate the other’s difference in order to construct and glorify the self in accordance with masculine law, is the keynote of *écriture féminine*. In The Newly Born Woman she writes:

Writing is the passageway, the entrance, the exit, the dwelling place of the other in me—the other that I am and am not, that I don’t know how to be, but that I feel passing, that makes me live. (10)

At the end of her journey to find her selfhood, what she accomplishes is not only her self-knowledge but the ability to love and let the other live as well. It may seem that she has returned to the place she began, but this time her action is based on her conscious choice and knowledge. Thereby, she has created a unique space for her individual identities that cannot be defined or restrained by the given categories and concepts of the society. She is neither a good wife nor a fallen whore. She is all of these yet neither of them. She is now beyond the restrictive social codes and naming.¹³

¹³ Ruis Woertendyke’s review of the play’s production directed by Fornes herself supports my interpretation. He asserts that Fornes’s characterization of Marion overrides the stereotypes of women on the American stages: “the saintly image” or “the sinning women.” According to him, Fornes “sheds new light on the character of American women [...] simply by showing us the world from a woman’s point of view.” As a result, Marion is “both virgin and whore,” “a girl growing into a woman and though she ends as the standard woman in love with her husband, the excursion through her awareness is not stereotypical and sheds much light on woman’s sexuality and the role men play in forming that sexuality” (264-5). He

The last scene of *Abingdon Square* is set in the year of 1917. As Fornes notes, this was the time “you have jazz, the Charleston, and women dancing with dresses above their knees” (“Author’s Note” 121). Also it was the time the concept of the “new woman,” a sexual revolution of sorts was beginning to take place in the United States (*Clash of Cultures*). With this historical background, Fornes portrays a new woman but of a different kind. This new woman she creates through Marion has acquired the knowledge of her sexuality and subjectivity not through the given language of the society but through her own exploration, initiated and experienced by herself through her body. This embodied knowledge has brought her back to Juster, but it is based on her need and love, not as defined by the socio-cultural ideologies but as she herself writes it, as her body writes it.¹⁴

3.2 KENNEDY’S *JUNE AND JEAN IN CONCERT*: MEMORY IN THE MAKING, HISTORY REWRITTEN

June and Jean in Concert (premiered at the Signature Theatre in 1995) is Kennedy’s dramatic adaptation of her own autobiography, *People Who Led to My Plays* (published in 1987). Unlike other “usual” autobiographies, *People Who Led to My Plays* consists of short descriptions of

concludes, “Ms. Fornes shows us the restrictions of our gender roles and dissolves the stereotypes that have so long littered our stages. She makes us fully aware that **women’s actions are based on women’s needs** and not on the overpowering appeal and superiority of men” (266 **emphasis mine**).

¹⁴ The writing process depicted through Marion’s journey to find herself reflects the playwright’s belief in creative writing. Fornes warns against “dangerous reliance on ‘set phrases and concepts,’ on ‘linguistic pattern’ and ‘accepted codes, so that [people] speak a language that doesn’t come from their brain” (Kent 158). She also asserts: “You see, if there’s a point to writing, it really has to be the purity of creativity and getting in touch with the reality of those human beings, their flesh and their sweat, their nightmares and their hatreds. You have to get in touch with all those things” (Fornes, Interview by Wooden 105).

various people, including her family members, teachers, writers and Hollywood movie stars, and some photographs of her choice. Thus, the autobiography, instead of giving out a linear and well explained story of “how I have become who I am,” presents bits and pieces of information about the author in a fragmented and rather disorderly way. Though Kennedy explains at the beginning of *People* that she wrote it as an attempt to answer the frequently asked question, “Who influenced you to write in such a nonlinear way? Who are your favorite playwrights?” (Kennedy, *People* 3) *People* is still enigmatic and “elusive” (Diamond, “Adrienne Kennedy” 126). It is so, in the sense that after reading the whole autobiography, you might feel that you have been invited to look into the multi-faceted middle-class Black family life, and the culture, especially pop-culture, in which they were immersed from the 1930s to 1960s, and that you have now a vague sense of what constructed Kennedy’s inner lives, but that you still do not know at all who she is because she “tells” you nothing after all. Kimberly W. Benston comments on *People* that “no comprehensive thematic structure coalesces around a perceptual center; no controlling consciousness focuses and justifies the details that would give it referential validity” (116-7). She further observes that “the text is so relentless and nonsyntactically detailed that what might appear as total disclosure becomes instead a kind of occlusion: revealing subversively becomes veiling” (117).

June and Jean in Concert resembles its original work not only because it often takes its lines directly from *People Who Led to My Plays*, but also because of its “subversively antinarrative strategy” (Beston 116). Like others of Kennedy’s plays, *June and Jean in Concert* does not have a clear plot to speak of. In other words, the events in the play are arranged according to neither chronology nor cause-and-effect relations and the diary entry June and Jean read out and their speeches are not psychologically motivated in the situation but follow some

kind of unconscious associations, creating a unique, perhaps poetic, pattern and rhythm. Kennedy splits herself into the twins (June and Jean), and also into the phantasmagoric figure of Dead Aunt Ella. Kennedy then weaves together the different viewpoints of these split subject positions and presents her memories of childhood and a day in later life when she has become a playwright. Instead of having a stable plot, Kennedy structures the play so as to generate certain impressions and/or sensations and lets meanings emerge from them. Thus, on the one hand, it presents the process of writing of the memory or “an actual memory in the making” (Kolin 180), evoking the bodily sensations of the past inscribed in the writer, and, at the same time, reproducing the bodily experience of the act of remembering. On the other hand, it is indeed tightly focused as an exploration of the original moment of writing of Kennedy herself or her character Jean who becomes a playwright and whose plays quoted in the play are actually Kennedy’s own¹⁵. Thus, the play is not only about the memory but also about writing and its meaning and function in the lives of women, specifically black women in U.S. society. The play meditates on the importance and necessity of writing for the survival and the identity construction of black women.

In expressing these themes of writing and memory, Kennedy chooses in *June and Jean* to use the diary (autograph books) as a dramatic and narrative device. The twins write and read out their diary entries on the stage most of the time during the performance. In between the diary entries are inserted fragmented and vague scenes in which their mother or father speak to them. The twins’ writing and reading out their diary seems to be the only tangible action in this play. The diary is, of course, portrayed as a tool with which to reveal the inner lives of the characters

¹⁵ The ambiguous thin line between the author herself and her characters are the landmark of Kennedy’s plays. Her plays are strongly autobiographic but, nonetheless, are different from Kennedy’s own life: they are imaginative and creative art work of Kennedy as playwright, distinct from Kennedy as a person.

and to record their history. Kennedy, however, uses diary in a quite challenging and even disturbing way. Firstly, Kennedy takes advantage of the diary's generic feature, especially its temporality, which means immediacy and everydayness. That way, she creates the presentness of the events happening on the stage, thereby creating a tension between the presentness and the ambience of remembrance. Also she complicates this effect by using the tenses—present, past and future tenses—in confusing ways. She uses the past tense where normally the present tense should be used, or the future tense as a mysterious prolepsis. The past and the present collide with each other and the temporalities the audience would expect of a diary or a memory play are constantly betrayed and frustrated. Furthermore, Kennedy rearranges the time sequence backwards and forwards, and has different points of view intersect with one another. Thus she creates a particular style that is unique to this play.

This particular use of temporality and the unique style as its result work in ways to evoke the bodily sensations associated with certain memories and communicate them to the audience. According to Julia Kristeva, “sensation and experience actually enter and become an intimate part of language” (“Editor's” 183). She asserts this by quoting Proust that there are two facets of reality: one is what is intellectualized and the other is what is evoked through it.

Everything was “interpreted by the intellect”: “one does not know what feeling is so long as it is not brought within the range of the intellect.” However, through what is “intellectualized,” another reality is perceived: “One distinguishes, and with what difficulty, the lineament of what one has felt” (“Sensation” 185)

This “what one has felt” may be unnameable and, in order to signify it, one needs “an enlarged and subtle rhetoric.”

[...] the access to the speaking subject's sensation requires the possibility of an enlarged and subtle rhetoric. This would have to be capable of naming its unnameable experiences, on condition of not reducing things to a 'pure signifier' but utilizing the capacity for perceptive and sensory regression. Whether therapist or writer, the one who is committed to bestowing signs or even a style on this sensory cave which, for the majority of people, is unnameable is called to a true experience. (188)

While Kristeva demonstrates the possibility of this rhetoric in novels by analyzing Proust's sentence rhythms and structures, I argue that Kennedy's *June and Jean in Concert* is a theatrical example of giving a style to the 'unnameable.' Kennedy's unique structuring of temporality, points of view, and usage of tenses bring forth the sensations and experiences in memories that are dormant in our consciousness yet without names. She makes happen "the lost time and lost language" through writing. What Julia Kristeva states about a writer's "insistence on lost time, on lost language," and "the urgency [to make the latter happen through writing at any price]" is applicable to Kennedy.

Maybe because there was another time, another experience, where time-thought-language *had not taken place*. If this were the case, regaining time would not simply mean being reconciled with whatever was the sense of the stimulus and was repressed (a desire, an object, a sign). Regaining time would be to make it come to pass: to extract feeling from its dark apartment; to snatch it from inexpressibility; to provide the sign, meaning and object they were lacking. Regaining memory would be to create it by creating words and thoughts anew. (193-4)

Thus, my analysis of *June and Jean in Concert* will be based on this premise that Kennedy's narrative construction contributes to making it—that is, the physical sensations of the past and the act of remembering—come to pass.

Kennedy's unique style has not only an aesthetic significance but also a political one as well. Feminist narrative theorists have claimed the need for a new narrative paradigm. For example, Jean Forte argues, "classic realism, always a reinscription of the dominant order, could not be useful for feminists interested in the subversion of a patriarchal social structure. Kennedy, as a black and a woman in the U.S., has fought a double fight in order to establish and affirm her individual identity within the political power structure of the society. In order to truthfully explore her experiences of oppression, the historical psychological damage running in the family, and her unique sense of identity construction, she must find a way to avoid the trap of the existent narrative structure (while she can't help deal with it) and to invent her own. Just as Attilio Favorini aptly points out, "[...] Kennedy is haunted, often literally, by 'the narrative structure of white, male-dominated culture,' which she repeats, resists and reinvents" (214). Kennedy, in *June and Jean in Concert*, resists the dominant narrative structure by experimenting with narrative temporality in her unique way.

In my reading of *June and Jean*, I will examine how Kennedy regains time by creating *theatrical* words anew—in this case her particular structuring of narrative time. I will also examine what "unnameable" or "unnamed" things Kennedy tries to limn of the past and of the act of remembering. Then I will discuss how the "unnameable" Kennedy reveals is related to the identity formation of the black women in the U.S. and, also how it is interconnected with the theme of writing.

Narrative Time

According to Paul Ricoeur, tenses in fictive narratives are tools and resources with which the writer shapes and expresses the writer's or her character's experiences. He explains that the system of tenses is independent from the time we phenomenologically experience. Due to this independence, the tense system provides resources to narrative composition on two levels: "a storehouse of distinctions, relations, and combinations from which fiction draws the resources for its own autonomy with respect to lived experience"; and "their successive arrangement along the chain of a narrative" (Ricoeur 62). Thus, he clarifies what to look for in examining the writer's strategy to structure the temporality for her narrative world. In addition to the interplay of the tenses, the rearrangement of the chronological orders and the shifts of narrative perspectives play a significant part in the narrative structure of *June and Jean in Concert*. Ricoeur states: "The initial narrative schema is that of sequence, and the art of narrating consists in restoring the succession of events" (79). He explains,

The arrangement of scenes, intermediary episodes, important events, and transitions never ceases to modulate the quantities and extensions. To these features are added anticipations and flashbacks, the inter-linkings that enable the memory of vast stretches of time to be included in brief narrative sequences, creating the effect of perspectival depth, while breaking up chronology. (80)

Manipulating the tense system and the sequential orders of time, Kennedy creates a unique relation between the time of narrating and the narrated time, giving a form to her lived experiences. Ricoeur calls this narrative forming of temporal experience "poetic morphology."

He further asserts:

The task of poetic morphology is to make apparent the way in which the quantitative relations of time agree with the qualities of time belonging to life itself [...] this time of life is “codetermined” by the relation and the tension between the two times of the narrative¹⁶ and by the “laws of for” that result from them. In this respect, we might be tempted to say that there are as many temporal “experiences” as poets, even as poem. (80-81)

Then my questions as I examine *June and Jean in Concert* are: How does Kennedy make use of the tenses provided by the grammar in ways to give a shape/form to her own lived experience, distinct from those imposed on her by the hegemonic ideologies?; how does she arrange the tenses and the time sequences in order to express the bodily sensations the memory brings up?; how is her telling related to the narrative perspectives, that is, “who tells and who sees?” (Mieke Bal, qtd in George 42); and what is the significance of writing that gets revealed in the complex narrative structure Kennedy weaves and constructs?

Tenses: Interplay of the difference and their successive arrangement

“The interplay of the differences [of the tenses] within the broad grammatical paradigm,” and “their successive arrangement along the chain of a narrative” (Ricoeur 62) are important in the analysis of *June and Jean* since the past tense and the present tense are used in ways to betray the expectations of the audience and, therefore, create tension. Harald Weinrich explains that “there is a relation of mutual dependence between the speech attitude and the tense distribution” (68). According to Weinrich, there are two kinds of speech situations. One is narrating and the other is commenting. The tense in a speech guides the listener to the kind of communication

¹⁶ Paul Ricoeur makes distinction between utterance and statement in a narrative, and to which correspond a time of narrating and a narrated time. (77)

attempted by the speaker or to the kind of attitude the speaker expects from the listener to have toward the speech. Usually, the commented world (for example, dramatic dialogues, political memoranda, testaments, scientific reports, and all forms of ritual, codified, or performative discourse) uses the present, the compound past and the future, and is associated with an attitude of tension and involvement. Any drama script would be an example for this. The narrated world (for example, folktales, legends, novels, and historical narratives) uses the preterite, imperfect, and conditional¹⁷, and is associated with relaxation and detachment (67-8). For example, a sentence like “a long time ago, there lived a beautiful princess” may signify to the reader/listener to relax and enjoy the story because there is a safe distance between her (world) and what is narrated.

In *June and Jean*, the tense used in the utterance often doesn't agree with the context of the utterance: what the audience is prepared for and expects to receive and understand is constantly thwarted. Firstly, although *June and Jean* is a “performative” discourse, a drama, and, therefore, is expected to be in the present tense, most of their diary entries are intentionally written in the past tense. Of course, diaries are often in the past tense, as in “I went to church today.” But Kennedy uses the past tense in diary in a peculiar way: for example, “the Sunday school teacher *repeated* every Sunday” (JJ 240) instead of “the Sunday school teacher *repeats* every Sunday,” putting it in the past tense where it is in the making. It produces a sort of discomfort since the characters use the past tense even when they write about their weekly or daily routines. Furthermore they often use the future tense in the midst of past tense, prophesying what will happen in the future, which indeed happens later. Also, in contrast to the past tense they

¹⁷ As Paul Ricoeur is French, all these tenses are from the French language. In the analysis of the narrative time in *June and Jean in Concert* I will mostly pay attention to the past, the present and the future tenses in English grammar system.

use in their diaries, they suddenly speak in the present tense when they say a sermon in the church or talk to Dr. Mays. Within the context of the drama, the shift of the tenses is quite drastic and surprising. Finally, at the same time as June and Jean write diaries and make speeches in the scenes, outside the scene is Aunt Ella who sets up and at times comments on the scenes always in the present tense. Thus other than the surprising and disturbing shift of tenses by June and Jean, there is another tense, the eternal present tense of Aunt Ella. Now that I have briefly described the use of tenses in *June and Jean*, I will further provide a close reading of the play with detailed examples.

June and Jean in Concert begins on Easter morning in 1943. Dead Aunt Ella, who is “one level above the stage” (*June and Jean* 240), sets up the time and place in the present tense.

AUNT ELLA¹⁸. Dining room. Easter morning, 1943. A stained glass window of tulips.

Through a side window, falling snow. [...]

My sister, fragile in house dress, *goes* in and out of the dining room. My nephew, angelical looking boy of six, *sits* at the table holding his white Easter bunny. (240, *italics mine*)

We hear Mother say good bye to June and Jean as they leave for church, then with the sound of the choir singing “the stage becomes church” (240). Then soon, June and Jean begin to write in their autograph books, as Aunt Ella informs: “June and Jean hold Easter baskets, dolls, choir books and autograph books in which they write the history of their family” (240). June and Jean write and simultaneously read out what they are writing. What makes the reader/audience uncomfortable about their writing is the tense they are using. They use the past tense where they should use the present in the story time or the narrated time in which they exist. For example,

¹⁸ Although I refer to Aunt Ella as a temporal marker here, I will later provide a detailed analysis of the character of Aunt Ella.

they write and say, “‘Jesus loves you,’ Sunday school teachers repeated every Sunday, winter, spring and summer” (240). In the temporal plane they belong to, they should write “Sunday school teachers *repeat* every Sunday” instead of “repeated.” Or, when they write (as they speak) about their father, they write, “Our father saved people. People talked of what a fine social worker he was and how many young people he had helped set in the right direction” (242). If to be grammatically correct, they should write “our father saves people.” However, this is not a mistake: it is an intentional choice by the playwright. Kennedy, in the stage direction, explains the reason for the girls to write in the past tense: “The twins write and speak. They write in the past tense as they are writing their *history*” (241 *italics mine*). History, according to Weinrich’s categorization of communication situations, is one of the representatives of the narrated world, therefore, is associated with the past tense, generating an attitude of relaxation, easing of tension, or detachment. Though he admits that “the distinction between tension and relaxation is not as clear-cut as it may first appear”, and that the two can overlap or coexist while one concealing the other (Ricoeur 69), the past tense in the twins’ diary certainly gives some sense of finishedness and distance.

Thus, the feeling of presentness established by Aunt Ella and the expectation of temporal immediacy established by the fact that the twins are writing diaries collides with that of the pastness generated by the tenses in the twins’ writing. This collision or the disagreement of tenses produces a jarring effect: tension, discomfort and confusedness on the part of the reader/audience. In some way, this tension or confusion functions as a force that moves forward this play which is without a particular plot or action. It keeps the audience alert: instead of being eased into the familiar image and plot structures of teenage girls’ diary writing, the audience is constantly jerked out of their comfort zone. We have to work hard in order to stay in the story, to get

ourselves back aboard every time we realize that we didn't use the right frame of mind to understand the girls' "history." We must try hard to figure out who June and Jean are and where these girls are: the world of these twin girls, which we cannot but admit that we know nothing of. Since the discomfort due to the disagreement of the tenses—so unfamiliar and "wrong"—creates almost physical sensation somewhere in the stomach, or in the head, we want to and need to do something to get rid of this uneasiness. Perhaps in this way, *June and Jean* makes us work hard for it. Interestingly, in this process, we become active participants of the twin girls' life and experience.

In addition to engaging the audience in a unique way, the peculiar use of the tenses in *June and Jean* carries out another communicative function: what Weinrich calls "putting into relief." According to Ricoeur, "[this] is still an axis of communication, without any reference to the properties of time. This putting into relief consists in projecting certain contours into the foreground and pushing others into the background" (71). In *June and Jean*, this "putting into relief" effect is achieved through sudden shifts of tense, both within a same diary entry and in the transition between scenes. If it is within the same diary entry, the sudden use of the present tense or even the future tense pulls what has been written in the past tense to the background and pushes what is being spoken in the present tense to the foreground. The relaxation mode is abruptly changed and the utterance requires the audience to listen with more involvement and tension.

JUNE: [...] "Jesus *loves* you," Sunday school teachers repeated every Sunday, winter, spring and summer. "Jesus *loves* all little boys and girls." I saved the pictures of this Jesus into whose feet they had driven nails but who arose. And *who loves me and my family*. My book, Easter Sunday. 1943. (*June and Jean* 240, *italics mine*)

Or

JEAN: (*Writing*) We were excited because that afternoon our father was going to take us to hear Paul Robeson. [...] We loved Paul Robeson. *Our mother will stay at home with our brother and his bunny.* His asthma was bad that spring, and besides, our mother had been sick that winter. (241, *italics mine*)

In the first example, “Jesus loves” is not only repeated but is foregrounded against the past tenses. It seems that the phrase is almost forced into the girl’s mind. Thus, later in the play, this impression will be echoed throughout the play, in the minister’s sermon at the church, in June’s prophesy that Jean will write cruel Jesus, and finally in Jean’s plays. In the second example, the twins’ memory about Paul Robeson seems far in the distance. It once happened and left a merry memory. It formed a certain part of the twins’ lives but it is just that. But “our mother” is still so vivid and significant even in the present. Which present? The present of the narrated time, or that of the time of narrating? It is not certain, perhaps intentionally. However, ever so subtly, the shifts in the tenses and the peculiar uses of the tenses inscribe an impression: something about Jesus or their mother is not yet resolved: they are memories but not yet memories because the events are still going on in the present of someone’s consciousness. (Whose consciousness could that be? This question is related to the perspectives, which I will examine in the latter part of this chapter.) Indeed, Jesus and Mother from these two examples become recurring themes as the play unfolds. Later, June in her vision foresees that “Jesus will become a character in the play Jean will write, and a surprising Jesus, berserk, evil, sinister” (249). Also in the part where Jean’s (that is, Kennedy’s) plays are quoted, Jesus appears repeatedly. As for Mother, even though she is a fairly silent character in this play, her presence is so powerful that Philip C. Kolin states, “[psychically], however, it is Kennedy’s mother who is the centerpiece for *June and Jean in*

Concert [...]” (174). Mother’s pain, tears and dreams are indeed what fill the psyche of the two girls.

The “putting into relief” effect achieved by the difference between tenses is found not only within the same diary entry, but also in the sequential arrangement of the tenses. One of the most impressive examples of this is where June and Jean give a sermon to the congregation in the church. On Easter in 1943, June and Jean’s father take them to church. They write in their book in the past tense what happened at the church that morning, mostly about their father who received a civic award for helping the Negro youth and for being “a fine social worker:”

JUNE and JEAN. (*Writing as they speak*) Our father saved people. People talked of what a fine social worker he was and how many young people he had helped set in the right direction. [...]

[...] He read us poetry of Negro poets and told me stories of Du Bois, Marian Anderson and Mary McCleod Bethune. He listened to us sing spirituals, which we loved and popular songs, which we also loved. (242)

And also about what the minister preached about Jesus and his resurrection:

JUNE. [...] The minister preached violently of the crucifixion, Jesus, Judas, betrayal and finally Jesus Christ arising from the dead on Easter morning. My father started sobbing. [...] (242)

Their writing is at times interspersed with the minister’s speeches. As Minister announces, “And now June and Jean will play for us,” the twin girls play the piano. Then, “unexpectedly,” June stands up and says, “[And] this is my sermon for the day.” She talks about the Japanese and how the war changed their family life. And then suddenly she changes the tense to the present.

JUNE. [...] At home I have a slim yellow book on the piano that contains Negro spirituals. My mother often sings when she cooks Sunday morning breakfast, “Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child.”

(ESTELLE, *their mother, stands in her faded flower house dress and sings first lines of “Motherless Child.”*)

In the summer of 1942 we moved into a new house in the popular Glenville section of Cleveland, far across the city from the Mount Pleasant area with Mr. Bertiloni’s grape arbor. These houses are larger. My parents even have a room with a fireplace, a room that is the length of the house.

It’s a *Now Voyager* room, I think when I enter and my mother is sitting in her pink quilted bed jacket reading *Cosmopolitan* and eating Whitman’s chocolates (evenings after she had completed her school work). She’s teaching elementary school and is completing her bachelor’s degree and has college classes at night.

In our new house there is a bookcase in the living room next to the fireplace and on the bottom shelf are some old books left by the previous tenants. One book is crimson, the same crimson color as my mother’s scrapbook, a thick volume with heavy pages entitled *The Poems of Percy Shelley*. (*JUNE and JEAN return to their seats.*)

MINISTER. Thank you, June and Jean. (243)

What is interesting here is that the event of going to church on Easter morning and things about their father are all written in the past tense, but things about their home life and mother are in the present tense.

As a matter of fact, it is quite unlikely that teenage girls like June and Jean should give a sermon in a church on Easter morning. It seems that the sermon is envisioned or imagined by June, whose character is to question, see and prophesize compared to that of Jean who writes relatively in a matter-of-fact manner. In her mind, June speaks of things that are actually meaningful to her. She doesn't understand why her father sobbed, "so very concerned about Jesus" who "had died a long time ago" (*June and Jean* 242). What concerns her more and what she wants to talk about is rather the Japanese and the anxiety and fear they brought to her family life: how her mother was "no longer at home because she went to work at the war plant" and how she was afraid when her mother "sprained her back" because of the Japanese (242-3). Their father is a publicly important person, acknowledged for his achievement in the black society. People speak highly of their father and the twins are proud of him. But what is more vivid in June's mind is her mother singing "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child" and the crimson book of Shelly (a poem from which is later quoted), the same color of their mother's scrap book. As much as the Negro artists and the great Black men in the history of whom their father taught the girls, *Cosmopolitan* and Whitman chocolate, and Percy Shelley's poems played important roles in the girls' world. It testifies that the meaning their mother and Shelly's poem had in the twins' lives cannot be fixed in the past tense, as a history. Kathleen George maintains that "[a] writer straddling tenses can suggest that something from the past is forever happening or is more fresh than what is in the present" (59). She further explains:

[...] when we remember things, we sometimes move ourselves between looking at and **being inside** the memory. By switching tenses a writer can alert us to the relationship between past and present. (59-60, **emphasis mine**)

Likewise, the use of present tense here produces the effect of sensations or feelings still vibrant and immediate in the present.

The church is a public space and men's space. It is the minister's, father's and Jesus' space. In the "mammoth hall" (*June and Jean* 242) of the church, girls like June and Jean may be invisible. Compared to their father who is a social worker and works for the Negro cause, their mother at home might be insignificant. Then, through writing and reading diaries on stage, what June and Jean are doing is not only recording their history, but also foregrounding what has been silenced and pushed to the background: the black girls' and women's inner lives and sensitive psyches, their complicated and surprisingly multifaceted construction¹⁹ of identities. Against the minister's sermon and their father's reward for his contribution to the Negro society, which are written or uttered in the past tense, the shift to the present tense demands from the audience more intense involvement and attention. It is as if the twins stop the time and write into the crevice of time what could not be written in the public or black men's history.

Similar things happen again in the next section—when Dr. Mays, "the great man", visits the twins' home. Dr. Benjamin Mays, President of Morehouse College, is a great man; the minister and their father tell the girls. When June and Jean ask their father "What is a great man?" their father answers "He's helping to lead American Negroes out of racial strife" (*June and Jean* 243). The church fades and it seems that they are home and that their father is talking with Dr. Mays about the history of Glenville:

¹⁹ Jacquelyn Grant, in "Black women and the church," laments the position of black women in the church, "It is often said that women are the "backbone" of the church. On the surface, this may appear to be a compliment, considering the function of the backbone in the human anatomy. [...] It has become apparent to me that most of the ministers who use this term are referring to location rather than function. What they really mean is that women are in the "background" and should be kept there [...]" (14). Criticizing the "the fact that Black theology does not include sexism specifically as one of those injustices" (145), she regrets the oppression of Black women in the Black church and the Black community.

FATHER: (*telling Mays about the section of Cleveland they live in. The twins sing “Deep Purple” louder.*) Glenville was incorporated as a village on October 4, 1870 and was annexed to the City of Cleveland on June 19, 1905. Glenville was once known as a resort of the wealthy and the “garden spot” of Cuyahoga County. [...] (243)

In contrast to the chronological history—the official history of Cleveland reflecting racial segregation—their father reports to Dr. Mays, June writes about her family life: her personal record of the places meaningful to her, and their weekly routine of driving in their father’s car and eating “chilled Jello with bananas and vanilla wafers” and the excitement of listening to the radio; in other words, those things that may not be mentioned in official and authoritative Black history but still mattered so much to the girls. While she writes, she still uses the past tense. Then, quite unexpectedly, “for the first time [June and Jean] try to address Dr. Mays” (245). Once they begin, they continuously and “uncontrollably” speak to him. And the tense shifts to the present tense. Their address to Dr. Mays is mostly in the present tense and, therefore, in contrast to that of their father’s who repeats “When I was at Morehouse...” (245), which is in the past tense. In spite of their mother’s and father’s mild reproach, “leave Dr. Mays alone” (245, 247), June and Jean’s urge to talk to Dr. Mays seems to be imperative. They simply keep talking to him about various things: Hitler in their everyday lives, their Jewish friend, Chopin and movie stars, their Jim Crow experience, and so on. But Dr. Mays does not listen to them. He just continues to talk with their father. Actually, nobody listens to the twins but, because of the way Kennedy arranges the shifts of the tenses of the utterances and juxtaposes their speeches against their father’s, the audience is guided to listen with more tension and involvement to what the twins have to say.

Though the twins are “talking” to Dr. Mays, the effect is that Kennedy is “writing” into the history of Black people in the U.S. what has been omitted so far: daily trivial and small details which may seem insignificant in light of chronological sense of time and grand history of Black men, but which actually filled the twins’ days with meanings and formed who they are. Though Dr. Mays and their father turn deaf to the twins because they are only interested in the “Race Problem” (*June and Jean* 245) and “When I was at Morehouse”—the great man’s subjects—the girls’ lives and what comprises it still requires to be heard. Historian Darlene Clark Hine states that “[Black women] were outside of history” (xx). She argues that Black women were absent and invisible throughout much of the history.²⁰ While Hine laments that “even today²¹ a few historians of women and of African Americans continue to dismiss or question the importance of Black women’s history,” here Kennedy, through the diaries of June and Jean, is foregrounding the Black women’s history against the men’s history. I do not mean to say that Kennedy is denying the history of racial strife in the U.S. or her racial identity. What I am observing here is her effort to insert or write the history of Black women into the history.

What Kennedy reveals about the history of Black women in *June and Jean* is not in any sense a simple picture of how identity is shaped, just as Hine states that “Black women’s history compels the individual to come to grips more completely with all of the components of identity” (xxi). It seems that almost two incompatible elements, two polar values that could be at war with each other, are coexisting in a strange harmony in the world of the twins. They are

²⁰ Hine maintains: “Actually, as members of two subordinate groups in American society, Black women fell between the cracks of Black history and women’s history. A facile assumption held that whatever was said about Black men applied to Black women and that history of white women covered Black women. [...] Black women historians argued that historians of Black America and of women had never in fact included Black women or paid adequate attention to questions of difference” (xxvi).

²¹ Her book *Hine Sight: Black Women and the Re-Construction of American History* was published in 1994, and *June and Jean in Concert* was first produced in 1995.

certainly living in the world of racism. Their father and Dr. Mays are devoted to breaking the racism in American society. They “[continue] to talk about the Race Problem” (*June and Jean* 245). However, what the twins try so hard to say to Dr. Mays and write in their book creates, in a sense, a contradictory picture to the familiar discourse of American blacks fighting against racism, united for the one cause.

JUNE. (*To DR. MAYS*) Dr. Mays, sometimes people say we’re a little touched in the head. We’re like Aunt Ella who used to climb up in the willow trees down in Georgia and sing.

JUNE and JEAN. We can be Mrs. Miniver, Annabel Lee and Bette Davis.

MOTHER. June and Jean, leave Dr. Mays alone.

JUNE and JEAN. We know “Lines above Tintern Abbey.”

FATHER. When I was at Morehouse...(245)

In June and Jean’s world, the distinction between white and black may not be that clear in terms of identification, while in their father and Dr. Mays’ world, White is against Black and the Negro cause can be won only when it fights against the White. The twins, however, can be “Mrs. Miniver,” a character of an English housewife played by Greer Garson from the same titled movie *Mrs. Miniver*, Annabel Lee, the heroine in Edgar Allen Poe’s famous poem (who must also be white), and Bette Davis, the icon of Hollywood movie glamour. The fact that they are all white women does not seem to hinder the twins from identifying with them. In the twins’ world, those beautiful white women in literature and movies are without any problem a part of themselves.²² Their literary imagination is not only comprised of Negro poets but also of Poe,

²² The fluid shifting of identities and crossing of the racial boundaries will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

Shelly and Wordsworth. What is more complicated is the part where June speaks of her experience with the Jim Crow railroad car.

JUNE. Dr. Mays, although I love my grandparents immensely, I hate the train ride to Georgia that my brother and I take every June, especially the ride from Cincinnati to Montezuma in the dirty Jim Crow car. When the Travelers' Aid meet us in Cincinnati station, my brother is still crying. As soon as the train pulls out of the Cleveland Terminal Tower he starts to cry and he cries with his head on my shoulder.

Once my father bought me some magazines at the Cleveland Terminal. One was a *Modern Screen* with a picture of Clark Gable in Army uniform. I tried to interest my brother in the magazine, but he kept sobbing, "I want to go home." I put my arm around my brother, looked out of the dirty double-panel windows and clutched the *Modern Screen* magazine with Gable on the cover.

(FATHER and DR. MAYS talk inaudibly, perhaps repeating, "When I was at Morehouse...") (247)

The "irony here" is, according to Elin Diamond:

[...] just another feature of mass culture, how it comforts us all in the most contradictory ways. In your case you were enamored of the movie icon, Gable, in the role of the white American male patriot, when it's white male culture that has produced the Jim Crow that is making you and Cornell²³ so miserable. (Kennedy, Interview by Diamond 133)

²³ Cornell is Kennedy's younger brother.

When Diamond interviewed Kennedy on this “irony,” she was referring to the autobiography *People Who Led to My Plays*. Then, Kennedy answered quite casually, “Well, that’s very savvy. But don’t you think that these magazines did that, offered comfort and illusion? I mean, it’s a little embarrassing, but I’m sure I spent the rest of the summer, many, many hours, in a Clark Gable fantasy” (133). Though Kennedy’s answer in this interview seems quite casual, in the play *June and Jean in Concert*, she is quoting this passage again in juxtaposition with Father and Dr. Mays talking about Racial Strife and “When I was at Morehouse...”

What is remarkable here is how Kennedy challenges our preconception of racial identity: how she “deliberately [seeks] to frustrate and interrogate expectations about what black intellectual means [...] [grappling] with the conundrum of color, culture, and class” (Posnock 261). Not only in *June and Jean* but in other plays as well, Kennedy powerfully and daringly challenges the audience’s preconceived and familiar ideas about identity, especially that of the black intellectual upper middle class woman. She locates the construction of identity and subjectivity in complicated, multifaceted and ever fluctuating conjunctions of culture and history, and questions the idea of unitary and fixed identity, racial stereotypes and its constraints. Perhaps the best example for me is *She Talks to Beethoven*, in which the heroine Suzanne Alexander writes Beethoven’s biography. As she understands and appreciates the life of the European male composer more and more in her imaginative accompaniment and conversation with him, she finds the strength and wisdom to endure her husband’s absence and her own pain as well. “What does Beethoven have to with an African-American woman writer?” “How can there be any identification between the two?” were the questions I had first, which reversely exposed my ignorance and prejudice about black women writers, much to my shame. Ross Posnock’s *Color and Culture: Black Writers and the Making of the Modern Intellectual* enlightened me on this

point with his history of black intellectuals. According to Posnock, in the process of the birth of modern black intellectuals, black writers had to have double fights in order to make their way into the scene of literature and intellectual discourses: on the one hand, they had to fight their way against “the obdurate belief that high culture is a private citadel of white privilege” (3) and, on the other hand, they had to resist the stereotype of black intellectuals expected by the majority of the publishers and readers. Here the “stereotype” means not only that which white people had of black people, but also that which black people expected of their intellectuals: the voice of nationalism advocating the oneness of black people and demanding them to “represent the race” (9). Posnock, however, finds in the history of black intellectuals such as Du Bois and Adrienne Kennedy the endeavor “to escape the pressure to conform to the familiar and recognizable, to stereotypes” and to express the subjectivity and identity not as fixed in race but as more fluid, open and free. Posnock asserts that in Kennedy’s dramas “[...] selfhood is a theater of impulse, mimetic and otherwise, of ceaselessly shifting appropriations, identifications, and fantasies” (271). In *June and Jean in Concert*, by juxtaposing June and Jean’s fantastic identification games with their father and Dr. Mays’ conversation, Kennedy both affirms the history of racial struggle and its effect on her and remembers the erased parts in the history: She refuses to be categorized or fixed, constantly crossing boundaries, which “actually annihilates marginality and exclusion” (Barrios 615).

Other than the surprising truth about the identity-making process, what Kennedy inserts into the history through the writing of the twins is women’s creativity, inspiration and dreaming. In the quotation of the play above, June says to Dr. Mays, “Dr. Mays, sometimes people say we’re a little touched in the head. We’re like Aunt Ella who used to climb up in the willow trees down in Georgia and sing” (*June and Jean* 245). Aunt Ella is the twins’ mother’s sister. Though

little information on her is given in the play, she stimulates various associations: she is a mad woman, a seer who sees things that others cannot and the singer of the forbidden songs. The fact that she is dead also has symbolic allusions in this world: the femininity repressed and forgotten in the history and in the consciousness of many people. It is only June and Jean who remember her. However, Aunt Ella is a figure who is constantly on the stage, looking down upon the girls and their mother, and “serving as [a female spirit] of protection and inspiration, almost like [a guardian angel] over the production” (Kolin 173). Furthermore, it is revealed later in the final scene of the play that Aunt Ella is responsible for all the future tenses in June’s writing.

JUNE’s GHOST. Jean, if you look in the vanity table in our room in the lower left hand drawer underneath the rose colored wallpaper that lines the drawer you will find Aunt Ella’s writing. She used to bring it to me in the middle of the night.

(AUNT ELLA *sings softly*, “*Go Down Moses.*”)

JEAN. Hello, Aunt Ella.

(*Sound of ESTELLE crying in the basement.*)

FATHER. I want to talk to you. Your mother and I may get a divorce. I want to go back home to Georgia.

JEAN. Hello, Aunt Ella. Do you still sing in trees?

AUNT ELLA. Yes.

JUNE’s GHOST. Jackie knows about our father’s future second wedding. Jackie always read the pages Aunt Ella gave me. That’s why he wheezes. [...] (*June and Jean 260*)

All of June's visions of the future that she sees and writes in her diary are from Aunt Ella's writing. June is able to see what others cannot see because she is connected to Aunt Ella, the mad woman, the dead woman who sings in trees.

In fact, the future tense used in June's writing generates a surprising and even frustrating effect in the narrative. Right before June and Jean first speak to Dr. Mays, June writes in her diary again in the past tense when she should use the present tense: "Our family: We took drives in my father's Plymouth every Sunday" (*June and Jean* 244). In the middle of this diary entry, she talks about the future in the future tense, which is quite unexpected and shocking.

JUNE. The Y had a "ballroom," a large room painted blue where Jean *would* one day have her wedding reception and where, as a teenager, she saw our father give many talks at Y banquets. Down the hall from the "ballroom" were rooms where guests at the Y stayed... small single bedrooms with plaid bedspreads and a desk. My brother and I peeked into the rooms that were empty. How could I or any of us know that it *would* be in one of these rooms where my father *would* spend the last days of his life, sick from emphysema, divorced from my mother and bereaved of his second wife? (244, *italics mine*)

How does she know the future? Why does she talk about the future? Will the future be like she sees it now? After the scene with Dr. Mays, June writes her "vision of the future" (249) this time she writes in the present and the future.

JUNE. (*Writing*) We drove past Lakeview Cemetery where my father and brother will be buried. And the school where my brother *will* run the fifty-yard dash and win the state championship.

AUNT ELLA. The car swerves.

JUNE. I can't stop thinking of Lakeview Cemetery where my brother and father *will* be buried.

AUNT ELLA. Car swerves again and rolls over in snow.

Voices of DR. MAYS and FATHER (*Calling.*) June and Jean. June and Jean.

JUNE. (*Barely coherent*) Before he joins the Army Jackie will go to Ohio State where he will run track. He stands beneath Jean's window in Baker Hall and practices his Spanish. It will be spring when he leaves for Germany. [...] (249)

Thanks to Aunt Ella's intervention, we can know that the twins are in a car accident at the same time as June is reporting from a future time. In the following vision, June sees Jean becoming a playwright and writing a cruel Jesus, their parents having divorce, her father's last days of loneliness and her brother brain damaged: all the tragic happenings that will come to her family in the future.

In terms of emplotment, this surprising prolepsis functions as a kind of forward²⁴: it keeps the attention of the audience and makes them want to know more. However, the use of the future tense in June's writing is somewhat different from the use of prophesy in the traditional dramas (such as in Greek tragedy) or the narration scene in Brecht's epic drama that tells the audience beforehand what is going to happen in the scene. It doesn't seem to be intended to make the audience wonder what is actually going to happen as a result of this prophesy, or to guide the audience's interest toward how it is going to happen rather than what is going to happen. Aunt Ella simply tells the audience, "[everything] she saw came true" (*June and Jean* 251). Since the time in *June and Jean in Concert* does not either move forward or backward in a secure pattern, the audience cannot be certain whether the future tense actually points to or affects actions in the

²⁴ "A forward is anything that arouses an audience's interest in things yet to come." (Ball 45)

future or retroactively in the past. Instead, the future tense in *June and Jean in Concert* holds the audience in wonder and anxiety of not knowing. The audience is suspended in a timeless space, not knowing what to make of these future events revealed to them--like finding an unexpected piece of puzzle.

Then, what does June's reporting/seeing the future reveal about the meaning and nature of writing? What does it tell us about the significance of writing diaries in the twin girls' lives? Or how is it related to the origin of writing which the playwright herself is exploring through the writing of her characters Jean and June, which I have argued at the beginning of this chapter is the main theme of this play? In order to answer these questions, I will now examine narrative perspectives in *June and Jean* and how they are connected to the construction of the narrative time and the story of this play.

The time sequence and the narrative perspectives.

Before I move on, I should acknowledge that it is not only Kennedy but many other playwrights that manipulate the time sequences in their plays in order to create a unique "temporal experience" proper for expressing the subject and the theme of the play. David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly* or Paula Vogel's *How I Learned to Drive* might be good examples. In these plays the story telling relies heavily on the narrator/main character's perspective and voice to reconstruct the past, and, in spite of the mixture of the present and the past in telling the narrator/main character's version of the story, the progress overall sticks to the chronological order.²⁵ In

²⁵ As to *M. Butterfly*, Hwang does make use of peculiar temporality in the play but it seems that once the narrator leads the audience to the past, he progresses linearly. However, in terms of perspective, Song's point of view interrupts Gallimard's toward the end of the play, and Gallimard realizes that he can't control it or prevent it from interceding into his narrative. So he commits suicide. But the invasion of another perspective is also his own voice from the knowledge, which he doesn't want and it doesn't

contrast, Kennedy's *June and Jean* has a lot more complicated sequencing of temporality and perspectives related to the temporal plane unfolded in each scene. Kennedy rearranges the events, taking them out of chronological linear order and putting them in a peculiar narrative order. It starts on the Easter in 1943, then goes back to Christmas in 1942, and again retreats even earlier to December 1941, which is the beginning of Act 2. Then the time leaps forward to November of 1974 and moves on to near Christmas in 1974, and then goes back again to the spring of 1947. On the whole, the play moves backward in time and then leaps forward but then moves backward again to the point later than the one it started at, and what makes the play all the more complicated is that all these leaps in time happen without the guiding voice of the narrator/ main character. What kind of story is told through this complicated arrangement of time? What "temporal experience" is expressed here? What meaning is made due to this particular of narrativization of the past events, which otherwise would have been left to indifference and oblivion? Moreover, the arrangement of temporal order in *June and Jean* is tightly related to the different perspectives. The first scene in Act 1, Easter in 1943, consists of both June and Jean's perspectives, but the two scenes after it, Christmas in 1942 and December in 1941, are what June's ghost remembers after June commits suicide on Easter, 1943. Then, the 1974 scenes are mostly centered on Jean, who has now become a playwright and who remembers her unforgettable moment in 1947. And what we must take into account is the fact that beside all

affect the temporality in the progress of memory. *How I Learned to Drive* is more complicated in sequencing the time: it starts from and ends in the present, and the action basically goes backward in time (from 1969 to 1962) but three times the events later in time (one from 1970, the other from 1979, and another from 1969) interrupt the backward flow of time. Basically, however, the play "[goes] back earlier and earlier in time" (Vogel, 1618) as the playwright herself describes it Vogel in an interview says, "If you look at the structure of my play, all I'm doing is asking how do you feel about this? We see a girl of seventeen and an older man in a car seat. You think you know how you feel about this relationship? Alright, fine. Now, let's go back a year earlier. Do you still think you know what you feel about this situation? [...] It constantly pulls the rug out from under our emotional responses by going back earlier and earlier in time. The play moves in reverse" (1618).

these different planes of temporality, there is always the seemingly separate one of Aunt Ella, who is present all throughout the play.

Though the perspectives and the temporalities related to them are perplexing, I can at least begin with June and Jean, who are the main foci of this play. At the beginning of the play, it seems that the twins' perspectives are almost indistinguishable. In the Easter in 1943 scene in Act 1, the perspectives of June and Jean cross with each other in coexistence. They often write and speak together simultaneously on the same topic. On a closer look, however, the two girls have individual personalities. June is more inquisitive and a visionary. She is the one who knows and writes the future. While her writings in the past tense describe and record peaceful and happy everyday lives filled with food, popular songs and radio programs and so on, she also writes the tragic future that awaits her family. She dies, perhaps like Aunt Ella, because she could not bear what she sees.

AUNT ELLA. Then June sees my sister pushing Jackie in a wheelchair.

(JUNE *cries and runs out.*)

JEAN. Before we could stop June, she jumped or fell off the upstairs porch. We buried my twin sister three days after Easter. (*June and Jean 250*)

Compared to June, Jean seems rather naïve. She has the childish innocence and simplicity. She writes in a more matter-of-fact manner what she observes about June and her family, just as in the quotation above.

It is after June dies that June's perspective takes over the narrative. To be more precise, it is June's ghost who remembers Christmas Eve five months earlier.

AUNT ELLA(*appears*). Everything she saw came true. Now June's Ghost remembers Christmas eve, 1942. Five months earlier.

(JUNE's GHOST *appears. She wears dotted Swiss dress.*

"Bing Crosby" sings "White Christmas")

AUNT ELLA (*continued*). She remembers her frail mother wearing a flowered house dress and a Christmas apron rushing in from the kitchen with a poinsettia. And Jean, dressed in her green ballerina dress setting the table with the china plates with flowers, the same plates they will use for Easter, 1943.

June's Ghost wears her Brown Derby dotted Swiss evening gown. She writes, too. (*June and Jean 251*).

Then the scene continues while "June's Ghost watches June" (251) as June is writing in her diary. So it is as if June's Ghost remembers what June was or is remembering at the time. Then what is it that June's Ghost tries to remember by going back to this particular time and what does she want to find out by remembering it? One of the major things that happen in this scene is June remembering the last Christmas, that is, Christmas in 1941, when the twins' grandmother--their father's mother—died. The memory of their grandmother's funeral brings about other memories too: June's visiting her house, which is also related to her father's younger days and how her father reacted to his mother's death; her father's deep remorse over his mother's death, which becomes one of the recurring themes throughout the play. June does not know the meaning of her memory of her grandmother's death and the effect it had and will have on her father, but June's Ghost must know something about it, and the audience has to wait until it is revealed. Indeed the grandmother's funeral is the point that the twins' and their father's memory repeatedly go back to.

Another major happening in this scene is the twins' brother, Jackie, reading June's secret diary.

MOTHER. Where is your brother?

JEAN. He's upstairs sitting on the porch watching for Santa Claus.

JUNE. I hope he's not reading my secret books.

(Light on JACKIE on another level)

JACKIE. *My Secret Book*, by June.

Dracula: even though he likes blood, he is noble and even lives in a castle.

[...] *(June and Jean 252)*

This is something June on Christmas in 1942 cannot know at the time. It is June's Ghost who is watching over all of this that knows that Jackie was or is reading her secret book. Then some questions arise: how does June's Ghost find this out? Why is it important for her to remember this? June does not know either the fact that her brother is reading her secret book or the result it will bring about in the future. But there must be a reason why June's Ghost has to remember this particular moment.

Shelley's poem is another significant element that permeates the mood throughout this scene and expands into the rest of the play. The red book of Shelley's poems is one of the things that have been foregrounded by the use of the present tense against other records of history in the past tense, and June's Ghost's remembrance of Christmas in 1942 begins with the poem.

SCENE

(JUNE's GHOST watches JUNE.)

JUNE. *(Writing)* Sometimes after I finish my homework, I sit on the floor beside the bookcase and stare at the pretty old scarlet volume, and leaf through its thick pages. One poem caught my eye. I read it many times:

Music, when soft voices die,

Vibrates in the memory,

Odors, when sweet violets sicken,
Live within the sense they quicken.
Rose leaves, when the rose is dead,
Are heaped on the beloved's bed;
And so thy thoughts, when thou art gone,
Love itself shall slumber on.

Last Christmas my grandmother died. [...] (*June and Jean* 251)

In this poem, the poet is singing about what is left behind when a certain object that one loves is gone. After the reality of the tangible substance disappears, what one is left with is its memory that is engraved in her body as sensual feelings—music, odors, and the feeling of love. What June's Ghost is doing in this scene is to conjure up this music and feeling of love or an awareness of the loss of it. For Kennedy, to remember and to write memory can never be adequately expressed with language or within the given narrative structures. Through the music²⁶ and the complex labyrinth of images and fragments of impressions we may discover meaning which we did not perceive at the time and which we can recognize only now. June's Ghost remembers the Christmas in 1942 and sees herself remembering the Christmas a year before and her father's sadness over his mother's death and her brother reading her secret book. All these pieces of memory are yet to be discovered of their meanings. It has to meet with other

²⁶ It is apparent to me that the music—from church gospels to popular songs—plays a crucial role in evoking emotions and generating atmospheres in this play. However, since I am a Korean who is unfamiliar with most of the musical numbers used in this play, I have to admit that they do not signify much to me. It is something that research cannot compensate: it is something that cannot be intellectualized. Even so, I acknowledge and understand that the compositional arrangements of the musical numbers in *June and Jean* makes this play an American one, bringing forth feelings and nostalgia in the hearts of the audience who share the experience of living the 1940's in the U.S.

perspectives and other times in order to make a whole picture, although this scene is already comprised of two perspectives—June’s and June’s Ghost.

So we need Jean’s perspective as well. Interestingly, Jean’s perspective takes us to 1974, then back to 1947. Hence it becomes clear that Kennedy is not using the somewhat familiar narrative structure of having two different perspectives/story versions over the same time/ event. The pattern I could discern instead is that there is a similar structure repeated in Act 1 and 2. Act 1 begins in 1943 seen through the perspectives of June and Jean and then June’s Ghost perspective takes us back to 1942. Grandmother’s funeral in 1941 is the point at which June’s and Jean’s perspectives intersect, and Act 2 begins with Jean’s perspective, which leads us to 1974 (June’s Ghost accompanies Jean in this scene so her perspective is also working, but on a lesser level) and then takes us back to 1947, remembering the time and revealing the hidden meaning it had about the future.

The year 1974 is significant for the twins because all that June saw of her future in 1943 has come true. Her father is now divorced from their mother and bereaved of his second wife and lies in sickness in a small bedroom at the Y. Jean has now become a playwright and her plays are produced in theatres. Three of her plays are read out loud, by her father and Jean herself, which are of course Kennedy’s plays. The plays quoted here are: *Sun: Dedicated to Malcolm X*, *A Rat’s Mass*, and *A Lesson in Dead Language*. The anxieties, fear, destruction of innocence, and the image of blood in these plays create a sharp contrast to the father’s laughter. Then, Jean remembers one day in the year 1947. Aunt Ella says,

AUNT ELLA. Jean still remembers spring, 1947. Drama room, Glenville High School.

A room lined with theatre books, a case of Samuel French editions, moveable desks and, at the front, a stage.

(Voices of high school choral club singing Rodgers and Hart, "Manhattan.")

Seated before the stage is Jean, dressed in a jumper, a white ruffled blouse, studying Jane Eyre. June's Ghost studies Jane Eyre too, beside Jean. *(June and Jean 258)*

Why this particular day? Perhaps this is the day her career as playwright first began. On this day, for her characterization project in class, she played Jane Eyre, who in her mind was associated with her mother, and both of whom in her imagination she always dreamed to be. She remembers this day as "It was the only time in my life I publicly had a chance to become Jane Eyre" (258). Although she could "feel the passion [she] evoked in the class" (258), she realizes that the difference of the skin color could never again be erased or ignored publicly. And on this day, she saw her mother remembering June and heard her crying in the basement. And on this day, she first heard from her father the news of their parents' divorce. Most significantly, she sees June's Ghost for the first time.

AUNT ELLA. Estelle went out. Her descending steps were heard. Then the sound of her crying in the basement. Suddenly, for the first time, Jean sees June's Ghost. She is atop the willow tree with me.

Winston comes rushing in.

FATHER. Jeannie, your mother and I may get a divorce.

AUNT ELLA. He disappears upstairs.

(JUNE's GHOST appears from atop the "willow tree" in Georgia.

JEAN now sees JUNE's GHOST) (259)

What is quite perplexing yet requires attention is that at this point, the time and the place turn quite ambiguous. Aunt Ella's speech, which throughout the play has always been in the present

tense, is in the past tense as if she is remembering the past together with Jean, and then it changes to the present tense, again establishing the immediacy in time. As to the place, at the beginning of the scene in 1947, Jean is seated at the stage in her high school in Glenville, Cleveland, but now she sees June's Ghost who is "atop the 'willow tree' in Georgia," with Aunt Ella. Jean sees her for the first time, too. So it seems that June's Ghost, Jean, and Aunt Ella are meeting in a time and a place that is beyond any material or physical time and place. In this final scene of the play the three perspectives, which have been separate yet coexistent throughout the play, at last meet, filling the gaps in each other's writing. June tells Jean that Aunt Ella has always been with them and she read Aunt Ella's writing and that is why she foresaw the future; that Jackie, their brother, also read it and found it hard to cope with the truth, and that is why he whizzed and will have the accident that will leave him brain damaged. And Aunt Ella tells Jean how her parents suffered their own personal tragedies: how her mother suffered from a miscarriage; how her father never got over his mother's death. We finally realize this is why June's ghost remembered the Christmas in 1942 so that she could look into what had been really going on at the time. And this is what Jean as a writer must understand—the disparity between the surface of reality and what is underneath it, the brokenness of our lives in spite of our efforts to live a good life.

Then, we cannot help but ask, who is this "Aunt Ella?" While I examined June's and Jean's perspectives, I could not do so without mentioning her. Though seemingly a minor character in this play titled "June and Jean in Concert," she is the figure who begins and ends the play. At the beginning of the play, Kennedy describes in the stage direction, "Sitting atop the 'willow tree' is a pretty girl of nineteen humming. She has on a yellow organdy dress; she is DEAD AUNT ELLA" (*June and Jean* 248). This mad woman, the singer, the forgotten feminine voice and perspective, who is so like Ophelia or the mad woman in the attic, sets up each scene in

the present tense. She guides the audience in this labyrinth-like play and informs us of where the characters are and who is remembering what at the moment. For example, in the section where June and Jean are in a car accident, the audience knows it because she says “[the] car swerves” (249). In June’s and Jean’s speeches and writings, the past tense, the present tense, and the future tense are mingled and complicated, but Aunt Ella’s tense is always the present. She is the constant presence on the stage, watching over all happenings. Ben Brantley, in his review of the play’s production in 1995, saw Kennedy’s alter egos only in June and Jean, but, interestingly, he remarked: “Curiously, the most convincing characters in the work are the omniscient ghosts: that of June [...] and the exquisite Aunt Ella [...], who died as a young woman and is picturesquely suspended over the stage in a porch swing” (A21).

Aunt Ella’s perspective certainly functions as another temporality and another point of view along with June’s and Jean’s and June’s Ghost’s. She is not just setting up the scene but actually evokes the memory process for other characters. She also represents the judicative consciousness that grasps the narrated events together, as Paul Ricoeur posits

The configuring act presiding over emplotment is a judicative act, involving ‘grasping together.’ More precisely, this act belongs to the family of reflective judgments. We have been led to say therefore that to narrate a story is already to “reflect upon” the event narrated. For this reason, narrative “grasping together” carries with it the capacity for distancing itself from its own production and in this way dividing itself in two. (61)

Or if we could apply Genette’s analysis of Proustian narrative time in *Recherche du temps perdu* to *June and Jean in Concert* because of their resemblance, she could be the narrator who “in a trance perceived the unifying significance of [her] story.”

Taking an overall view of the anachronies in Proust's *Recherche*²⁷, Gennette declares that "the importance of the 'anachronic' narrative in *Recherche du temps perdu* is obviously connected to the retrospectively synthetic character of Proustian narrative, which is totally present in the narrator's mind at every moment. Ever since the day when the narrator in a trance perceived the unifying significance of his story, he never ceases to hold all of its places and all of its moments, to be capable of establishing a multitude of 'telescopic' relations amongst them." (84)

Then can we say that Aunt Ella is a substitute for the author herself? I think we can. Kennedy wrote this play after she finished writing her autobiography, therefore, in the process of writing it, had seen "the unifying significance of [her] story." Or in her case, some of the unifying significances in plural, one of which she explored in *June and Jean in Concert*. What I am getting at is that we have to consider Aunt Ella as one of the perspectives that choose and order the time sequences in this play, and that perhaps, hers is Kennedy's writerly consciousness that knows how to grasp together the past and that provokes her characters, June and Jean, to remember and find out the meaning of the past.

What is interesting to me, then, is that Kennedy dramatized this remembering and knowing consciousness as Aunt Ella, the dead woman. Though *June and Jean in Concert* comes

²⁷ Explaining Gennette's analysis of Proustian narrative structure, Paul Ricoeur writes: "In Proust, this procedure (of anachrony) is used to oppose the future, become present, to the idea one had of it in the past. The art of narrating is for Proust in part that of playing with prolepsis (narrating ahead of events) and analepsis (narrating by moving back in time), and inserting prolepses within analepses. [...] Whether it is a question of completing the narration of an event by bringing it into the light of a preceding event, of filling in an earlier lacuna, or provoking involuntary memory by the repeated recalling of similar events, or of correcting an earlier interpretation by means of a series of reinterpretations—Proustian analepsis is not a gratuitous game. It is governed by the meaning of the work as a whole. This recourse to the opposition between meaningful and unmeaningful opens a perspective on narrative time that goes beyond the literary technique of anachrony" (83). I find his description of anachrony in Proust's novel quite similar to that in *June and Jean in Concert*.

from her own experiences and memories of the past, Kennedy hides her presence as the author behind Aunt Ella, the mad woman “touched in the head.” By doing so, she shows that the inspiration and the urge to write comes from what Aunt Ella symbolizes: what in others’ eyes may seem like madness; what has been repressed deep down; women’s songs that expresses the sadness in soul reverberating in the body; the love that lingers on even when the object of love is gone. It is only this “madness” that can look past the surface into the very essence of truth. It is only Aunt Ella who knew and is able to tell Jean the truth about her parents, which she did not know at all.

AUNT ELLA. Jean, your mother suffered two miscarriages. Her aunt died in '39 and on the morning of her funeral after riding nine hundred miles on the train in Estelle's fifth month she lost a second child. It like to killed her and then the Cleveland school system wasn't hiring many Negro teachers. There was a strict quota and she couldn't get a job. She fell into a state that was so different from any state she had ever been in. Remember she took to dressing in her nightgown and lost all touch with Winston and his work.

And your father, remember at the dedication of the new Y everyone had walked about the polished rooms filled with baskets of flowers congratulating him. The press was there flashing bulbs. In the midst of the congratulations he had gone to the roof. No one had known whether he was trying to catch a bird or trying to hush their moaning or trying to commit suicide. He had fallen on the scaffold, broken his arm and been rescued. (*June and Jean* 261)

What June and Jean wrote in their diaries was only those things that teenage girls were able to understand and appreciate (their family drive in the 1937 Plymouth, their socially acknowledged

father, their beautiful mother and her dreams that always inspired the girls). Underneath, there were the despair and pain with which their parents were struggling —death, loss, depression and the harsh reality of racism in the U.S. It is Aunt Ella, the absent and forgotten woman, who sees and remembers all these and reveals them to Jean, the writer. In this way, Kennedy, gives a body to the perspective which has been repressed and hidden in history and empowers the marginalized and alienated points of view/ voices.

As I have examined thus far, different perspectives weave time sequences in *June and Jean in Concert*. In other words, June's perspective which is visionary and inquisitive, June's Ghost's perspective which is recollecting, and Jean's perspective which is more observant coexist, but at times one becomes more focused and stronger than the others in telling the story. Then, Aunt Ella's perspective is woven into the two (or three) perspectives, as if watching or embracing them all. Though they are intricately interlaced and put in peculiar order, there is certainly a final tableau toward which all these different perspectives and temporalities are heading and in which they conjoin with one another. It is Jean's initiation moment to become a writer: the final scene set in 1947 or in some timeless or spiritual space. At this crucial moment, two significant things happen, which suggest the nature of writing Kennedy believes in. One is that Jean finally becomes able to hear and see June's Ghost and Aunt Ella and understands that, in fact, she has been accompanied by these ghosts all along and their presence has been reflected in her writing with or without her knowing. The other is that she discovers, through Aunt Ella's teaching, that, underneath the surface of reality, there is another layer of reality that is more painful and powerful.

Kennedy suggests through Aunt Ella's revelation that there are multiple perspectives and realities extant in one's writing. The process of writing involves many voices that come from

history and unconsciousness. Thus, it is actually a process of listening as well, just as June writes what Aunt Ella wrote and brought to her at night, and Jean hears June who hears Aunt Ella when she writes. Kennedy demonstrates that writing is amalgamation of all of these fragmented sounds and voices from memory, imagination, dreams and desires, and from one's ancestors and from those whom one loves. Kennedy also stresses that writing as record of history is incomplete: it contains only a small part of the truth. June and Jean write all they could as "the history of the family" but they did not or could not write what they could not see. June and Jean may think in the moment of writing that what they write in their diary is the truth and the sum of reality, but later they learn that it is only one small truth out of the infinite multifaceted truths. Nonetheless, Kennedy emphasizes the imperative necessity to write. Writing is the only way for Jean to be connected to dead but beloved June and Aunt Ella, and to affirm her experiences and existence in time. *June and Jean in Concert*, in this way, projects Kennedy's conviction that, in spite of its limits and veiling, writing is still a powerful tool to give meaning to one's life and that writing opens the door toward deeper wisdom and understanding of others.

The significance of writing Kennedy affirms is also illustrated in the 1974 scene. Jean's father, who is sick in bed, reads June's diary to Jean.

FATHER. Jean, here are your diaries. (JUNE's GHOST *speaks with him.*)

Roosevelt and Churchill: They were meeting. I saw it in the newsreel at the Waldorf Theatre. They were meeting to stop the war, [...] How, I wondered, could they, sitting in chairs smiling, stop the Germans? My father had told me that the Germans were invading all of Europe. I was very worried; then my father told me the Russians were going to help. The Russians going to help us.

The Russians (the Russian Bear): My father was smiling, the newspaper under his arm as he strode into the house. The Russian Bear is stopping Hitler.

[...]

(FATHER *laughs*. *He clutches his daughter's diaries*. JUNE's GHOST *writes*.) (*June and Jean 256*)

The father laughs because the seriousness with which Jean wrote betrays her childish innocence and simplicity. She wrote what was important and urgent to her, but wrote only those things she could perceive and grasp, through the eyes of a teenage girl. And her understanding of the war was greatly influenced and shaped by her father's view. So it is not only what is left of June but also the traces of the father as well. The childish innocence and the feeling of safety in the writing in spite of the war outside may be the precious gift her father gave her in return for her complete faith in him. So he laughs because he meets in June's diary not only June but himself as well, his past self that is so different from his present self. June's diary is an evidence and a record that such a time existed. Thus the double face of writing is shown. While writing can seize only one aspect of the whole truth, just a version of truth seen through the perspective of the writer, it is also a record that is left as the evidence that you once lived and loved. And the language is so powerful that it takes the twins' father to the time in the past, which is lost, gone and irretrievable. The language revives the past in the present and brings the memories—the music, the feeling, and the love—all back to him. For a short moment he lives the past again. And the diaries are the physical existence of the past. So he clutches them. Thus in a sense, this scene reflects one of the overall themes of this play: the interplay of innocence and knowledge which time endows one.

So while Aunt Ella teaches Jean what she was never able to see or write about the personal pain and tragedy her father and mother suffered and which alienated them from each

other and from the world, June still asks her to write. She says to Jean, “Farewell for now, my sister. Write everything down for us” (*June and Jean* 261). It is as if their survival and assertion of their meaning in the world depends on writing. The plays Jean writes in 1974 express the horror and the nightmare behind the reality. But June’s request for her to keep writing everything down sounds strangely soothing and encouraging. Thus Kennedy, throughout *June and Jean in Concert*, suggests two seemingly contradictory theses about writing, but finds a way to synthesize them: while she shares her awareness that what you write can never be the total sum of truth, she affirms the value and absolute necessity of writing for the survival and the identity formation of women and for those who are minorities in society.

Thus far, I have examined how Kennedy uses the tenses and arranges temporality in *June and Jean in Concert* focusing on the meaning effect they generate related to the bodily sensations of memory and the nature and significance of writing. Using the diary and the particular temporality the genre manifests, and by taking advantage of the difference between the tenses provided by the grammar system, Kennedy forwards the plot. In other words, by alternating the past tense and the present tense in an unexpected manner, she keeps the attention of the audience, guides and subverts their expectations in the course of the drama. She also effects the bodily experiences of the act of remembering and endows the fullness of meaning to sensations related to the past. Also, the alternation and juxtaposition of the different tenses create the effect of foregrounding the women’s histories, which has been invisible or unnamed in the “official” histories. Thus she reveals the complex ways their identities were formed and shaped, and emphasizes the importance of feminine creativity and spirituality. Kennedy connected temporality of the past events to specific perspectives of the characters: she interweaves the points of view of June, Jean and Aunt Ella, each remembering and searching for the meanings of

the past in the present. By having multiple perspectives and voices conjoin in the diary writing of the characters, Kennedy illustrates that a text is plurivocal and is the result of diverse voices and points of view from the present and the past. By arranging and reordering the time sequences centering round the initiative moment of writing, Kennedy explores the nature of writing and asserts its values in the lives of women.

4.0 AUTOBIOGRAPHY: GIVING BIRTH TO MYSELF

In this chapter, I examine autobiographical writings dramatized in Fornes' *Sarita* and Kennedy's *A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White*. *Sarita* centers on the character Sarita from the age of 13 to 21 and traces her uncontrollable sexual passion for her lover Julio to its destructive ending. *A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White* is a play about a black young woman named Clara who strives to be a playwright while simultaneously struggling with her family problems. Tying these two plays under the heading of autobiographical writing may seem arbitrary. However, both plays present the characters writing on the stage and, to be more precise, struggling to write in order to articulate who they are and how/why they have become the way they are. Sarita's mother tells her life story in a song. Sarita writes letters to Julio, in which she attempts to identify what causes her to be helpless in her relationship with him. Clara, in *A Movie Star*, writes her own movie script about her struggle to be a playwright, weaving her story with her parents' and brother's biographies. In other words, these plays project the female characters' desire for self-construction, which they attempt to accomplish through writing about themselves. The Merriam Webster Dictionary online defines autobiography as "the biography of a person narrated by himself or herself." However, Tess Cosslett, Celia Lury and Penny Summerfield in their introduction to *Feminism and Autobiography: Texts, Theories and Methods* express the difficulty in defining this genre. They maintain, "Autobiography makes trouble: it is difficult to define as a distinct genre, on the borderline between fact and fiction, the personal and the social,

the popular and the academic, the everyday and the literary” (1). They further admit that the autobiographical writings take various forms: “autobiographical practices are now seen to operate in many different written, spoken and visual genres, such as application forms, interviews and family photographs” (1). While acknowledging the complicated attributes of the genre of autobiography, I define autobiography, for the purpose of this chapter, as a form of writing and, by extension, narrating intended to articulate and construct one’s identities by relating her past history and present situations.

In the previous chapter, I examined the diary writing dramatized in *Abingdon Square* by Fornes and *June and Jean in Concert* by Kennedy. Diary is also a form of autobiographical writing, but I distinguish it from autobiography because of the difference in readership and narrative temporality between the two genres. While diaries are usually not intended for readers except for the writer, autobiographies are written or narrated with certain readers or listeners in mind, whether definite or indefinite. Diaries promise extreme privacy (even to the extent of naïve self-deception as I discussed in the *Abingdon Square* section), whereas writing autobiography demands the writer to be aware of the realm of social and cultural discourses that she is to become a part of as a *result* of writing. Thus autobiography is more likely than diary to reveal the social and cultural relations in which the writer is located. The author writes with and against the existent discourses pertaining to her identities and subjectivities; she attempts to make herself recognizable within the existing discursive schemes and yet to construct herself as she wants others to view her. Furthermore, diaries are different from autobiographies in that one of the most distinctive characteristics of diary writing is the everydayness and the immediacy between the event recorded and the time the event happened. On the other hand, autobiographies are generally written or told at a certain point in time as a recollection or reconstruction of the past.

And the retrospective glance at the past gives the writer an opportunity to affirm her self-awareness and create identities for herself for the present and the future.

Among the social and cultural relations the autobiographer treats in her story is motherhood and that is one focus of this chapter. There are two main points that delineate my use of the word ‘motherhood’ in this chapter. First is the writer’s relation with her own mother—not the mother as the object of nostalgic longing but the real and physical mother the writer interacts with throughout the good and bad experiences of everyday life. Second is the writer’s own identity as a mother. This motherhood, then, can be divided into two, if I borrow Adrienne Rich’s terms, the motherhood as institution and the motherhood as experience. In other words, Fornes’ and Kennedy’s characters, Sarita and Clara, experience the discrepancy between the motherhood present in patriarchal society with male authority at the forefront of family and society and the motherhood a woman actually experiences in her pregnancy, labor, and rearing of the child.

In terms of the first usage of the word ‘motherhood,’ my reading of the plays reveals that Sarita’s and Clara’s relationships with their mothers have profound influences on the development of their sexuality and identities. My interest in the woman writer’s relationship with her mother is shared by the critical literature on women’s autobiography. For example, Guunthórunn Gudmundsdóttir, in his study of “Gender and Fiction in Women’s Autobiographical Writing: Janet Frame, Marie Cardinal,” asserts that “[the] relationship with the mother is a theme handled in many autobiographies by women” and that “[the] mother-daughter relationship has also been analyzed by many feminist theorists and is clearly an area of great importance in any discussion of gender and autobiography” (118). Tess Cosslett, in her essay “Matrilineal Narrative Revisited,” drawing on “the feminist movement’s recovery of the

mother/daughter bond,” examines “matrilineage as a way of constructing the feminine subject” (142-143) in women’s autobiographies. Locating the life-writing depicted in *Sarita* and *A Movie Star* in the context of women’s autobiographical writing, I will discuss how Kennedy and Fornes explore the conflicting issues in the daughter-mother relationship. I will also examine how Fornes, in *Sarita*, touches on the psychological aspect of the mother-daughter relationship in the formation of the daughter’s sexuality. Putting the play in dialogue with Kristeva’s discussion of depression in her book *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholy*, I will read *Sarita* as a representation of the depressive aspect of feminine sexuality. In my analysis of *A Movie Star*, I will examine how Clara identifies with yet feels alienated from her mother. I will argue that the love-hate relationship Clara feels toward her mother entraps her but writing enables her to distance herself from the entrapment and to survive it.

In *Sarita* and *A Movie Star*, the characters’ own motherhood brings psychological, physical, and social crisis to them. Once they become mothers, they are coerced to play the role of “mother” as patriarchal society defines it. They become alienated from their own bodies and subjectivities. I argue that even though motherhood is an intricate part of their identities and subjectivities, the characters suffer from not having proper narrative/discourse they can turn to in order to grasp its meaning or at least to acknowledge their meaningfulness. *Sarita*’s and Clara’s attempts at life-writing represent their struggles to preserve their subjectivity, preventing its immersion in the motherhood designated by the society and culture.

While the foci of my analysis of *Sarita* and *A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White* are the characters’ relationships with their mothers and their own motherhoods, I will examine them in the context of the general questions this dissertation pursues. Thus the questions I posed in Chapter 1 will be modified for the purpose of this chapter as follows: How do the characters

construct their identities/subjectivities through writing an autobiography? What social and cultural conditions pertaining to mother-daughter relationships and motherhood are revealed in the process of the characters' writing? How do they incorporate in their writing their bodily experiences related to maternity and their relationship to their mothers? How do the playwrights structure the narrative of the plays so that the bodily sensations of the characters acquire theatrical/dramatic language?

This chapter is especially meaningful for me because I am a daughter struggling to make peace with my mother, caught between matrophobia and yearning for her support and acknowledgement, and also because I am a mother who writes plays, always agonizing over where my primary obligation lies, theater or my daughter. I am a mother who has to fight hard to preserve my individual sexuality from the myths of motherhood, and I am a writer who aspires to create a space from which I can speak my body and write about others without degrading them to mere objects. One of my intentions in writing this chapter is to find the wisdom the two female writers offer to other female writers in terms of the creative strategies to negotiate these identities and invent one, if necessary.

4.1 FORNES' SARITA: DO YOU KNOW YOUR NAME?

*Sarita*²⁸ (first produced at INTAR in 1984) begins with a scene in which Sarita, 13-year-old second generation Cuban immigrant living in New York, asks Yeye, her friend, to read the cards

²⁸ *Sarita* is originally written as a musical. Although I acknowledge that music plays a significant part in creating meaning for this play, I could not get access to video recordings or sound tracks of this play, and as a result, cannot discuss its effect. Therefore, to my regret, I will limit my analysis to the text only.

for her to find out whether Julio, her lover, loves her or not. At first the scene looks like a young girl's playful game over a boy she likes. But soon it turns out that Sarita is obsessed to possess Julio, more specifically, "his thing." Julio's unfaithfulness, the fear of losing "his thing" makes her feel as if she is dying. To overcome this dead feeling, Sarita goes out with boys and, as a result, gets pregnant. Her mother Fela, a single mother who was deserted by her first lover, tries to marry Sarita to her old boarder, Fernando, but fails. Pregnancy does not stop Sarita from pursuing Julio. When Julio returns, she leaves her mother and her baby to be with him. When his constant betrayal drives her to attempt suicide, she meets Mark, a kind and loving man who saves her. In spite of Mark's devotion to her, Sarita finds herself irresistibly drawn to Julio. She keeps returning to him for sex. Sarita is torn inside between her awareness that the feeling she has toward Julio is not love and her inability to identify what it is exactly. Out of her desperate effort to separate herself from Julio, she kills him.

Although the driving force for the actions in this drama is Sarita's sexual passion for Julio, there are few critics who discuss its nature. Assunta Bartholomucci Kent, in her book *Maria Irene Fornes and her Critics* offers a brief discussion of the play. She states that Sarita's life is "dominated by sexual passion for her unfaithful boyfriend" (164), but she focuses more on how Fornes blurs the cultural and gender dichotomy. Hoonsung Hwang in his essay "Three Fragile Females' Suicidal Gesture to Shatter the Male Mirror" pays attention to Sarita's sexuality but he reduces her agency by viewing her sexuality only as an object of the male gaze in the patriarchal society. He asserts that "[her body] is always and already possessed and colonized by males in a patriarchal society" (93). According to him, Julio is the "male author" of her sexuality and her body is imprisoned in his male desire. Thus, he fails to notice that it is Sarita that desires Julio, and that it is Sarita who finds irresistible pleasure in Julio's body. None of these critics

attempt to explain why Sarita is infatuated with Julio to such an extent, why she is always haunted by the feeling of being dead, why she is always restless. My reading of *Sarita*, thus, corrects the reading of Sarita as a passive victim of the patriarchal society and, instead, delves into the feminine sexuality Fornes portrays in this play, which other critics have not illuminated. Drawing on Julia Kristeva's discussion of depression in *Black Sun*, I will read Sarita's desire for Julio and her continuous restlessness as an illustration of feminine depression: the dark face of feminine sexuality repressed and unnamed in the phallogocentric society. I will offer a close reading of *Sarita* parallelizing the symptom and origins of depression Kristeva posits with Sarita's psychological states and actions. I will argue that Sarita's sexual obsession with Julio resides in her unresolved relation with her mother, which is one of the most crucial elements in female sexuality. I will also argue that her constant effort to write is an expression of her will to get out of her depressive state and to assert her subjectivity.

Depression: mourning for the loss of maternal "Thing"

Emptiness or something like insatiable hunger drives Sarita to be restless throughout the play. Sarita cannot find its name no matter how hard she tries. "I'm dying" is the only way she could express how she feels. She knows that she must resolve it or else she will be destroyed. So she endlessly seeks it, pursues it. What it is is strongly alluded to in the play. It reveals its existence in Sarita's words, songs, and cries. I can relate to it from my own experience as a woman who has a body. But it remains without being named to the end of the play. Kristeva's writing on depression, especially women's depression, illuminates what Sarita's "it" is. Kristeva's explication of the depressed person's symptoms and analysis of their origin helps me to approach the signification of Sarita's actions. However, it is not my intention to psychoanalytically

diagnose this character. Rather, my intention is to explore the feminine sexuality Fornes uniquely reveals in *Sarita*.

Simply put, depression is a state of sadness due to the loss of an object. Kristeva asserts that depression is caused by “intolerance for object loss and the signifier’s failure to insure a compensating way out of the states of withdrawal in which the subject takes refuge to the point of inaction (pretending to be dead) or even suicide” (*Black Sun* 10). Sarita lost Julio, her lover. Kristeva explicates what it means for a woman to lose her erotic object.

Loss of the erotic object (unfaithfulness or desertion by the lover or husband, divorce, etc.) is felt by the women as an assault on her genitality and, from that point of view, amounts to castration. [...] Even though a woman has no penis to lose, it is her entire being—body and especially soul—that she feels threatened by castration. *As if her phallus were her psyche*, the loss of the erotic object breaks up and threatens to empty her whole psychic life. The outer loss is immediately and depressively experienced as an inner void.²⁹

Thus for Sarita, losing Julio means losing her whole self and being left with “the inner void.” She cries to Yeye: “Yeye, I think I’m going to die. I think I’m going to die. I think I’m dying. Tell me I’m not dying.—He takes my life with him when he leaves me” (Fornes, *Sarita* 97). Her going out with every guy she meets is also explained as a depressive behavior. Kristeva maintains: “[blank] activity, lacking meaning, may just as well follow a death bearing course [...] or an innocuous one (wearing herself out doing housework or checking the children’s homework)” (*Black Sun* 82). In Sarita’s case, reckless going out with guys is the “intense expression” of her sadness “in place instead of the shameful loss.”

²⁹ Kristeva, Julia. *Black Sun. Portable Kristeva*. Ed. Kelly Oliver. New York: Columbia UP, 2002. 383-98.

Even though Sarita goes out with boys, and later finds comforting love in Mark, her feeling of emptiness does not go away. She cannot let herself be loved by Mark either. Kristeva suggests that this inability to dissociate oneself from the object of depressive desire has to do with narcissism in the sense that the depressed person's desire for the other is indeed inverted toward the self. She states: "Depression is the hidden face of Narcissus... This time, however, [...] we shall see the shadow cast on the fragile self, hardly dissociated from the other, precisely by the *loss* of that essential other. The shadow of despair" (Kristeva, *Black Sun* 5). The depressed narcissist is completely tied to the object of her desire to the extent that she cannot dissociate herself from it. Kristeva offers a clear description of the ambiguous attitude of the depressed narcissist toward the erotic object:

"I love that object", is what that person seems to say about the lost object, "but even more so I hate it; because I love it and in order not to lose it, I imbed it in myself: but because I hate it, that other within myself is a bad self, I am bad. I am nonexistent, I shall kill myself." (*Black Sun* 11)

This passage shows a remarkable similarity with Sarita's letter to Julio, that is, her autobiographical effort to analyze herself. As Julio's constant betrayal hurts her, Sarita writes letters to Julio three times trying to articulate her feelings. In the third letter, which turns out to be a suicidal note, she writes:

"When I am with you I don't care about anything else and I hate myself for that. I can't live any longer because I hate myself. I'm going to die Julio and I don't care what you think. I'm doing it because I hate myself and what I am." (*Sarita* 108)

Kristeva explains that, in this kind of case, the suicidal drive is not a mask for the desire to attack the other. It indicates that the person suffers from the thought that she is flawed from the

beginning: “sadness would point to a primitive self—wounded, incomplete, empty. Persons thus affected do not consider themselves wronged but afflicted with a fundamental flaw, a congenital deficiency” (*Black Sun* 12). This passage is an apt description for Sarita’s self-image as well. When her mother Fela first hears that she is pregnant with a baby whose father she does not even know, Fela is deeply distressed in sadness and anger. Fela blames herself for not watching her daughter, but Sarita tells her: “It’s not that, Mami. You taught me right. (*She holds Fela tightly.*) It’s just that I don’t understand....I’m a savage....Other people don’t have to learn how to be. But I’m a savage. I have to learn how to lead my life” (*Sarita* 100). Sarita’s narcissistic depression is given a visual image in the scene titled “1942-Mirror” in which Sarita, having left her mother for Julio, is now with him. Fornes’ stage direction describes: “They sit side by side with their arms around each other. They face front and smile tenderly as if they are looking at each other in a mirror” (105). Importantly, they are not exactly looking at each other. The stage picture signifies that what Sarita is actually staring at is herself, the fundamental wound that she fantasizes to compensate through Julio.

Kristeva suggests that the fundamental pain for a depressed narcissist is that the wound or deficiency they carry with them cannot be signified.

Their sadness would be rather the most archaic expression of an unsymbolizable, unnameable narcissistic wound so precocious that no outside agent (subject or agent) can be used as a referent. For such narcissistic depressed persons, sadness is really the sole object; more precisely it is a substitute object they become attached to, an object they tame and cherish for lack of another. In such a case, suicide is not a disguised act of war but a merging with sadness and, beyond it, with that impossible love, never reached, always elsewhere, such as the promise of nothingness, of death (*Black Sun*

12).

Thus she calls it “Thing” to posit what a depressed narcissist mourns for cannot be signified, even though it is real. She asserts: “Let me posit the “Thing” as the real that does not lend itself to signification, the center of attraction and repulsion, seat of sexuality from which the object of desire will become separated” (13). In this term, it is interesting that Sarita keeps referring to Julio’s genital as his “thing.” Although it is a euphemism a young girl may use for a male genital, the repetition of “thing” or “it” loosens the link between it and its original referent and, instead, begins to signify something else, suggesting that the “Thing” that Sarita longs to possess may be something else. In other words, what she really desires is not Julio himself but the “Thing.” She is merged with it since it is within her, is her. The “Thing” is “perceived not as a significant object but as the self’s borderline element.” She is unable to separate “it” from herself by giving it a proper name. So she wants to kill herself. Thus, Kristeva maintains, “For those who are depressed, the Thing like the self is a downfall that carries them along into the invisible and unnameable” (15). Her self-hatred and suicidal drive is related to the impossibility to identify the “Thing.”

The crux of Kristeva’s discussion of depression is that the depressed person’s “Thing” is ultimately related to the maternal body and that the way to move out of depression is by being able to signify it with symbols. In the psychoanalytical model of language acquisition, a child at first identifies itself with the mother’s body. In the second stage, the child, in order to become an independent subject, has to separate itself from the mother’s body, therefore, loses it. Simultaneously, the loss is compensated with language: although you don’t have the mother’s body, you have the signs instead. With these signs, you enter the realm of language, the social. In this process of loss and compensation, identification with what Kristeva calls “the imaginary

father³⁰” helps the child to endure the severance, “reminding one of the bond of faith” (*Black Sun* 14). Imaginary father’s love guarantees the protection a subject needs in its transference from its identification with the maternal body to language. The process of acquiring language is related to one’s development of sexuality as well. According to Kristeva, the different relations male and female have with their mother’s body causes the difference between male and female sexuality. As I stated above, one should separate oneself from the maternal body in order to become an autonomous being. Thus, Kristeva asserts that “[matricide] is our vital necessity, the sine-qua-non condition of our individuation” (28). You kill the maternal body (not your mother, but the container that meets [your] needs) and you recover your loss with an erotic object or transform it into symbols (religious or artistic). If this process is hindered, the matricidal drive is inverted on yourself. In a heterosexual society, it is easier for a man to abject the maternal body and eroticize the other (another woman). For a woman, however, it is tremendously difficult to kill the mother and substitute the lost maternal body with the other because you look just like your mother. If you kill your mother you kill yourself. If you abject your mother’s body, you abject your own body. Also, you cannot eroticize your mother’s body. It is homosexual. It is forbidden. Thus, feminine sexuality is melancholic.³¹

³⁰ Kristeva explains: “The ‘primary identification’ with the “father in the individual prehistory” would be the means to link that might enable one to become reconciled with the loss of the Thing. Primary identification initiates a compensation for the Thing and at the same time secures the subject to another dimension, that of imaginary adherence, reminding one of the bond of faith, which is just what disintegrates in the depressed person” (*Black Sun* 13-4). The “father in the individual prehistory” is Freud’s term. Kristeva draws in this concept but develops her concept of the “imaginary father.” Kelly Oliver explains: “Kristeva develops her notion of the imaginary father in order to explain how a human being becomes a speaking being. She maintains that the stern oedipal Father with his castration threats is not enough to compel the child to leave the safe haven of the maternal body. She develops an account of the narcissistic structure that includes an imaginary agent of love that allows the child to negotiate the passage between the maternal body to the Symbolic order” (*Reading Kristeva* 69).

³¹ [...] “in order to separate from their mother’s bodies females must separate from themselves as women, and in order to maintain some identification with their mothers as the bodies of women **females carry around the ‘corpse’ of their mother’s bodies locked in the crypt of their psyches.**” Because the

In this light, I argue, Sarita represents melancholic aspects of feminine sexuality. Symbolically, Sarita was hindered in the primary stage of language acquisition, without the “father” who would carry out the role of “imaginary father.” Furthermore, Sarita has an unresolved, ambivalent relation with the maternal body. The stage set described in Fornes’ stage direction signifies this.

The set represents Fela’s livingroom in New York’s South Bronx. However, the proportions are not realistic. The ceiling is inordinately high. There are no windows except for a small one, ten feet high on each side wall. [...] (Sarita 91)

The unrealistically distorted stage set representing Fela’s living room is protectively yet oppressively encompasses Sarita. Not being able to abject the maternal body completely, she carries the “‘corpse’ of [her] mother’s [body] locked in the crypt of [her] psyches” (Kristeva, qtd in *Portable Kristeva* 300)—the “Thing.” Kristeva’s depiction of the psychological state of mind of a depressed woman illuminates Sarita and her relation with her mother: “Consequently, the hatred I bear her is not oriented toward the outside but is locked up within myself. There is no hatred, only an implosive mood that walls itself in and kills me secretly, very slowly [...]” (*Black Sun* 29). Sarita suffers from self-hatred, from the thought that she is a savage, inherently defective.

In order for a depressed person to overcome sadness, she needs to be able to convert the state of sadness, the ineffable inscription in her body, into language or some kind of signs. In other words, she has to be able to name the lost object: “Naming suffering, exalting it, dissecting it into its smallest components—that is doubtless a way to curb mourning” (*Black Sun* 97). That way, she can separate herself from the fatal narcissistic bond with the lost object. It is as if the

girl’s first love object is her mother, in a heterosexual culture, this primary homosexual feminine sexuality remains repressed and we lack ways of describing loving relationships between women, homosexual or otherwise. Feminine sexuality is melancholic because to identify as women, females must identify with an abject maternal body. (Oliver, *Portable Kristeva* 300, **emphasis mine**)

depressed person has to repeat the scene of the first acquisition of language: abjecting the maternal body and identifying with the imaginary father³² who would help her to enter the realm of signs. Kristeva asserts:

What makes such a triumph over sadness possible is the ability of the self to identify no longer with the lost object but with the third party—father, form, schema. A requirement for a denying or manic position (“no, I haven’t lost; I evoke, I signify through the artifice of signs and for myself what has been parted from me”), such an identification, which may be called phallic or symbolic, insures the subject’s entrance into the universe of signs and creation. (23-4)

She needs someone to love and identify with other than her maternal loss. But in a male-dominant society, men are elusive. Her father deserted Fela when he found out that she was pregnant with Sarita. Julio, whom Sarita chose as her erotic object, is a cruel faithless lover. Ferdinand, the old boarder at Fela’s house, only wants Sarita’s body to warm his body when Fela asks him to marry Sarita so that she will not become an unmarried mother. In addition to the absence of loving supporting males, she is hindered in acquiring the language with which to signify and name the “Thing.” Firstly, the discursive system of the phallogocentric society does not provide women with narratives that affirm their bodily experiences. Secondly, in the U.S. society during the 30s, her female gender and poverty holds her back from having a proper education.

In a significant way, Fornes symbolically reenacts the female acquisition of language and

³² Yet Kristeva emphasizes the balance between the imaginary father and the oedipal father: The supporting father of such a symbolic triumph is not the oedipal father but truly that “imaginary father,” “father in individual prehistory” according to Freud, who guarantees primary identification. Nevertheless, it is imperative that this father in individual prehistory be capable of playing his part as oedipal father in symbolic Law, for it is on the basis of that harmonious blending of the two facets of fatherhood that the abstract and arbitrary signs of communication may be fortunate enough to be tied to the affective meaning of prehistorical identifications, and the dead language of the potentially depressive person can arrive at a live meaning in the bond with the others. (*Black Sun* 23-4)

sexuality through Sarita. Fornes' set design for this drama supports this view. She locates most of the scenes in Fela's living room. By indicating that the proportions of the stage set are not realistic, Fornes signifies that the living room symbolizes Fela's world that Sarita is still contained in, which she has to move out of in order to become an autonomous person. Since the first scene, the play traces Sarita's separation from her mother and union with different lovers as a necessary process of acquiring autonomy. Though Sarita may not have successfully accomplished the primary stage of language acquisition and sexual development, the 13 year old adolescent Sarita is given one more chance to become an autonomous speaking being in Fornes' drama.

Sarita's depressed state adds another dimension to the play—her incessant search for meaning. She does not stop trying to know because she does not know. It is interesting that Kristeva points out the paradox that the depressed person is the most eager to find the meaning of life precisely because she has lost it. She asserts:

For the speaking being life is a meaningful life; life is even the apogee of meaning. Hence if the meaning of life is lost, life can easily be lost: when meaning shatters, life no longer matters. In his doubtful moments the depressed person is a philosopher [...]
(*Black Sun* 6)

The artist consumed by melancholia is at the same time the most relentless in his struggle against the symbolic abdication that blankets him [...] (9)

Likewise, Sarita is an earnest seeker of the truth. Three times, she writes letters to Julio. She asks God if he knows the endless doubt that gnaws her heart. She asks Fernando how she can find the peace he has. Her search for ways to give meaning to her "Thing" drives the play forward. The size of her will and obstinacy is that of a tragic hero.

Thus far, I have argued that Fornes portrays Sarita as a depressed woman in a way that she can represent the melancholic aspects of feminine sexuality. In the following section I will analyze Sarita's letters to Julio as her autobiographical effort to establish her selfhood separate from him by identifying and giving a name to her desire for him. Then I will go on to examine the reasons why Sarita's search is interrupted as Fornes suggests in the social and cultural context she constructs in the play.

Sarita's letters—the interrupted autobiography

For me, the three letters Sarita writes to Julio are autobiographical efforts in that she endeavors to explicate who she is and how she has become thus. They are the crux of this play, occupying the center in the structure of the play. The play accumulates its tension toward these letters. Then it traces why these letters are left unfinished and interrupted.

The letters are significant in that they are the first step Sarita takes in order to establish "I" in language. Symbolically, Sarita leaves Fela's living room, the maternal body that protects yet immerses her within it. To Fela who is asleep on the sofa, Sarita says, "...Mami...I'm leaving. Julio is back and I'm going with him. I have to, Mami. [...] I'll take care of myself" (*Sarita* 105). Fornes reenacts the daughter's separation from her mother by uniting with the third party. Linguistically and socially, Sarita departs from her mother's way of understanding a woman's identity as culturally designated by the society. Fela's Song exemplifies how women can uncritically accept the narratives circulating in the male-centered society when they perceive their identity. It also shows how damaging it can be. In Fela's Song titled "A Woman like Me," there is no "I."

You spend your life

waiting for the first love.

You hope that first love

will come back.

But he's gone

away.

[...]

A woman like me,

loves a man,

only one,

and he must

run away.

He must forsake her.

He must forget her.

He must betray her.

And he must drink

And die alone. (103-4)

There are only “you” and “she” in her song. Fela does not make an effort to establish her identity.

She buries herself in the existent discourses of women which ultimately disenfranchise her.

Marie-Françoise Chanfrault-Duchet, in her study of women's life-stories, asserts:

Individuality is always a product of social models and can only be understood through the social. To construct an identity, a subject takes up the models offered by society, as transmitted by culture, and shapes them into his or her own type, bringing into play a system of values. (61)

According to her, while a woman builds her identity drawing in the narrative models offered in the society, she not only accepts it but at the same time resists and modifies it to assert her individuality. What reveals the life-story teller's presiding attitude toward these existent models is what Chantrault-Duchet terms as "key phrases." "Functioning as refrains," key phrases "constitute formal markers that accent the narrative, within the phrases of evaluation of the life experience," thus expressing "an attitude marking the relation between self and society: harmony, indifference, submission, ambiguity, conflict etc" (67). In Fela's song, the key phrase is "a woman like me," and it evidences that Fela submits herself to the prevalent narrative of deserted women. That way, she avoids the pain accompanying the struggle to assert her agency in her life. She lets herself be alienated from her selfhood, hiding herself behind "she," "a woman like me". She does not write her story but accepts what others write for her.

Similarly, she does not exert her agency in her life. In Act 2, she tells Yeye how she was deserted by her first love, Teyo. He told her to come to New York and stay with him, but when he found out that she was pregnant with Sarita, he left. When Fela came to New York, he was already gone.

YEYE. And what did you do?

FELA. Nothing. I couldn't do anything. (*There is a pause.*) I stayed there in the hallway. I stood against the wall and didn't move for a long time. I didn't know where to go. (*Sarita 118*)

Only when the superintendent couple offered help, she passively took it and did as they told her to do. Later, Fela heard that Teyo was dead. She describes how she felt: "Sometime after I heard he was back home. He was sick. And he died. I didn't mourn him. It felt different not thinking he was alive someplace. Something went empty inside me" (118). Fela did not, does not, properly

mourn for her loss. In a significant way, she must be as depressed as Sarita. But unlike Sarita who ceaselessly tries to face and overcome the emptiness inside her, Fela lets it be. She buried “I”—the sadness, wound, anger “I” felt and still feel—in the stories the society offers her. She accepts the humiliating place of an unmarried mother assigned by the society. All she could pass on to Sarita is her inner void and obedience to the traditional patriarchal values which renders her silent.

Sarita’s letters contrast with Fela’s song in that she makes genuine efforts to establish “I” by articulating what she feels with her own voice. It is not an easy task, though. In the first letter she writes: “Julio, you left and here I am. You are a son of a bitch and did not appreciate my love. You did this too many times already and this is the last time” (*Sarita* 105) Instead of looking into herself, she talks about Julio’s behavior. Then she continues: “I don’t care, I’m doing fine. It’s you who will suffer” (105). She lies--to herself--by denial and negation. She just wishes to change Julio’s behavior by blaming and threatening him. She is still like the 13-year old who wanted to make things happen the way she wished by having Yeye read cards and say only what she wanted to hear. In fact, she is not writing any meaningful thing. So when Julio comes home, she indulges in the physical pleasure from Julio. It is like an insatiable hunger. Sarita asks Julio, “Why are you the way you are? Why are you so sweet and so juicy and so bad?” (106) After kissing him, she asks again, “Oh, honey, why are you so good to kiss?” (107). Of course, Julio does not read the letter.

In the second letter, her voice becomes more serious. She looks into her feelings and expresses them: “Being here alone is like being in a grave.” Nevertheless, she has not looked deeply enough yet. She finds the reason for her loneliness still in Julio’s behavior (even though it is partly true) and the general idioms of the world. She writes: “Maybe I should have never loved you or anyone. Maybe I should just do whatever comes my way and that’s better because what’s

the use, life stinks anyway” (*Sarita* 107). This time again, Julio does not read the letter.

The third letter, finally, is different from the two previous letters. Firstly, she invokes as many “I”s as possible. She uses writing as a way to underwrite her subjectivity.

[...] maybe you’re right that I have no will power when it comes to you, and that I am an old rag and that that’s why you have no respect for me. I have no respect for me either.—I know I cannot trust myself. When I am with you I don’t care about anything and I hate myself for that. I can’t live any longer because I hate myself. (*Sarita* 108)

She begins to look at herself earnestly. She abandons the rote language and set phrases, and instead tries to find words that could genuinely express her experiences. She becomes able to distinguish Julio from the need she has for Julio. She achieves the lucidity to identify the fundamental lack/loss inside her that propels her to desire Julio. She writes: “I’m not doing it because I love you because this is not love.—It’s like a sickness that lives in my heart and I have tried to tear it out but I can’t. I am sick with it and I want to die” (108). Although she is still confined in self-hatred and suicidal drive, it is a great achievement that she is now able to confront the “Thing.” She steps out of her little kitchen where she has let herself be abused by his faithlessness.

That Sarita writes letters to Julio as a conscious autobiographical effort to look back on the meaning of her life and express it is in contrast with Fela’s passivity. Fela only waits for a letter to come to her. In her song, she sings:

She hopes
that one day
a letter
will come

with the words

“I’ll return.” (*Sarita* 104)

She waits for her man to return to her and write her as his wife and a mother, the only legitimate identities allowed to women in the patriarchal society. She fixes herself in one place, forever waiting and enduring. Sarita takes initiative to write letters, which enables her to exert her agency. It is, however, only temporarily. Her writing does not develop further.

Sarita meets Mark, a kind loving American soldier from Cleveland, on the Empire State Building the moment she tries to commit suicide. He literally saves her and falls in love with her. It is like the end of a happy ending story. But it is not. Fornes ends only Act 1 here. There are a lot more obstacles Sarita has to meet in her way to accomplish subjecthood.

Letters are delivered to you.

Letters are important metaphor in *Sarita*. As I argued above, the difference of attitudes toward life between Fela and Sarita is emblemized in letters: Sarita writes letters, Fela waits for letters. Sarita is hardly discouraged to look for the meaning of her life. She wants to name the “Thing.” Fela accepts the identities given to her. Then, in Act 2, a letter is delivered to Sarita—from Julio. Julio sends a letter to Sarita via Yeye. Afraid that it might ruin Sarita’s relationship with Mark, Yeye hesitates to give it to Sarita. She puts it in the couch, leaving it there for Sarita to discover if it is her fortune. Sarita finds it. Mark sees it. Mark becomes furious, thinking that Julio, her lover, is calling her to him.

MARK.

What does he want! What does your lover want!

What does he want! What does he want!

What does he want! Read his letter!

Read his letter!

What does he want!

SARITA.

What have I done?

What are you thinking of?

I have not seen him since I've been with you. (*Sarita* 124)

Sarita is helpless in this situation. She cannot help receiving it because it is written to her with her name on it. Regardless of her will or action, because Julio sent a letter to her, she is given an identity she does not intend to have. Thus a letter in *Sarita* symbolizes naming, in other words, the war over a woman's identity: either you write it or you are written.

Sarita is offered identities three times throughout the play. The first identity offered or forced upon her was that of a mother/a wife as legitimized in the society. When Sarita gets pregnant, Fela cannot stand the idea of Sarita becoming an unwed mother like herself. She plans to marry Sarita to Fernando. What Fela did not plan was that Fernando, a 60-year-old man, would want sex from Sarita. He insists: "If I'm going to marry her she has to be polite and she has to move into my room" and "Well, in winter it's cold, one would like a warm body to feel warm" (*Sarita* 101). Sarita realizes that once you become a legitimate wife/mother to a man, you become simply a body. Interestingly, Sarita is wearing a parochial school uniform. Before she got pregnant, she was a girl, and a student. She was safely included in the society while she had a culturally approved identity for an adolescent girl. Once she becomes pregnant, her identity becomes problematic within the boundary of the society and culture. Only when she has a husband so that the baby belongs to a father and his family, who can give it a proper name within

the patriarchal institutions, she and the baby can safely belong to the social. However, when a woman gets pregnant out of wedlock, she is suddenly thrown out of the cultural therefore social boundary. She becomes a threat that blurs the boundary, then, silenced to a non-being in the society.³³

What Fornes suggests is that motherhood within a patriarchal society can be an oppressive identity violently forced upon a woman. Once you enter motherhood as the society institutionalizes it, you must enter wifehood as well: you are deprived of your unique individuality but become a body that carries and nurtures the baby and that provides sexual service to a man.³⁴ Sarita's resistance is futile.

SARITA. I don't want to get married. I am going to school.

FERNANDO. You can't go to school anymore.

SARITA. Why not?

FERNANDO. Because you are pregnant and you should be ashamed of yourself.

(*Sarita* 102)

However, Sarita is strong-headed. She insists that she will not marry Fernando. Instead she will work and provide for the baby. She passes on the role of "mother" to Fela and Fernando.

³³Kelly Oliver explains Kristeva's argument pertaining to this complex attitude of the male-dominated society toward a pregnant woman. "Kristeva argues that the two discourses of maternity that are currently available, science and Christianity are inadequate to explain maternity. Science explains maternity as a natural, and therefore presocial, biological process. Yet, where is the mother in the process? Is she the subject of this process or merely subject to it? If the mother is seen as merely subject to this process over which she has no control, then her identity (and subsequently the identity of the infant who identifies with her) as a speaking subject is threatened. If, on the other hand, the mother is seen as the master of this process, then she is the master of something presocial and biological and her identity (and subsequently the identity of the infant) as a speaking subject is once again threatened" (*Portable Kristeva* 295-6).

³⁴In regard to the violent aspect of the motherhood as institution, Adrienne Rich, in *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, strongly asserts: "[...] the patriarchal institution of motherhood is not the 'human condition' any more than rape, prostitution, and slavery are" (33). In the scene in which Fela tries to marry Sarita to Fernando, all three of the forms of oppression mentioned in Rich's assertion are illustrated.

SARITA. That's right. I'll support him. So that's that. You heard what I said. (*To Fela.*)

You take care of him. (*To Fernando.*) *And you too. And I'll support him.* (103)

She refuses the name of "mother" as already written.

The second identity Sarita is offered is "the flower" and "Tahiti." When Sarita and Mark meet on the Empire State Building, he falls in love with her. He sings, "You are Tahiti."

You are the flower.

I am the snow.

You are Tahiti.

I am Gaughin.

You are all color

I am the brush.

I, without you,

am but a void. (110)

The melody is sweet, and the lyric is romantic. Sarita tells Mark: "Do you know that... that without you I would have died?" which ends the Act 1. You might expect to find in Act 2 Sarita happy in her new relationship, but instead we see Sarita unsure and hesitant. Diane Lynn Moroff offers a helpful tip for me to interpret the ambiguous anxiety Sarita feels about her relationship with Mark.

Certain traditions of film and theater are so intact they invite suspicion. The Empire State Building as a site for a suicide attempt is a cliché; Mark has fallen in love with the essence of the victimized and needy woman, and Sarita has found her shining knight. Or she has cast her shining knight. "You are so nice.—I know you're nice"

(109), she says, revealing that Mark is what she wants him to be above all else [...]

These romantic clichés immediately make suspect the validity of Sarita and Mark's relationship, ending the first act on a skeptical note. (88)

Although I do not necessarily agree with her view that Mark sees in Sarita “the essence of the victimized and needy woman,” her point that Fornes is projecting the cliché of popular romance in this scene is of value. Mark believes himself to be the painter who can discover and create beauty out of Sarita, the traditional role of the man in romance. Mark is writing Sarita as Tahiti, while assuming the role of Gauguin himself. Sarita, on the verge of giving up her life, lets him do so. It is, at least for a while, better to be his flower than to fall off of the Empire State Building. Though it is not her name, she feels that it might be her name as all other women want it for her name. Thus, Sarita continues the relationship but cannot make up her mind. When Yeye asks Fela when they are going to get married, Fela shrugs her shoulders and says, “He wanted to and she didn't want to. Then she wanted to and he didn't want to. [...] They're complicated” (*Sarita* 120).

Then finally, Julio's letter arrives. What name he actually calls her by in the letter is not clearly revealed in the play, just as what drives Sarita to him is always alluded to and never clearly named. However, as much as this name is unknown, it is powerful and dangerous. In the order of the scenes, the scene entitled “1945—The Letter” comes after the scene “1944—The Party” in which Fela observes a ritual for Oshun. Oshun, also called Virgin Mary, is a goddess of sensuality, love, and feminine beauty. She is also a guardian goddess of powerless women.³⁵ By

³⁵ Oshun is a goddess worshipped in Santería, a Cuban religion which is a combination of Yoruba religion from Africa and Catholicism. Similar African orisha and Catholic saints are combined in one, for example, Oshun and Virgin Mary, and worshipped for their unique abilities and characters. For further information: “Santería originated when the Yoruba were brought from Africa to colonial Cuba as slaves and forced to adopt Catholicism. They immediately recognized the parallels existing between their traditional beliefs and the ones newly imposed on them. Both religions consisted of a high god who conceived, created, and continued to sustain all that exists. Additionally, both religions consisted of a host

offering food and music to Oshun, Fela wishes to bring happiness to her daughter in her relationship with Mark. It seems successful in the beginning. Fela, Sarita and Yeye enjoy female bonding, singing and dancing. Sarita and Mark have a good time, dancing fox trot. But soon, Julio's unexpected visit interrupts the party. Oshun cannot prevent Julio from coming back. Dancing together, Sarita and Julio sing:

Frozen fingers
hold the shadow
Bloodless lips
want to smile.
Icy eyes look at
the shadow
of a love that's but a ghost. (*Sarita*117)

Their dance is neither passionate nor erotic: it is rather sinister. There is coldness instead of warmth. It is not love, but a ghost and its shadow. It is a reprise of what Sarita called in her third letter to Julio "a sickness that lives in my heart." Still she senses its existence even though she cannot identify it by giving it a name. Thus, when Julio's letter arrives, she cannot but answer to it. Their physical relationship begins again. Hence, it is fatally important that you should know your name. Or, if you don't know your name you should write and make up your name, Fornes demands. When you do not know your name, when someone calls you by a wrong name, you

of intermediaries operating between the supreme God and the believers. Catholics called these intermediaries saints, while Africans called them orishas. In order to continue worshipping their African gods under the constraints of slavery, they masked their deities behind the "faces" of Catholic saints, identifying specific orishas with specific saints. These gods, now manifested as Catholic saints, were recognized as the powerbrokers between the most high God and humanity. They personified the forces of nature and had the power to impact human beings positively or negatively. Like humans, they could be virtuous or exhibit vices, doing whatever pleased them, even to the detriment of humans. Like humans, they expressed emotions, desires, needs, and wants" (De La Torre xii-xiii).

might just answer to it regardless of who you really are.

Is love its name?

After the letter scene, the scene titled “1945—Summer Resort” follows. In this scene, Sarita and Mark quarrel over the word “empacho.” Sarita explains to Mark that empacho means “what you get when you go in the water after you eat.” As Mark does not understand her, she continues,

SARITA. You can also die if you drink cold beer or a cold drink after you eat
too much on a hot day.

MARK. And what do you call that?

SARITA. Empacho. (*Sarita* 125)

In Sarita’s culture where it has a name, this phenomenon exists and you die from it. In Mark’s culture where there is no name for it, it does not exist. You never die from taking a shower after you eat.

MARK. You don’t take a shower after a meal?

SARITA. No.

MARK. I do.

SARITA. It’s a wonder you’re alive. (126)

Then, Fornes asks us, does “empacho” exist or not? Just because something doesn’t have a name in your language, can you say it does not exist?

The “sickness” that afflicts Sarita’s mind and soul does not have a name but it does exist. The only word that could indicate it the closest is “love” in the society which Sarita lives. But ‘love’ does not identify it exactly. Sarita struggles even with God.

SARITA. If one has one love in one’s lifetime, only one, and one has been true to that

love, does one go straight to heaven?—for being true? (Short pause) I hope so. Because here it's hell. (Short pause) I just want to know if you know about **this**? (Short pause.) Is this your idea?—Or is the devil doing it? (Short pause.) Go on. (Short pause.) Do something. (She palms her hand as if there were a small person in it. She lowers her voice.) Good Lord, child, somebody made a mistake. I put you in for an easy life. You're my favorite kid. Don't worry about a thing, honey. I'll take care of things. (Using her own voice.) Oh, God! Thank you God.—God. I am serious. I cannot breathe. I'm burning. I'm turned inside myself. Do you know what I'm saying?—I feel my life's leaving me. I feel I'm dying. God, I want to love Mark and no one else. (*Sarita* 126, **emphasis mine**)

In her first question, it is not certain who she is referring as her “one love.” Considering that Sarita has “loved” and still “loves” Julio, it seems to refer to Julio. Moreover, at the end of the prayer, by saying that she “wants to” love Mark, paradoxically, she admits that she does not love Mark. So the “one love” is Julio. Then, the “love” she means at the beginning of the prayer is not the same “love” she means at the end. She is confused, torn apart, about “this” for which love is not the right word. Though she tries to write a script for this silent God, all she hears is nothing. The long dash Fornes put between “Thank you God” and “God, I am serious” reveals the gap between the script she writes with hope and the reality. In reality, she is lonely and in pain caught in between the “love” she should feel and the “love” that consumes her. While the painful feeling in her body and soul is real, there is no name for it. In the world which God created, He does not know that “this” exists. Then Sarita cannot avoid the doubt about who she is and if she exists at all.

The next scene is titled “I Don't Love You.” Sarita's and Julio's clothes are disheveled.

They have been making love. Love? Here the meaning of the word ‘love’ is still ambiguous, even oppressive. Sarita protests “No. I don’t love you. I don’t love you.” Julio mocks her:

JULIO. You don’t. Didn’t you love me a moment ago? Didn’t you?

SARITA. No.

JULIO. Oh no. You didn’t.

SARITA. No.

JULIO. Oh no?

SARITA. No.

JULIO. And what was that that happened just now. What was that?

SARITA. I don’t know. I lost my mind. [...] (*Sarita* 126-7)

What they have is sex, which is, for Julio, love. For Sarita, it is something she does not know.

This endless downfall Sarita experiences due to her desire for Julio’s body finally ends when she kills him. More precisely and importantly, it ends when Sarita sees Mark—how much pain he is going through because of what she does. Mark finds out that Sarita is having sex with Julio, when Julio comes in their kitchen with Sarita’s key. Mark drinks until he loses consciousness. Fornes describes:

Mark sits with his head on the table. He is unconscious. There is a bottle of liquor and a shot glass on the table. Sarita enters. She is 21 years old. She starts to go to Mark, notices the key and picks it up. She is dejected. (Sarita 129)

With Julio, who is the project of her own loss and desire, she saw nothing but herself. She was fixed in a narcissistic bond. In contrast, with Mark, she perceives her behavior and its affect on others in light of her relation with others. She begins to step out of the narcissistic depressive bond with her maternal “Thing.”

Now I turn to Kristeva again. As I already discussed at the beginning of this section, Kristeva suggests that the way out of depressive mood is to identify with neither self nor the maternal “Thing,” but the third party, that is, father, symbol, or scheme. Thus, by being able to signify the “Thing” in language or image, you can separate yourself from it (you feel it is okay because you have the sign though you lost the “Thing”): you move out of narcissism. Identifying with the other, that is, opening your closed boundary of self to the other can be also called love. In an interview, Kristeva puts it this way:

Now love is a moment in the life of a speaking being who all the while caught in the body, opens oneself to the symbolic dimension. I love the other, who is not necessarily me, and who gives me the possibility of opening myself to something other than myself. This can take place through an imaginary fusion with this outer body, but if it is experienced not in merely narcissistic way but as the governing principle of my whole subsequent existence, what I call love is openness to the other, and it is what gives me my human dimension, my symbolic dimension, my cultural and historical dimension. [...] I, for my part, say that the love relation is the only chance to go through narcissism toward the recognition of the symbolic moment. (Interview 381)

Seeing Mark and feeling his pain as if it is hers is the beginning of Sarita’s symbolic moment. Here Fornes makes a remarkable choice as a playwright. Instead of giving Sarita a definite end, she demands the audience to imagine it.

Open ending

Fornes leaves the “Thing” still unnamed. Sarita does not become a professional writer or an artist who expressively articulates her ordeals and psychological pains. Neither does she suddenly

encounter a kind psychoanalyst who would help her to give language to her depressive affects by listening to her, as Kristeva, psychoanalyst herself, suggests as the healing function of psychoanalysis. Sarita kills Julio in her desperate effort to separate “it” from herself. Even though she physically killed “it,” she hasn’t completely moved out of her immersion with it. She is confused whether she killed it or it killed her.

I love you, Papi, Papo.

Don’t die.

I love you, love you, Papo.

[...]

(She kisses his lips.)

Where is your little tongue?

(She looks at him.)

Shit, papi.

Papi, are you dead?

(She sobs.)

Ay....

Ay....

(Pushing him away.)

Get away from me.

Why are you doing this?

(She sobs.)

[...] (*Sarita* 130-31)

As a result, Sarita literally loses herself: The next scene shows Sarita in a mental hospital. Fornes demonstrates that the power of feminine depression can be deadly destructive: it can kill—both the other and yourself. However, by avoiding naming it but simply presenting it, she lets the audience herself experience the horror and chaos it can create. To better explicate this paradoxical dramatic strategy of Fornes, I turn to Toril Moi. While Moi admits the positive function of naming/writing, she also warns of the possibility of reducing the raw power of the unnamed which an action of naming/writing can result in. Moi asserts:

The attempt to *fix* meaning is always in part doomed to failure, for it is of the nature of meaning to be always already elsewhere. [...] This is not to say that we could or should avoid naming—simply that it is a more slippery business than it seems, and we should be alive to the dangers of fetishization. (160)

Thus, Fornes avoids *fixing* meaning here. Instead of giving it a name, she communicates to the bodies of the audience members so that they can do their own writing/ remembering / imagining what Sarita is going through: the omnivorous hunger you once felt for your lover regardless of your will; the suffocating fear of losing him because if you lose him, you lose yourself; the sadness, restlessness that encompassed you without specific reasons; the self-hatred you could not help because you did not know who else to blame; how they killed you silently. Here Sarita takes all of these and explodes them. Thus, Fornes, in a sense, makes a clean slate for Sarita to

write herself from the very beginning. In other words, Fornes places Sarita at the entrance into language one more time. In the first entrance into language, Sarita's father was too selfish and weak to give her the proper love and protection she needed in order to become a speaking being. He was absent. She was left with the mother's body locked inside her, forever mourning, without success to move out of the deathly bond. Thus, it is significant that Fela is not in the last scene even though we know from the characters' dialogue that she is still a supportive and caring mother. I argue that the last scene signifies that Sarita has succeeded, even though not entirely yet, in separating the corpse from the crypt of her psyche. Fornes lets Sarita use the power of the unnamed not to kill herself but to give birth to herself. In a society that does not easily allow her to write her name, Sarita does not give up.

If Jill Dolan's reading is the only way to read *Sarita*, the last stage picture is very dark and dooming.

Fornes' theme in these plays is the hopeless entrapment of women's desire. Her female characters struggle to fulfill themselves sexually or intellectually but are continually, brutally foiled by the controlling male desire and the legal, social superstructure by which it is legitimated. (108)

I assert that, in opposition to Dolan's reading, Fornes ends the play with a lot more positive notes. My interpretation is supported by the fact that Fornes allows Mark and Fernando to change and mature while Sarita has her own journey to acquire autonomy. Before, I argued that Mark wanted to see Sarita as a beautiful object that he can paint and create. However, the Mark, who is now kneeling by Sarita, sees her as she is: he still loves her after all that has happened.

MARK. (*He walks to her and kneels by her side.*) Hello Sara.

SARITA. Hello Mark. How are you? (*Mark sits on a chair.*) You came to see

me? (*He nods.*) Even after what happened? (*He nods.*) [...] (*Sarita* 132)

As to Fernando, I discussed before how he shamelessly showed his intention of using Sarita as a body to warm his aged body if he would take her for his wife. But after Sarita ordered him to take care of her baby, Melo, he developed his paternal side. Yeye and Fela's dialogue shows this. When Yeya asks Melo's whereabouts, Fela answers,

FELA. [...Melo]'s out with Fernando. They went to buy shoes.

YEYE. For Melo?

FELA. For Fernando. He wanted Melo's opinion.

YEYE. Fernando is nice to him.

FELA. He thinks he is his father. (120)

Also, Fernando tells Sarita that he became an American and found his peace here because he came to care for her, not as a sexual object but more as a daughter.

FERNANDO. [...] Then, it happened that I didn't think of my island any more. I thought of the people here. That's how I became an American. I thought of the people here. I imagined that you came from school and you did your homework and that you didn't get into fights in the street. Or go out with boys who were mean and disrespectful. (128)

By developing a loving, caring relationship toward Sarita and Melo in a different way than how the patriarchal society authorizes the legitimate fatherhood, he matures as well. Furthermore, the last stage direction allows the audience to imagine a hopeful future for Sarita and Mark.

SARITA. [...] What do you think will happen? What will they do to me?

(*Mark and Sarita's hands lock with force as music is heard.*) (132).

Although Sarita's questions are full of anxiousness, she will not have to go through it alone: Mark

will be there supporting her³⁶. Instead of her ever absent father (who left her and her mother truly following the patriarchal discourse of the male as the free adventurer), Fernando and Mark, who have grown and matured in love because of her, are helping Sarita. Hopefully this time, Sarita can enter the Symbolic, writing her name(s), not as already offered by the society but on her own terms.

4.2 KENNEDY'S *A MOVIE STAR HAS TO STAR IN BLACK AND WHITE*

Kennedy's *A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White* (premiered in a workshop production directed by Joseph Chaikin in 1976, and first published in 1984) begins with the Columbia Pictures Lady, who sets up the locations and characters of the story and ends with her "*Brief dazzling image*" (Kennedy *Movie Star* 78). The first scene, the *Now Voyager*'s ocean liner scene, in which Bette Davis, who has just been transformed from an ugly hysteric spinster into a beautiful independent lady, meets the sophisticated and gentle Paul Heinreid, is interwoven with Clara's parents "boy-meets-girl" memories and Clara's failed marriage. The second scene, the wedding scene in *Viva Zapata*, overlaps with *Now Voyager*, Clara's parents and her divorces, and her troubled dream of becoming a writer. The third scene, the boat scene in *A Place in the Sun*, is interlaced with the other two movies, and echoes Clara's ruined psyche. While the

³⁶ Sally Porterfield's own experience with her production of *Sarita* and Fornes supports my view. She reports: "Fornes's money is on Sarita, despite the bleak final scene in which she is discovered in a mental hospital, comforted by the still faithful Mark and Fernando. In our production, the sound design included the hollow clang of a metal door after Sarita's final query, "What do you think will happen? What will they do to me?" At the playwright's request, we took the ominous clang out. She objected to its implications of hopelessness because she wants the play to remain open-ended, with Sarita's question hanging in the air. She would like to believe that Sarita is finally able to make peace with her darkness and to find the light she is seeking" (214).

Hollywood movie stars occupy the scene as the “Leading Roles,” played by actors who look exactly like the movie roles, Clara, designated as ‘a bit role,’ keeps writing in her notebook on the stage. It is an autobiography in a movie script form in which Clara, the central character, writes about how she has become who she is now: a struggling black female playwright in a white male dominated society, a mother of a young boy, a wife separated from her husband, a sister to her brother who, driven by the violence of the racism in U.S. society, ended up in a car accident and coma, and a daughter to her divorced, distressed parents. Clara sets her autobiographical movie in 1963, connecting it to her journal articles from 1955. She interlaces her depressive and somehow all-related identities with three Hollywood movies. She not only projects her uneasy relationships with her mother, her husband, and the difficulty of pregnancy to the heroines of these movies, but also redirects her situations through them. Thus, this play deals with the complicated interrelatedness of racism and sexism in American society through multilayered images and discourses.

How this play reveals the racism in U.S. society through Clara’s impossible identification with the white actresses on the screen has attracted many theatre critics over the years. Because Clara casts herself as a “bit role” in this movie while letting the white heroines speak for her, this play has invited the interpretation that, as Philip Kolin, an important Kennedy critic, asserts, Kennedy “reinforces the legacy of racial discrimination and typecasting” (103). Similarly, Debora Geis argues:

[...] the tension between immersion and angry confrontation of the Hollywood world experienced by Clara in this play embodies the ambivalent spectatorial status of the African American woman whose **subjectivity** risks being **undermined by her *identification with an exclusionary cultural apparatus.*** [...] however compelling

the movie-star fantasies may appear to be, their attractiveness originates from a Hollywood world sustained by a mythology that is ultimately oppressive in its unassailability. (“Spectator” 171, **emphasis mine**)

Furthermore, Martha Gilman Bower argues that Clara Passmore (she believes that Clara in *Movie Star* is the extension of the character by the same name in *The Owl Answers*) is “the embodiment of a woman caught up in the performance of a black and white character, one that had to be played out as black and white” (127). Drawing on Herbert Blau’s assertion that “Whiteness is very much engrained, maybe against her wishes, in her lyrical quest for her roots,” she affirms that Clara “can’t escape the desire to be white” (127). On the bottom of these scholars’ reading of this play is the dichotomic world view that posits clear division between white and black. However, in opposition to these critics’ reading of the play, I argue that Kennedy demonstrates through the writer character of Clara how the process of writing can blur the categorical boundary of identities and lead to invention of new identities. Since autobiography allows the writer to construct her identity through writing it, *Movie Star* is especially illustrative of the relation between writing and identity construction in Kennedy’s plays. Ross Posnock supports my reading, for he locates Kennedy alongside the black intellectuals who resist the binary opposition between black and white and attempt to create and affirm a cosmopolitan identity that encompasses and transcends all cultural and social identities. Posnock, in his *Color and Culture: Black Writers and the Making of the Modern Intellectual*, identifies Kennedy’s writing style as collage, that is, “a genre that refuses to ‘embody a kind or class’ or ‘illustrate a principle;’ instead it **incarnates the incommensurable** and thus militates against the demand to be representative” of the race (262, **emphasis mine**). He asserts that the self that emerges from her text is “a self rendered as open and revisable, a palimpsest or braid of overlapping familial and cultural affiliations, practices,

identifications, and disavowals” (261). Indeed, both Geis and Kolin, in their latter part of the reading of *Movie Star*, acknowledge that the act of writing itself is the very theme of the play and that it empowers Clara, and Kennedy via her character, to “[write] her way out” (Geis, “Spectator” 176). I will further develop the relationship between writing and identities portrayed in *Movie Star*, with reference to Hélène Cixous’ and Gloria Anzaldúa’s theory of writing. But for the order of this chapter, I will first explore the “mother” Kennedy deals with as an indispensable constituent of a woman’s identity.

While the effect of the racial marginalization these popular movies have on the lives of black females is one crucial theme of this play, what I am also interested in is how Kennedy depicts Clara’s relationship with her mother and her experience of motherhood/pregnancy, which are central themes in women’s autobiography. Clara J. McDonough, in her essay “Language of Blood: Embodied Women’s Experiences in Adrienne Kennedy’s *A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White*,” points out that while many critics have analyzed the racism revealed in this play, few have paid attention to how this play “examines the challenges to a woman’s identity presented by pregnancy and childrearing due to both social expectations and physical experiences of women” (58). She states that what marks *Movie Star* is its presentation of “pregnancy, not as a metaphor [of social oppression] but as a lived experience—the actual embodied experience of an individual woman” (59). I agree with McDonough that pregnancy and childrearing brings crisis to Clara’s selfhood as it conflicts with her pursuit of career as a playwright. However, I argue that while the traditional institution of motherhood in patriarchal U.S. society is oppressive for Clara, she also finds the force of creativity in pregnancy. Thus, I will examine both how Clara’s autobiographic writing in *Movie Star* reveals the difficulties a woman experiences due to

motherhood and how motherhood can also be the motivating force for her to exert her selfhood all the more.

Furthermore, I will also explore the daughter-mother relationship—an important theme in women’s autobiography, portrayed in *Movie Star*, which McDonough does not address. In Clara’s struggling pursuit to become a professional writer, her mother is portrayed as an ambiguous companion. In spite of Clara’s profound yearning to identify with her mother as a source of support and knowledge, her mother is always elusive, even cruel. Clara is even more silenced in her mother’s presence. I will analyze this complex relationship between Clara and her mother drawing on and contending with Julia Kristeva’s and Cixous’ discussion of maternity. Also drawing on Adrienne Rich’s exploration of mother-daughter relationships in *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Institution and Experience*, I will examine the social and cultural causes of conflict between the two women Kennedy suggests in the play. I will argue that even though Clara feels overwhelmed by a relationship full of contradicting emotions, she survives by not giving up writing. Then I will analyze specifically what kind of writing typifies the play.

As Posnock’s terms for Kennedy’s writing style, ‘collage’ and ‘palimpsest’ imply, Kennedy overlaps and interlaces multiple layers of discourses and subject positions in *Movie Star*. Clara’s words have one meaning, but later, in light of another perspective, have another meaning, too. Therefore, I will analyze the dialogues and monologues from diverse angles, explicating the meaning layer by layer (although Kennedy’s texts are inexhaustible). In order to do so, I will have to quote the same line repeatedly but put it in different contexts each time. Another analytical strategy I will use in this chapter is to refer to the playwright’s personal life in relation to the play. Bower asserts that *Movie Star* is perhaps “Kennedy’s most autobiographical play” (127). Indeed, this play overlaps with the events Kennedy records in the chapter “Marriage and

Motherhood: 1953-1960” in her autobiography *People Who Led to My Plays*.³⁷ Of course, as Kennedy maintains in a few interviews, the family members she dramatizes in her plays are “metaphors.” In *Movie Star*, although many events and images are from her own life (Clara’s struggle to be a playwright, parents’ divorce, difficult pregnancy, and her brother’s coma), she fictionalizes them as well (Kennedy did not lose her first baby, and although she divorced her husband later, she had a good relationship with him during the time the play covers). Ultimately, her autobiography provides clues as to the meanings of her personal symbols (for example, what Bette Davis symbolizes for her). Consequently, I will make reference to them in my analysis of *Movie Star*.

Kennedy is not the only playwright who writes autobiographical plays. For example, Larry Kramer in *The Destiny of Me* dramatizes his own experience as a gay man, and Lanford Wilson deals with his past memories in *Lemon Sky*. What particularly draws me to Kennedy’s autobiographical plays, specifically *A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White* here, is her dealings with women’s bodily experiences such as pregnancy and motherhood, and the effect of having the character writing on the stage in real time.

“I’m very lonely”: the mother’s suffering

Cixous asserts that while pregnancy can bring “unsurpassed pleasures” to women, “they [have] actually been always exaggerated or conjured away—or cursed in the classic texts” (qtd in McDonough 57). Pregnancy, childbirth and childrearing—all women’s responsibilities in the patriarchal society—have been controlled and defined in ways to preserve the male dominance in

³⁷ In the previous chapter, I discussed *June and Jean in Concert* as Kennedy’s own adaptation of her autobiography *People Who Led to My Plays*. *Movie Star*, on the other hand, was written **before** *People*. It is later in *People* that Kennedy explains the personal meanings of the people and the images she used in *Movie Star*. Thus, *June and Jean* and *Movie Star* are in different relationship with *People*.

the family and society. As a result, women, the very subject of pregnancy and motherhood, have been silenced. When pregnancy and childrearing come with the psychological crisis—the split of self, the feeling of her identity subsumed into the child—and physical exhaustion, women are not prepared to acknowledge and deal with them. Women are encouraged, even coerced to play the role of “mother”—the emblem of the unconditional self-sacrificing love. Adrienne Rich asserts:

Nothing to be sure, had prepared me for the intensity of relationship already existing between me and a creature I had carried in my body and now held in my arms and fed from my breasts. Throughout pregnancy and nursing, women are urged to relax, to mime the serenity of madonnas. No one mentions the psychic crisis of bearing a first child, the excitation of long-buried feelings about one’s own mother, the sense of confused power and powerlessness, of being taken over on the one hand of touching new physical and psychic potentialities on the other, a heightened sensibility which can be exhilarating, bewildering, and exhausting. No one mentions the strangeness of attraction—which can be as single-minded and overwhelming as the early days of love affair—to a being so tiny, so dependent, so folded-in to itself—who is, and yet is not, part of myself. (36)

Kristeva also points out that in Western society motherhood is either represented through the Virgin Mary myth in Catholicism or explicated in science. In either of these discourses, there is no real mother’s voice. She urges that we should pay close attention to “what today’s women have to say about this experience” (Kristeva, “Women’s Time” 366). Adrienne Kennedy’s *A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White* does pay attention to a woman’s experience of pregnancy and motherhood. Kennedy deals with it in concrete dramatic terms what Kristeva touches on in her theoretical writing. Kennedy stresses, through Clara’s autobiography writing on

the stage, the importance of the experience of motherhood in the formation of women's identities. She bases the mother's speech on her own experiences and dramatizes it for theatre. I will now examine how she tells the untold story of a mother's experience and how it affects a mother's double identity as a writer.

The Columbia Pictures Lady, who has appeared in bright light, presents for Clara³⁸ the prologue of the movie, which has just started. "Lately I think often of killing myself. Eddie Jr. plays outside in the playground. I'm very lonely" (Kennedy, *Movie Star* 64). What strikes me in these three sentences is how simply yet succinctly Kennedy expresses the feeling of confinement and despair, which mothers experience when they have to be the sole caregivers of their infants and toddlers, especially when the mothers have their own ambitions in the society, as Clara does. The Columbia Pictures Lady continues, "Met Lee Strasberg: the members of the playwrights units were invited to watch his scene. Geraldine Page, Rip Torn and Norman Mailer were there..." (64). The feeling of loneliness and desperation contrasts with the sense of belonging—the "unit." Eddie Jr., to whom she is tied but who is outside on his own nonetheless, is contrasted with the established playwrights with whom Clara wants to be associated. This split of the self is repeated again, "While Eddie Jr. plays outside I read Edith Wharton, a book on Egypt and Chinua Achebe" (64). It is as if her identity is split in two: the mother to Eddie Jr. and a person who aspires to intellectual growth and independence through reading books. Then it continues with more writers she wants to meet: "LeRoi Jones, Ted Joans, and Allen Ginsburg are reading in the Village" (64). Motherhood splits Clara in two: her obligation as a mother, the sole caregiver to the child in a nuclear family of a patriarchal capitalist society, and as a woman with creative ambitions.

³⁸ I will later argue that it is in fact Clara who writes and speaks *through* the Columbia Pictures Lady or other female movie stars.

Motherhood also erases her personal identity in the eyes of people around her. Kennedy, in her autobiography *People Who Led to My Plays*, remembers how people around her looked at her only as a mother but never as an individual with her own desires. She writes:

People my husband and I met at gatherings around Columbia University:

They never asked me about anything: They said, how's the baby? They asked my husband about his graduate studies in Social Psychology, his opinion of the world and politics. As an afterthought they most often, but pleasantly, asked me, how's the baby? How old is the baby? Do you like New York? I resolved to work harder at my writing and to take courses. (*People* 82)

While her husband was approached as a man with his own thoughts and goals in life, she was treated like an appendix to him. And when they saw her, they saw only a mother as if there could not be any unique personality and individual history. Likewise, in *A Movie Star*, while Clara wears a maternity dress throughout the play, the Husband carries a briefcase: he is busy going to classes. Clara expresses her jealousy of her husband. Bette Davis speaks for her: "I get very jealous of you, Eddie. You're doing something with your life" (*Movie Star* 68).

Motherhood is repressive not only because it confines a woman to the role of mother, but also because in a patriarchal society it means obligated wifedom, for the child needs legal and economical support of the father. Just as Sarita is suddenly forced into marriage and wifedom once she gets pregnant in *Sarita*, Clara's motherhood subjugates her to her husband. Although Clara wants to divorce him, her husband demands that they should be together for their son. The Columbia Pictures Lady speaks for Clara, "Eddie comes every evening right before dark. He wants to know if I'll go back to him for the sake of our son" (*Movie Star* 64). He is like a ghost who haunts her. She does not want to be reminded of this social obligation to stay in the marriage.

He does not understand her desire to be a writer. He only thinks it is an “obsession” (75). His lack of understanding hurts her self-esteem, but in the capitalist society she knows well that a woman has lesser means of making money especially when she has a child. Economically, she cannot help depending on her husband. Clara deplors: “It bothers me that Eddie had to give me money for the ticket to come home. I don’t have any money of my own. The option from my play is gone and I don’t know how I will be able to work and take care of Eddie Jr. Maybe Eddie and I should go back together” (71).

Other than the split between motherhood and her desire to be a writer, what traumatizes Clara is the split between her body and mind—the complete loss of control of her body and the fear of death she experiences during pregnancy. Clara has Bette Davis read from Clara’s diary entry from July 1955, when she got pregnant with Eddie Jr.:

BETTE DAVIS. [...] Eddie doesn’t seem like the same person since he came back from Korea. And now I’m pregnant again. When I lost the baby he was thousands of miles away. All that bleeding. I’ll never forgive him. (*Movie Star* 67)

Since this short paragraph is packed with information, I will first explain the context of this writing. The baby she is pregnant with in this journal entry is Eddie Jr., her second baby. Her first pregnancy ends in a miscarriage. While she struggles with “all that bleeding” and fear of death by herself, Eddie is serving in the army in the Korean War. Clara is deeply disappointed and feels abandoned. She decides to get a divorce before Eddie returns. And when he’s back, she realizes that Eddie has changed. The romantic passion between the two is gone. But still, she gets pregnant “again.” She does not will this childbearing. It takes her by surprise. Later in the play Clara has Jean Peters repeat this feeling of unexpectedness, “After I lost the baby I stopped

writing to Eddie and decided I wanted to get a divorce when he came back from Korea. He hadn't been at Columbia long before I got pregnant again with Eddie Jr." (70). Even though she does not want to have the baby, the baby is there already.

What the paragraph I quoted above communicates is the absolute loneliness a woman feels during pregnancy, especially in a troubled one. One might think the child is the result of the love of two persons. But Clara experiences that in pregnancy and childbirth, a woman is all by herself. She remembers how she and Eddie loved and kissed in amorous joy, but the pain of pregnancy and losing the child is what she alone has to bear. The division of gender roles in society reinforces it. Clara remembers in scene 1, "When I was in the hospital all I had was a photograph of Eddie in GI Clothes standing in a woods in Korea" (*Movie Star* 67). In scene 2, Jean Peters repeats this memory for Clara:

JEAN PETERS. [...] For days there was blood on the sheets. Eddie's letters from Korea were about a green hill. He sent me photographs of himself. The Red Cross, the letter said, says I cannot call you and I cannot come. For a soldier to come home there has to be a death in the family. (73)

Clara and Eddie, in pregnancy, are as different from each other as the color of blood and the color of green, as much as the wide distance between them. She was experiencing deaths: the death of the fetus and the fear of death for herself. But it is not the kind of death that counts in the world where Eddie belongs.

Bleeding is the most prominent memory and image of pregnancy for Clara. Throughout the play Clara constantly goes back to her memory of endless bleeding she experienced during the first and, again, during the second pregnancy. The first line Bette Davis starts scene 1 with is "When I have the baby I wonder will I turn into a river of blood and die?" (*Movie Star* 64) In the

journal entry of July 1955, when she realizes her second pregnancy, she remembers the first one, “All that bleeding. [...] A virgin who was to bleed and bleed [...]” (67). In scene 2, Jean Peters keeps bleeding and Marlon Brando keeps changing the sheets for her. Jean Peters speaks for Clara, “The doctor says I have to stay in bed when I’m not at the hospital. [...] This reminds me of when Eddie was in Korea and I had the miscarriage. For days there were blood on the sheets [...]” (73). In scene 3, Clara repeats, “I am bleeding. When I’m not at the hospital I have to stay in bed.” All the while, Jean Peters is bleeding and sheets are stained with black blood.

Bleeding makes Clara fearful of death, helpless and immobile. The blood comes out of her body irrespective of her will. There is no way she can stop it. The only thing she can do is to wait and stay in bed. Her body is hers but not hers to control any more. Her mind is split from her own body. Adrienne Rich speaks of her experience similar to this:

In my own pregnancy I dealt with this waiting, this female fate, by denying every active powerful aspect of myself. I became dissociated both from my immediate, present, bodily experience and from my reading, thinking, writing life. (39)

Furthermore, the body that is split from her is in the hands of the doctor. The husband tells her, “Clara, please tell me everything the doctor said about the delivery and how many days you’ll be in the hospital” (*Movie Star* 68). At this, Clara becomes silent. From the hands of the doctors and then into the charge of the husband, the bleeding renders Clara simply as a maternal body and an object that has to be examined and taken care of by the males. Adrienne Rich, who wrote *Of Woman Born* in the early 1970s at about the same time as Kennedy wrote *A Movie Star*, witnesses the U.S. medical environment, which alienated women from their bodies due to the male-dominated medical system at the time. She states:

We were, above all, in the hands of male medical technology. The hierarchical atmosphere of the hospital, the definition of childbirth as a medical emergency, the fragmentation of body from mind, were the environment in which we gave birth [...]
(Rich 176)

Kennedy powerfully captures through haunting repetition and staged images the social alienation and the split of body and mind during pregnancy. McDonough also notes:

Thus, for Clara, the fear of childbirth is accompanied by a growing sense that she has lost control of her life. [...] But this loss of control is not only due to cultural mandates; it is also grounded in the physical realities of pregnancy. (62)

In her argument, she divides the physical realities of pregnancy from the cultural environment. I argue, however, that the physical realities, while Clara's experience of them is unique to her own body, are also contextualized in the cultural and social environment. As I have maintained above, the embarrassment, due to the mind-body split during pregnancy, is accentuated by the medical environment's alienation of women from the process. Also, the alienation from society and her own body, which women experience during pregnancy and childbirth, is mostly left in silence since the narrative and discourse of motherhood and pregnancy available in patriarchal society do not provide space for it. Kennedy demonstrates this concept in Clara's silence when faced with her husband's and other social demands upon her maternal body. However, by having Clara write this in her autobiography, Kennedy simultaneously exposes this social oppression, and gives voice to the silenced mother's body.

Although pregnancy and childrearing bring many difficulties to her pursuit of her dreams and ambitions, reversely, it also propels her to focus more on her desire to write. My analysis is given support by Kennedy's autobiography. In *People Who Led to My Plays*, Kennedy talks

about her experience of pregnancy on which she bases *A Movie Star*. The pregnancy and childrearing made her wait and be away from the part of the society she wanted to belong to, but exactly because of that she became more aware of what she wanted to be and do. It is when she got pregnant with her first son that she remembered and realized her long-time desire to be a writer. She turned the coerced solitary behavior of motherhood into an opportunity to discover herself. Because of the split she experienced, she also began to become aware of the discrepancy between the meaning of wifhood and motherhood she uncritically accepted and her real experience of them, which she was not prepared to face. This discrepancy and the fear of being erased accelerate her desire to write about her family, her origin, and herself. Of her first years of marriage and her first son, Kennedy writes:

My son Joe:

Caring for him in dark winter twilight hours or on long summer days by its solitary nature helped me to become perhaps more myself than I had ever been. [...] My husband had an immense study-and-work schedule and we were in this strange new city of New York. All of this, because it left me more on my own than I'd ever been before, caused my mind to leap and tumble in many chasms, good and bad. [...] For the first time, at age twenty-four, I wondered how I fit in—anywhere. (*People* 82)

Like Kennedy, Clara is left alone with Eddie Jr., but this loneliness paradoxically affirms her longing to fit in, her desire to write, “While Eddie Jr. plays outside I read Edith Wharton, a book on Egypt and Chinua Achebe. LeRoi Jones, Ted Joans and Allen Ginsburg are reading in the Village” (*Movie Star* 64). When her husband silences her, she writes through Bette Davis and Jean Peters what she really wants to tell him.

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

(Instead of CLARA, BETTE DAVIS replies. PAUL HEINREID is oblivious of him.)

BETTE DAVIS. *(Very remote.)* I get very jealous of you, Eddie. You're doing something with your life.

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

BETTE DAVIS. *(To Eddie.)* Eddie, do you think I have floating anxiety? You said everyone in Korea had floating anxiety. I think I might have it.

(Pause) Do you think I'm catatonic? (68)

After Eddie leaves, Clara regains her voice and says (or reads from her diary), "[...] I'm writing a lot of my play, I don't want to show it to anyone though. Suppose it's not good." Then she continues to read her play, excerpted from *The Owl Answers*, Kennedy's own play written during her second pregnancy in Ghana. Like Clara, she had a difficult time bleeding, but she turned her ordeal into a play:

The owls and myself:

[...] I was pregnant again. And there were difficulties. I had to stay in bed for a week, as I bled. I listened to the owl sounds, afraid. In a few months, I would create a character who would turn into an owl. *(People 122)*

Bleeding, loneliness (Kennedy writes in her autobiography that her second pregnancy was the loneliest time since she could not accompany her husband due to a difficult pregnancy), the fear of death, this mysterious bird and an identity crisis are all fused into one image, that is an owl

which, according to Carol Dawn Allen in *Peculiar Passages: Black Women Playwrights from 1975 to 2000*, symbolizes “a black woman on the verge of metamorphosis” (121). The end result is a play, a work of creativity. Thus Kennedy, when she recollects her experience of pregnancy and playwriting in “On the Writing of *Funnyhouse of a Negro*,” finds the connection between the two:

So trying (for the first time in my life) to comb my unstraightened hair, trying to out race the birth of my child, rereading the divorce news letters from my mother...in July Italian summer mornings, alone in the miniature room, near the Roman Forum, I finished *Funnyhouse of a Negro* the last week of July 1961. Our son Adam was born August 1. (28)

Kennedy’s Clara reflects this as well. She turns the silence of motherhood into writing, as I have quoted above and in the following quote as well:

CLARA: I am bleeding. When I’m not at the hospital I have to stay in bed. I am writing my poems. [...] (*Movie Star* 74)

Toward the end of *A Movie Star*, the play Clara is writing is finished more and more.

Julia Kristeva, in “Women’s Time,” calls pregnancy “this fundamental challenge to identity.” She asserts:

Pregnancy is a dramatic ordeal: a splitting of the body, the division and coexistence of self and other, of nature and awareness, of physiology and speech. [...] It is rather a slow, difficult, and delightful process of becoming attentive, tender, and self-effacing. If maternity is to be guilt-free, this journey needs to be undertaken *without masochism* and *without annihilating one’s affective, intellectual, and professional personality*,

either. In this way, maternity becomes a true *creative act*, something that we have not yet been able to imagine. (366, *emphasis mine*)

Kristeva acknowledges that pregnancy is a process with pain and joy and that it is an inescapable condition of motherhood. At the same time, she criticizes the masochism and self-annihilation, which the discourse of motherhood in the patriarchal society demands of women. Thus, she suggests the necessity and possibility of a new discourse of motherhood that would not repress the selfhood of the mother but support the creativity motherhood reinforces in women. Kennedy demonstrates through Clara the tremendous effort a woman must make to stay awake to preserve and develop her selfhood. Clara does not stop. “I’m terribly tired, trying to do a page a day, yet my play is coming together” (64). Writing plays and poems, Clara survives the split and alienation of motherhood, turning her experiences of pregnancy into a creative act.

“My mother cried in my arms...I thought both of us were going to fall headlong down the steps.”

A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White begins with Clara’s question: “Each day I wonder with what or with whom can I co-exist in a true union?” (64). And the play ends with her mother crying in her arms, while Shelley Winters is drowning in water “silently [crying] for help” (75). Thus, Clara’s union with the mother is not a supportive one which could bring peace to Clara’s uneasy mind but a depressive one that makes her feel as if she’s falling headlong down or drowning in water just as Shelley Winter does in *A Place in the Sun*. This last stage picture suggests the uneasy relationship a daughter has with her mother—the inseparable identification between the two brings heaviness to her heart that she has to remove in order to save her life.

Julia Kristeva writes in “Stabat Mater” of the reunion with her mother she experienced in her childbirth:

Recovered childhood, dreamed peace restored, in sparks, flash of cells, instants of laughter, smiles in the blackness of dreams, at night, opaque joy that roots me in her bed, my mother’s, and projects him, a son, a butterfly soaking up dew from her hand, there, nearby, in the night. Alone: she, I, and him. (320)

In the previous part of this chapter, I discussed the necessity of symbolical matricide for a child to develop into autonomy and to move into the realm of language. For a woman, her own pregnancy and childbirth opens an opportunity to be reminded of the love and identification she once had with her own mother. She was the body that held her once just as she is holding her baby in her; she was the first love that supported and enclosed her just as she loves her child now. In this new and intense experience of having a child, her mother is the only one she can turn to for support and wisdom. Kennedy, too, reconnects Clara to her mother through pregnancy. But she reveals a much more complicated nature of the relationship a daughter has with her mother, which Kristeva’s somewhat nostalgic reunion with the mother does not explain.

In Scene 1, when Clara finds herself pregnant, she identifies with her mother. Bette Davis speaks for Clara, “When I have the baby I wonder will I turn into a river of blood and die? My mother almost died when I was born” (*Movie Star* 64). Clara’s identification with her mother is based on her fear of death as a possible outcome of her troubled pregnancy, not through the delightful repletion of love. By identifying with her mother, Clara hopes to understand the nature of the strange, unknowable phenomenon in her body. Her mother survived her childbirth, so she might survive, too. However, her hopeful identification with her mother comes with her self-awareness as a failed daughter. Bette Davis continues, “I’ve always felt sad that I couldn’t have

been an angel of mercy to my father and mother and saved them from their torment” (64). Her longing to be identified with her mother is complicated by the heaviness of her duty as a daughter. Thus, what the Columbia Pictures Lady first sets up in the prologue about the current relationship with Clara and her mother becomes all the more significant:

COMLUMBIA PICTURES LADY. [...] Lately I think often of killing myself. Eddie Jr. plays outside in the playground. I’m very lonely...Met Lee Strasberg: the members of the playwrights units were invited to watch his scene. Geraldine Page, Rip Torn and Norman Mailer were there....I wonder why I lie so much to my mother about how I feel...” (64)

From the beginning of the play, Kennedy sets up a complicated relationship between Clara and her mother mixed with yearning and distancing, identification and estrangement. In spite of this complication, Scene 1 reveals Clara’s yearning to know and identify with her mother by seamlessly weaving her mother’s scrapbook and Clara’s journals into one. It traces her mother’s past—the racism she experienced during the 1920s in Georgia, how she met her husband and how she set out on a journey of marriage³⁹ with hope for a better future—and Clara’s present—her traumatic experience of pregnancy and her disillusionment of marriage; hers is falling apart just like her parents.’ The stories of the two women flow one after another as if they are one.

BETTE DAVIS. [...] He used to tell my mother his dreams how he was going to go up north. There was opportunity for Negroes up north and when he was finished at Morehouse he was going to get a job in someplace like New York.

³⁹ I believe there is a connection between marriage and journey in Kennedy’s thoughts. In *People*, Kennedy often speaks of marriage, linking it with travel or journey. For example, she writes under the heading of “My husband and a journey.” “We’ll go to New York and live when we marry,” he said. “I realized that would be a journey.” (73)

And she said when she walked down the road with my father people were
so friendly.

[...]

Seven more months and the baby.

Eddie and I don't talk too much these days.

Very often I try to be in bed by the time he comes home. (66-7)

“Seven more months and the baby” here serves as the bridge between the mother’s story and Clara’s. It is ambiguous whose baby the line refers to. Once more, the pregnancy links the mother and Clara.

In scene 2, Kennedy shows what is at the core of the conflict Clara, the daughter, has with her mother, which is a central theme in women’s autobiography. First is the mother’s guilt toward her children. Clara’s mother feels guilty for her children’s misfortunes. She thinks it is her fault that Clara lost her first baby. Clara has Jean Peters speak for her, “My mother always said that she felt if she and my father hadn’t been fighting so much maybe I wouldn’t have lost the baby” (70). Then, in an enacted bit, Clara’s mother deplors that she may be responsible for her children’s unhappiness: her son in a coma due to a car accident and her daughter in a troubled marriage:

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

CLARA. What do you mean?

MOTHER. I don’t know what I did to make my children so unhappy. (71)

Adrienne Rich illuminates this mother’s guilt:

I know now [...] that among the tangle of feelings between us, in that crucial yet unreal meeting, was her guilt. Soon I would begin to understand the full weight and

burden of maternal guilt, that daily, nightly, hourly, *Am I doing what is right? Am I doing enough?* The institution of motherhood finds all mothers more or less guilty of having failed their children. (223)

Because the responsibility to raise the children into perfection according to the social ideals is mostly put upon the mother, she is prone to guilt for whatever misfortunes her children go through. It does not matter how hard she has worked to give her children the best she can give. Clara's mother, too, feels she is responsible. This guilt somehow makes Clara lie to her mother, "I'm not unhappy. I'm very happy" (*Movie Star 71*). She does not talk about the sleepless nights or headaches or the dread she feels when Eddie comes to her every evening before dark. Perhaps because of her duty as a good daughter, perhaps because she still hopes to be an angel that saves her parents from sadness, perhaps because she can feel the pain her mother feels because they are so alike, she lies to her mother.

Then the second conflict arrives. Clara's mother, still caught in the traditional ideology of gender roles, does not understand her daughter's desire to have a creative career. She turns deaf to her daughter's utmost dream to become a writer:

CLARA. I'm not unhappy. I'm very happy. I just want to be a writer. Please don't think I'm unhappy.

MOTHER. Your family's not together and you don't seem happy. (*They sit and read.*)

CLARA. I'm very happy Very. I've just won an award and I'm going to have a play produced. I'm very happy.

(*Silence. The MOTHER straightens the sheet on her son's bed.*)

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

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

MOTHER. I just pray you'll soon get yourself together and make some decisions about your life. I pray for you every night. Shouldn't you go back to Eddie especially since you're pregnant? (*Movie Star 71*)

Rather than give Clara the support she needs, the mother becomes the voice in her head that discourages her pursuit of her dream. For the mother, the only solution to Clara's problem is to go back to her husband, fulfilling her duty as his wife, conforming to the socially acknowledged familial values. It is all the more disheartening for Clara since she has to fight against her own fear and hesitation in breaking away from the traditional values, which she herself once believed in. Clara has Jean Peters exclaim for her, "Depressed," and then again repeat, "Very depressed [...]" (71-2). However, it turns out that her mother is the one who would come to her with the greatest empathy when Clara is in her deepest loneliness and pain. In Scene 3, Clara writes in her diary—or writes, as an enactment of the past, how she wrote in her diary --about how her mother came to her right away the moment she heard about her divorce:

CLARA. (*To diary*) The last week in March I called up my mother and I told her that Eddie and I were getting a divorce and I wanted to come to Cleveland right away.

She said I'm coming up there.

When, I said. When?

[...]

I'll take the train tonight. I'll call you from the station.

[...]

When she got out of the taxi I will never forget the expression on her face.

Her face had a hundred lines in it. I'd never seen her look so sad. (76)

Although her mother can be cruel with her lack of understanding for Clara's need for self-establishment away from her husband, she is also the one who would run in a breath to be there for her. She is the one who would embrace Clara's sadness with hers, a sadness that is even greater than Clara's.

The third factor that silences Clara when she is with her mother is Wally, her brother, who is in a coma resulting from a car accident. Throughout the play, Wally's coma and Clara's depression from a troubled pregnancy and difficult marriage are juxtaposed and paralleled. Clara's immobility, her split between mind and body and her depressive silence, find their expression in Wally's physical state. Clara's "I'm bleeding" echoes in Wally's heavy and sad body fixed in bed: "The doctor says I have to stay in bed" (*Movie Star* 70, 73) overlaps with "The doctor says [...] his brain is damaged" (72, 77). Since this overlapping repeats throughout the play, when Clara says, in the last moment of the play, "The doctor said today that my brother will live; he will be brain damaged and paralyzed" (77), it almost describes Clara's psychological state. She is also damaged and paralyzed by both racism and sexism; her struggle to realize her dream to be a writer is refuted because of her gender and race.⁴⁰ When her pain is as hurtful as Wally's coma, it is always "sidelined:"

⁴⁰ Although I do not deal with Wally's coma in depth since my focus this chapter focuses on motherhood, Wally's car accident and his coma, as its consequence, constitute a significant part of this play. Clara comes back to Cleveland because of Wally's accident. The play begins with the news that Wally is in coma and reveals layer by layer how his promising youth was destructed by the racism. Clara's depressive psychic state and bleeding is associated with Wally's immobility and split of body and mind. Through this connection, the psychological damage and the broken dreams by the violent racism, which Wally's body represents, become Clara's as well.

The mother, father, husband, and Clara see and discuss Wally's automobile accident and psychologically damaging experiences with racism while Clara's embodied female experiences are sidelined, occurring in the privacy of a bedroom and unremarked upon by the real people in her life. (McDonough 68)

The mother, believing that her daughter will be happy again only if she goes back to her husband—that is the decision she should make about her life—does not hear Clara's words, "Mother, Eddie doesn't understand me" (*Movie Star* 71). The mother does not answer. There's only silence from her. The center of the mother's attention is always Wally. While the dialogue between her mother and Clara I quoted above continues, the mother either holds Wally's hand or straightens his bed sheets. Perhaps she does not even look at Clara as she talks to her. Adrienne Rich affirms what we—all daughters in the patriarchal society—know instinctively, "In a society riddled with sanction against women, a mother may instinctively place more value—let us say more hope—on a son [...]" (195). Clara, as a daughter, has to step aside from the center of the mother's love for her brother Wally. However, Clara is the one her mother turns to when her own marriage is breaking apart and when she cries for the pain of losing her "baby."

(FATHER enters the room, stands at the foot of his son's bed. [...] He has been drinking. The moment he enters the room the mother takes out a cigarette and starts to nervously smoke. They do not look at each other. [...] They all remain for a long while silent.

Suddenly the MOTHER goes and throws herself into her daughter's arms and cries.)

MOTHER. The doctor said he doesn't see how Wally has much of a chance of surviving: his brain is damaged.

(She clings to her daughter and cries. [...]) (Movie Star 72)

The weight of the mother clinging to her is so heavy that Clara feels “both of [them] were going to fall headlong down the steps” (78), but she cannot push her away. Who could understand better the pain of losing her baby than Clara, who also once lost her baby?

The relationship of a daughter to her mother, as portrayed in *A Movie Star*, is messy. It is like an indefinite swamp intermingled with love, bitterness, and other inexpressible contradicting emotions. Not only for Kennedy but for many other women writers, the relationship with mother is an important theme, especially in their autobiographical writings. Gudmundsdóttir, in his study of women writers’ autobiographies, concludes:

Writing an autobiography is in one sense to give birth to yourself, your story. It renders the mother’s role obsolete and therefore symbolically kills her off. Most of the writers discussed here talk about the mother in terms of denial of desire and as an obstacle on their way to become writers. [...] Admitting to the violence of this strong relationship, often depicted in bodily images and metaphors, usually leads to an attempt at getting rid of the mother. (122)

He also suggests that this attempt at eliminating the mother leads the writers to write the mother’s biography as a part of their autobiographies, thereby, “to give birth to the mother, to be finally in control of their relationship, not to be the ‘good girl’ and behave, but make it behave” (128). Meanwhile, Tess Cosslett also examines how women writers reconstruct their mothers’ stories in their autobiographies. She marvels at “mother’s unknowability”(141) detected in these texts. She concludes that the feminist narrative of the mother has progressed “from matrophobia, to speaking for the mother, to allowing her irreducible difference and mystery” (151). She argues that even though the mother in women’s autobiographical writings is left with an “unknowable

subjectivity,” the writers are nonetheless empowered and helped by the matrilineal lineage they construct. In *Movie Star*, Clara attempts to reconstruct her mother through the stories she was told and found in her mother’s scrapbook. She looks for the source of self-affirmation by finding what is like her, by being in union with the mother. The mother in reality, however, is unreachable and ungraspable. The relationship is full of contradictions, just as Gudmundsdóttir describes, “The emotions of love and hate are characterized by need and repulsion, moving constantly between identification and alienation” (125). In this term, the way Kennedy dramatizes Clara’s autobiographical writing looks similar to those examined by Gudmundsdóttir and Cosslett. But Kennedy is different in that she does not give definite conclusion to Clara’s relationship with her mother. Clara does not and cannot get rid of her mother. She does not succeed in “re”constructing a narrative of her mother. She is not empowered by it either. She is rather tied to the ambiguous and violent relationship with her mother, neither identified with nor alienated from her completely. It is a condition of life Clara cannot escape. What Kennedy allows her heroine is, instead, the ability to survive. And that entails ‘not to stop writing.’

Creating my own mother, giving birth to myself

The stage direction repeatedly dictates that Clara is writing either in her diary or in a notebook. She writes when she resigns to silence in front of her husband or her mother. Then, her movie stars speak for her, with her. Or rather, Clara speaks through the figures of the movie stars. Her imaginary dialogue that the Hollywood movie stars speak allows her to find her way through the heartbreaking events in her life. Writing enables her to penetrate the silver screen and to morph the differences of skin color into the bodies of the movie stars like osmosis. Clara makes the qualities she admires in Bette Davis her own, she imagines the power she desires to have and

projects it onto the figure of Jean Peters, and she imagines the worst ending of her story through the figure of Shelley Winters yet avoids it by having Winters enact it instead of herself. When her mother cannot give her the support and sympathy she needs in order to overcome the depressive social condition as a creative and intelligent black woman, Clara creates mothers for herself, thereby making it possible to survive.

Bette Davis must be Kennedy's favorite Hollywood actress. In *People Who Led to My Plays* she repeatedly records the impression the actress made on her from her childhood to adult life. In the "Junior High" part, Kennedy writes:

Paul Heinreid and Bette Davis and Now Voyage:

The idea of going on an ocean journey and becoming transformed by it caught fire in my mind when I saw *Now, Voyager*. [...]

Bette Davis:

The heroines in her movies were reflective and independent and had opinions. They also dressed beautifully and were adored by men. I wanted to be like that. (*People* 47)

The idea of journey and transformation and Bette Davis' admirable quality as an independent woman are all invoked in scene 1 of *A Movie Star*. Kennedy weaves together the ocean liner scene from the movie, the beginning of the journey of transformation and the relationship of Bette Davis' and Paul Heinreid's characters—her mother's meeting with her father and the beginning of their relationship—and the beginning of Clara's marriage. The stories of all three women are enmeshed in imagined identification. It is true that Clara imagines herself as "a bit role," thereby placing herself in the shadow of Bette Davis and her mother. What is important, however, is that even though Clara stays silent most of the time, she speaks through Bette Davis:

Clara does not speak Bette Davis' lines from the movie, but Bette Davis speaks what Clara writes.

In the stage direction, Kennedy writes:

[...] [Clara] *has a passive beauty and is totally preoccupied. She pays no attention to anyone, only writing in a notebook. Her movie stars speak for her. CLARA lets her stars star in her life. (Movie Star 68)*

However, by having her movie stars affirm her thoughts by speaking them aloud, Clara “makes” rather than “lets” them star in her life (Singh 171). Clara clothes herself with the spiritual/psychic forces she admires in Bette Davis—the “strong, independent, outspoken, successful, and glamorous career woman” (McDonough 64)— in order to give herself the necessary distance from which to narrate her mother’s life without completely losing herself to the all-absorbing relationship. Imbibing Bette Davis’ outspokenness as hers, she can also voice her “jealousy” toward her husband:

(Instead of CLARA, BETTE DAVIS replies. [...])

BETTE DAVIS. *(Very remote.)* I get very jealous of you, Eddie. You’re doing something with your life.

(He tries to kiss CLARA. She moves away and walks along the deck and writes in notebook.) (Movie Star 68)

By writing, Clara can acknowledge what otherwise would be lost in silence.

In Scene 2, Clara finds another feminine inspiration in Jean Peters. While Clara’s mother looks away from her psychical and physical pain, Clara finds in Jean Peters profound sympathy but also the irrepressible power of creativity. The dialogue between Clara and her mother in which the mother urges her to go back to her husband overlaps with Jean Peters and Marlon Brando enacting the wedding night scene in *Viva Zapata*.

[...] BRANDO and PETERS star in a dazzling wedding night light. Mexican peasant wedding music, Zapata remains throughout compassionate, heroic, tender. While CLARA and her MOTHER talk BRANDO and PETERS sit on the bed, then enact the Zapata teach-me-to read scene in which BRANDO asks PETERS to get him a book and teach him to read. (Movie Star 71)

Just as her mother advises her to sacrifice her dreams, Jean Peters, in the enacted scene, plays the role of supporter for the male hero's accomplishment. McDonough observes that "Clara finds herself more like Jean Peters' character [...] forced into sacrificing herself for marriage and becoming the mother/caretaker to her husband, whose actions are the real focus of the film" (64). Though I agree with her partly, my reading differs from hers in that I argue that even though Clara finds certain comforting identification in Jean Peters' subservient position in her marriage to Zapata, she overturns Peters' relationship with Brando in a different way than the movie by having her keep bleeding. Clara's Jean Peters bleeds like Clara. She is the bride who bleeds on the wedding night, as Clara calls herself "a virgin who was to bleed and bleed..." (Movie Star 67). Just as Clara kept bleeding during pregnancy, Jean Peters bleeds. This bleeding connects Jean Peters and Clara as women who share similar destinies. And in Clara's writing, even though bleeding still symbolizes the physical and psychical pain that accompanies pregnancy, Jean Peters' bleeding turns into a form of resistance to the rigid male-centeredness in the society. If McDonough's interpretation is right, the teach-me-to-read scene symbolizes the woman's subjugation to male ego. But the bleeding continues: it becomes a loud declaration of her existence, which resists negation, and a powerful affirmation of the size of pain Clara experiences. Her bleeding manifests in a concrete visible form Clara's depression, which in reality she has to endure all by herself. In her bleeding, Jean Peters repeats "I'm depressed," echoing and

amplifying Clara's physical and psychological pain. Furthermore, her bleeding symbolizes Clara's continuous writing; her bleeding turns into a play.⁴¹

JEAN PETERS. Very depressed, and afraid at night since Eddie and I separated. I try to write a page a day on another play. It's going to be called a Lesson In Dead Language. The main image is a girl in a white organdy dress covered with menstrual blood. (72)

And I argued in the previous chapter that the Pupils' bleeding in *Lesson in Dead Language* symbolizes the girls' resistance to the hegemonic discourses of women's body, especially of bleeding. Thus, Clara writes on Jean Peters—in whom Kennedy saw “an ideal of feminine beauty” (Kennedy, *People* 97)—not only the heavy sadness she experiences as a woman but also the embodiment of the desire for self-affirmation and creativity, which the patriarchal family values cannot repress.

Shelley Winters, in *A Place in the Sun*, represents a woman deserted by her lover/husband, a woman to whom pregnancy/motherhood is a curse, and a woman whom nobody listens to when she cries out for help. Clara associates herself and her mother with all three of the facets Winters represents. On the stage, it is more clearly shown. In the last part of scene 3, Shelly Winters appears on a dark boat, which Montgomery Clift rows, as Clara is crying. Then Clara and Winters speak together, thereby solidifying their identification, about Wally's despairing condition. Then, suddenly Shelley Winters falls into the water. Simultaneously, Clara's mother cries in her arms, and Clara feels like she and her mother are “going to fall headlong down” (*Movie Star* 78).. The three women's lives converge at this moment. However, it is neither her

⁴¹ Debora Geis also points out, “[the] powerful association Kennedy establishes between bleeding and artistic creation.” She asserts, “The ink like the blood, is black—a source of pain in the sense that Clara/Kennedy is “writing her wounds,” but a source of power in the sense that she is creating in black, something that comes from inside of her” (“Spectator” 177).

mother nor Clara who drowns but Shelley Winters. By writing the killing of the failed woman or witnessing the death of the woman who failed to establish an independent self-esteem, Clara could avoid killing her mother off or killing herself.⁴²

As I stated above, Clara writes in a notebook or diary throughout the play. What the audience sees on the stage is what Clara writes in the moment, in other words, what is in the process of happening in her mind as she writes. For example, in scene 1, it is Bette Davis who does all the speaking. But what she speaks is not the dialogue from her movie. She speaks as Clara of Clara's life. Then, in the middle of the scene, the light falls on Clara finally, revealing Clara "writing in her notebook" (*Movie Star* 68). Even though Clara did not appear from the beginning of the scene, it has been Clara all along who has been writing Bette Davis' dialogue. She is Clara but, while she is writing, she is Bette Davis as well. *Movie Star*, in this sense, embodies Kennedy's writing process. It shows the unique space Kennedy enters when she writes. It is neither reality nor pure fantasy. It is a liminal or threshold space, an in-between, where the boundaries are blurred and the manifolds of realities coexist. And this space resembles what Cixous and Anzaldúa envision as the space, which writing opens—especially the body-writing. I will explore Kennedy's particular writing process, which she suggests as her and her character Clara's survival tool against the sexism and the racism that silence her desire to be a writer, in dialogue with Cixous and Anzaldúa for the rest of the chapter.

First of all, the identities are imagined to be multiple and fluid in this space of writing. Clara is Bette Davis, Jean Peters and Shelley Winters, in turns and at the same time. While Clara

⁴² Philip Kolin reaches a similar conclusion. Quoting Marc Robinson, he states: "Yet, according to Marc Robinson, *Movie Star* ends on a very positive note that expresses Kennedy's victorious survival: 'By writing an image of herself writing, Kennedy...insists on the permanence and hard reality of her own vocation—the only stable aspect of a continuously mutating play.' [...] Clara [...] is alive at the end to create the works that she has inscribed in *Movie Star*. It is Shelley Winters who drowns" (115).

writes her story through the personae of these movie stars, she *is* these women, these women are her. Thus the cultural and social dualistic system that defines racial identity between black and white is blurred and negated. Clara, in this space of writing, is both black—the child of the black parents inheriting the history of the black people in the U.S.—and white—the lover of the Hollywood movie that once embraced her with all the feminine beauty and power she imagined to be hers as a child. This boundary between white and black is arbitrary from the beginning as the dialogue between her mother and father reveals:

MOTHER. (*In a hallway she breaks down further.*) I have never wanted to go back to the south to live. I hate it. I suffered nothing but humiliation and why should I have gone back there?

FATHER. You ought to have gone back with me. It's what I wanted to do.

MOTHER. I never wanted to go back.

FATHER. You yellow bastard. You're a yellow bastard. That's why you didn't want to go back.

MOTHER. You black nigger. (*Movie Star 73*)

To draw a line between black and white is impossible. To say who is black or white or yellow only reveals the artificiality of this boundary. Clara's writing reveals this by her constant fluid transformations through different identities. In her writing the borders are crossed and liquidated. It resembles the borderland or *nepantla* Gloria Anzaldúa speaks of as the space which writing opens for multiple identities. In an interview, she affirms:

I think the identity is relational, that it exists in relation to some Other. And so it's always in this in-between zone, the *nepantla* or the borderland. And that in being in this in-between zone it's saying your fixed categories are permeable. There are aspects

that overlap, that break down the categories, through osmosis or through some kind of very elusive, being-in-two-or-three-places-at-once kind of metaphor. (12)

In the space Clara opens with writing, she occupies multiple subject positions at the same time, permeating through the skin of the others like osmosis. It is a space of metamorphosis and transformation.

Ultimately, the fluid metamorphosis through writing enables Clara to invent herself. Clara does not rely on her mother entirely for her affirmation and establishment of selfhood, even though she does attempt to find her origin in her mother's story. In those places where she realizes she cannot expect her mother to provide her what she needs, she turns to the inspirations she can conjure up from the *goddesses* she adored from childhood. She becomes her own ancestor /origin by reconstructing and rewriting the women in Hollywood movies and grafting them onto herself. It is significant, in this sense, that Kennedy connects *Movie Star* to another of her plays—*The Owl Answers* (written in 1964, and premiered in Westport, Connecticut, and in New York in 1965)—by having Clara read the play in *Movie Star*. In *The Owl Answers*, the names of the characters already demonstrate how identities overlap and shift. “SHE who is CLARA who is the VIRGIN MARY who is the BASTARD who is the OWL” looks for her “GODDAM FATHER who is the RICHEST WHITE MAN IN THE TOWN who is the DEAD WHITE FATHER who is REVEREND PASSMORE.” But Chaucer, Shakespeare, William the Conqueror and Anne Boleyn (BASTARD's BLACK MOTHER who is the REVERED's WIFE who is ANNE BOLEYN) locks her up in London Tower, accusing her of assuming a wrong identity. They ask her, “If you are his ancestor why are you a Negro?” (Kennedy, *Owl Answers* 30) Kennedy links these two plays through the similar use of multiple subject positions in one person and the character's search for her origin. However, while SHE who is CLARA finds

herself violently thrown in the chaotic battle over her identities and locked up in her identity as a black bastard woman, Clara in *Movie Star* writes the same traumatic experience into plays by writing/being her own origin—by modifying and incarnating Bette Davis, Jean Peters and Shelley Winters (which perhaps reflects the self-empowerment Kennedy acquired during the years between the two plays).

In this way, Kennedy's writing process, as demonstrated through Clara, illustrates what Cixous calls "the wonder of being several" and the "pleasure from the gift of alterability" ("Laugh" 358), or what Anzaldúa elaborates through the metaphor of *nahual*, a shaman. Anzaldúa explains "the mestiza."⁴³ The writer is "*nahual*, an agent of transformation, able to modify and shape primordial energy, therefore able to change herself and others into a turkey, coyote, tree or human" (Keating 138). The power of metamorphosis through writing extends Kennedy's writing/theatre to rituals and spirituality. Scholars of Kennedy observe this spiritual aspect in her works—especially the influence of African myths and mask rituals. Martha Gilman Bower, basing her argument on Kennedy's remarks that her play *Funnyhouse of a Negro* found its powerful images in African masks during her stay in Ghana, asserts that Kennedy's plays are "vivification of West African ritual" (182). She maintains that her plays may be interpreted "as a masking ceremony, where the uninitiated viewers bear witness to a priestess traveling through geographic and temporal space." Kennedy's writing process can be viewed in this spiritual light,

⁴³ Erika Aigner-Varoz, in "Metaphors of a Mestiza Consciousness: Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*," provides a simple yet succinct definition of mestiza and mestiza consciousness. Quoting Anzaldúa, he states: "As a mestiza (a woman of 'white, Mexican [and] Indian' descent) and a lesbian and feminist, Anzaldúa redefines *Mestizaje* through what she calls a mestiza consciousness: 'a new value system with images and symbols' that may serve to heal the split between 'white...and colored,...male and female' and the hegemonically differentiated 'us' and 'them.'" (47-8) Anna-Louise Keating states that Anzaldúa, using mestizaje consciousness, "converts simplistic binarisms between dominant and subordinate groups into complex interconnecting fields" (70). I believe Anzaldúa's concept is applicable to Kennedy's works not only because Kennedy is also a product of diverse cultural and racial inheritance but also because she too challenges and subverts the binarisms in her works.

and I argue that this approach explains well how the act of writing generates a mystical dream-like atmosphere and ultimately opens a mythical space where Clara can assume different personae fluidly and simultaneously, thereby effecting her own birth. The playwright provides a more simple yet relatable explanation in an interview:

L.O: [...] We wanted to ask you more about the transforming of characters and metamorphosis.

KENNEDY: It's back to childhood—people turning into different people, different characters, feeling that you have a lot of characters inside of you, that's just so much a part of me. I've always been like that. I always just could very easily become a character in the movies or in a book. (Interview by Bryant-Jackson and Overbeck 4)

Whether it is a spiritual world or a child's free imaginative world, I assert that the act of writing is viewed as an act of opening a space where the categories of identities are blurred and the boundaries of rigid binary systems are crossed and reversed and also where the writer can freely become the others and the others become the writer herself, leading to the writer's (re)birth and (re)naming.

Cixous suggests that this kind of writing, which allows "alterability" and multiplicity of a subject, happens when one writes through the body, "I am spacious, singing flesh, on which is grafted no one knows which I, more or less human, but alive because of transformation" ("Laugh" 358). Similarly, Anzaldúa, in her assertion of the kind of writing that imagines freely shifting and overlapping identities that negate the binary system, calls for the body writing in a sharper language, "To touch more people, the personal realities and the social must be evoked—not through rhetoric but through blood and pus and sweat" ("Speaking" 173). Kennedy also

communicates through the body—“through blood and pus and sweat” of the female body—especially in *Movie Star*. The concrete bodily experience of pregnancy and bleeding is where the alterability of multiple subject positions happens. Through her pregnant body, Clara connects with her mother, and through bleeding, she connects with Jean Peters. Her body, which is immobile and fixed, connects her with her brother as well. Thus, the body becomes the site where the multiple connections between different identities are possible, functioning like a medium between different entities.⁴⁴ Furthermore, as Kennedy finds a way to speak through these bodily sensations and phenomena unmediated by language,⁴⁵ she escapes the danger of the fixity of meaning and the oppressive power of the existent discourse of gender and race. Instead she communes with the reader/audience by evoking the bodily sensations in them. Thus, she not only writes the body of the characters but also the audience’s as well, which is similar to the Fornes dramaturgy I discussed in *Sarita* section.

Thus far, I have asserted that the act of writing presents a space of in-between and affirms the body as experiences. I have also argued that, in this kind of writing, the body functions as a medium through which the writer plays the game of infinite exchange with the others. Now I will finish this chapter by exploring, from a position informed by Gloria Anzaldúa’s theory of writing, how this kind of writing contributes to the empowerment of the marginalized group in the society which *A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White* represents.

⁴⁴ Kennedy’s *She Talks to Beethoven* is an example of the use of the body as a medium that links two “ideologically” different entities. The main character Suzanne Alexander writes Beethoven’s biography. Suzanne, an African-American woman writer, connects with the white male European composer in a space that she opens through writing. Attilio Favorini supports this reading with the observation that “[her] arm has been recently operated on, and her disability and Beethoven’s deafness make for a bond between them.” (214)

⁴⁵ McDonough supports my reading. She asserts, “*Movie Star* not only conveys racial tensions and oppressions for blacks but is also an oddity in American theater in being so fully immersed in deeply female experiences presented in all their rawness and not mediated through traditionally male-oriented structures and metaphors” (59).

Firstly, writing preserves the selfhood of the writer. By the transformation and crossing of boundaries made possible by writing, Clara affirms her desires and bodily experiences, which would have otherwise negated or been lost in silence. Anzaldúa's assertion illuminates self-preservation through writing, "I write to record what others erase when I speak, to rewrite the stories others have miswritten about me, about you, [...] to discover myself, to preserve myself, to achieve self-autonomy" ("Speaking" 169). Secondly, writing allows Clara the distance she needs from reality in order to not be powerlessly drawn into it. Clara writes about Eddie's accusation of her that she is like a spectator of her life.

CLARA. [...]

Eddie says I've become shy and secretive and I can't accept the passage of time, and that my diaries consume me and that my diaries make me a spectator watching my life like watching a black and white movie. (*Movie Star* 75)

What Eddie means is that Clara is withdrawn in her imaginary world instead of living her real life. He may not be entirely wrong. But ultimately, he does not understand Clara—how she has "secretly dreamed of being a writer" even though "[everyone] says it's unrealistic for a Negro to want to write" (75). He cannot even imagine how much effort she puts into writing and that writing her own stories equals building up her self. In Clara's autobiographic movie, she thwarts the passive position of a spectator that Eddie warns her about into a more active position of a writer through writing. He does not see that writing gives her the space from which she observes and makes sense of the oppressive reality and in which she heals and renews herself. Anzaldúa remarks, "The writing is a tool for piercing that mystery [of having to consider oneself as "other" due to internalization of the social norms that posits "white" as normal] but it also shields us, gives a margin of distance, helps us survive" ("Speaking" 169). Thirdly, writing enables Clara to

keep open the possibility of creating herself resisting the social, cultural limits. Throughout the play, Clara refuses to give in to the social and cultural restrictions imposed on her as a black woman. Indeed, the final scene of *Movie Star* is bleak. Clara's brother is in a coma, forever immobile. Jean Peters exclaims, "I am bleeding" (*Movie Star* 77). "Quite suddenly," Shelley Winters falls into water but Montgomery Clift "only stares at her" (77). And Clara feels desperate as her mother is crying in her arms, shaking so hard. In this moment, Clara splits herself into Montgomery Clift and Shelley Winters. The stage direction dictates, "SHELLEY WINTERS drowns. Light goes down on MONTGOMERY CLIFT as he stares at SHELLEY WINTERS drowning. Lights on CLARA" (78). Clara retains the clarity to divide herself from Shelley Winter's passivity and the dead end it brings to a woman. As Clara uses writing to distance herself from reality, she also maintains a distanced stance toward the destiny of the woman in this cautionary tale. By partitioning herself, Clara survives. And the part of herself that survives--that holds up the mother in her arms--will keep going and writing plays. Writing enables Clara to keep writing herself as a writer. Anzaldúa's remark in an interview illuminates this reciprocal relationship between writing and the writer:

For me as I write I create a textual self, which is different from the "me" that lives out in the world. But the textual self that I create also changes the historical "me." And so I'm kind of creating myself as I go along, mostly through writing and speaking.
(Interview 14-5)

Kennedy, in an interview in 1977, around the time *A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White*, was reported to ask a similar question that Clara asks in this play: "I always wanted to be a great writer. A lot of it came from my inability to see where I fit in. How can you be a great writer if you're a Negro girl from Cleveland?" (Dunning 51). Later in another interview in 1985,

she testifies that she writes in order to break down the barriers that categorize and segregate people:

Interviewer: Do you identify as a Black writer or a woman writer, what do you think of these labels that imply usually a program or a perspective?

Kennedy: I took up being a writer because I wanted to break through barriers. I never wanted to identify totally with women playwrights or Black playwrights or anybody. [...] I think theater is segregated enough. (Interview by Binder 108)

Movie Star dramatizes Kennedy's writing process, which is a means to figure out her identities and yet to create ones for herself, "breaking through the barriers." Kennedy's Clara survives the harsh reality of racism and sexism through writing just as Kennedy asserts in an interview, "I feel that white America is against me in a struggle to take away my birthright. [...] My only salvation is to write" (Blumenthal C13).

5.0 CONCLUSION

In the previous chapters I have investigated the works of two avant-garde female playwrights, Adrienne Kennedy and Maria Irene Fornes, with specific focus on the female characters' act of reading and writing on the stage. Usually, the act of reading and writing is considered to be a passive static action on the stage, but in Fornes' and Kennedy's plays, it is an effective plot device and an active action for the female characters to form their identities and affirm their subjectivity. Furthermore, in the two dramatists' plays, the act of reading and writing is inseparable from the characters' bodily experiences and sensations, in spite of the fact that reading and writing is usually considered as an intellectual process rather than a physical one. Thus, I have explored in my close reading of the two playwrights' plays how the bodily engaged reading and writing is dramatized on the stage in ways to reveal the characters' desire for self-knowledge and self-affirmation in the social and political context in which they are circumscribed.

In my selection of the plays to be investigated, I chose Maria Irene Fornes' *Mud*, *The Conduct of Life*, *Abingdon Square*, and *Sarita* because these plays show most prominently Fornes' female characters who seriously engage themselves with the act of reading and writing in their struggle to know and express themselves. *Abingdon Square* and *Sarita* have drawn relatively less academic interests, but I selected them because they show how the act of writing and women's knowledge of their sexuality have mutual effect on each other. Among Adrienne

Kennedy's plays, I chose *Lesson in Dead Language*, *June and Jean in Concert*, and *A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White*. Although her earlier plays such as *Funnyhouse of a Negro* are better known than these plays, I chose them because they reflect Kennedy's more mature understanding of the importance of writing for her self-achievement and because even though these plays have drawn less academic interests their experimental narrative structures as a device to inscribe and affirm black women's embodied experience are worth investigating.

In my analysis of Fornos' and Kennedy's plays, I used the feminist poststructuralist psychoanalytic theory as the theoretical paradigm to illuminate the topic of this dissertation. Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva were especially of use to my study since they claimed the significance of women's bodily experiences in relation to language. Cixous was especially enlightening with her strong encouragement for women to write their bodies, and with her assertion of plurality and fluidity of identities. Kristeva provided me with critical terms with which to investigate the feminine sexuality represented in Fornos' and Kennedy's plays. She was also helpful for this study with her linguistic theory that the body is already inscribed in language because language consists of the *semiotic*—the bodily drives manifested as rhythm, intonation and breathing--and the *symbolic*—syntax and semantic which enable a stable communication, and that the signifying process is a constant oscillation between these two, therefore, language and the subject of language are heterogeneous.

In my analysis of the act of reading dramatized in Fornos' *Mud*, *The Conduct of Life*, *Abingdon Square* and *Sarita*, I have shown that Fornos often suggests that there are two kinds of attitudes toward language/a text: one is to blindly accept it for its literal meaning, and the other is to experience it with the whole body. Through Henry in *Mud*, and Leticia in *The Conduct of Life*, Fornos demonstrates that when a reader reads a text without engaging her body, the text does not

become her own words. It neither brings substantial changes to her life and her relationship to others, nor does it lead to spiritual growth. When a reader engages her body in reading process, in other words, actively seeks the interrelatedness between her own lived experience and the meaning of the text, just as Mae in *Mud* does, the text becomes the reader's own language. Due to the performative power of language, the reader experiences concrete changes in her self-perception, and in her relationship with the others and the world. Through this process, a text is interpreted in new ways and acquires new meanings. Kennedy suggests that this process can be infinite.

My analysis of *Abingdon Square* and *Sarita* shows that Fornes stresses that writing clichéd language without questioning it is to accept the existent discourses of hegemonic ideology in the society, and, along with it, one's identity as the society designates it. Therefore, writing in this way could result in self-deception or alienation from oneself. Fornes urges the necessity of writing that comes from one's embodied experiences. As I have shown through the diary writing of Marion, the writer should depart from the rote language and set phrases in order to find language that could honestly explore and express the writer's hidden thoughts and desires. That way, the writer can encounter the surprising aspects of herself, even though they could be ugly and dangerous. That way, the writer can truly begin to mature in self-knowledge and in the ability to love others. Importantly, in Fornes' dramas, knowledge and wisdom are gained both through language and the body. And sexual experience is a crucial part of one's knowledge and sense of identity, and one's identities. In *Sarita* and *Abingdon Square*, the female characters' processes of writing and of discovering their identities coincide with sexual discovery.

Fornes demonstrates in the plays I have examined how difficult it is for women in male dominant society to write. Due to lack of education, poverty, and forced gender roles, her female

characters are deprived of the opportunities to acquire knowledge and to establish their identities in their own terms. However, when Fornes' strong-willed female characters continue their struggle to read and write against the social restrictions and their own limits, their self-image which has been imposed on them by the institutional education of the society is shattered, and there a new possibility begins. And Fornes affirms that this process should be accompanied by the realization that the reality of the body is heterogeneous and unfixed. Thus she demonstrates that knowledge and the possibility to create oneself can only result from one's earnest effort to merge language in one's embodied experiences and vice versa. This merging of language and the body gives more agency to women in Fornes' dramas.

My close reading of Kennedy's plays has shown the dramatist's view that writing is an active action to imagine and create one's identities. It is also a powerful resistance to fixed racial identities within the hegemonic discourses in the U.S. Through writing, Kennedy's female writer characters explore the meanings of their embodied experiences in ways that exceed the existent discourses. In *Lesson in Dead Language*, Kennedy seeks to subvert the institutional education on how to read a text, and how to read women's bodies, by juxtaposing it against the seven girls' embodied experience of bleeding, and against the actual phenomenon of bleeding of the girls on the stage. In *June and Jean in Concert*, writing opens up the possibility for the writer, Jean, to be connected with the voices from the past as well as from her unconscious so that she can attest her embodied experience of the past. This way, Jean is able to write black women's experiences that have been silenced and forgotten back into the hegemonic narrative of history. In *A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White*, writing preserves the aspiring playwright, Clara's, subjecthood from the environment which threatens to erase her individuality. By writing, Clara survives racist and sexist prejudice and the demands of motherhood. Kennedy suggests that writing is the means

for socially and politically marginalized groups to ascertain their autonomy to create identities and to rewrite their lived histories into the discourses that circumscribe them. Kennedy affirms that writing is a powerful tool for survival.

My analysis has shown that Kennedy suggests that the reality of the body escapes/exceeds the meaning which the hegemonic discourses designate to it. Kennedy's unique strategy is to avoid giving a definite name to it, but to emphasize its meaningfulness by inscribing it in the innovative theatrical language such as repetition, use of music and visual elements, and, especially, experimental narrative structures. In *A Lesson in Dead Language*, Kennedy intentionally fragmented the narratives so that the meanings are ambiguous. In this way, Kennedy exposes the arbitrariness of the premise of the White Dog (the teacher)'s stories. Thereby, Kennedy emphasizes the undeniable reality of the girls' bleeding which subverts the White Dog's discourse. In *June and Jean in Concert*, Kennedy manipulates the narrative temporality, by which she reproduces the physical sensations of the act of remembering. She also foregrounds the girls' lived experiences against the authoritative versions of chronological history that stresses Black Nationalism.

In Kennedy's plays, writing opens up a space in which the writer can experiment with and assume many different identities, and occupy multiple subject positions simultaneously. This process is both imaginary and real—real in the sense that it has concrete effects on the writer's perception and establishment of her identities. In this real yet imaginary process, the body serves as a medium through which the writer experiences the others' identities. In Kennedy's writing, identification is a fluid and free process just as a child imagines herself to be any person she wishes to be. In the space the writing opens, the writer experiences the others' experiences using her bodily sensations and embodied experiences. In the identification process Kennedy envisions

through the act of writing, the boundaries between white and black, between cultures, and between different times, become blurred and crossed. The body in Kennedy's plays is the source for creative imagination and for the writing that does not oppress the others.

My investigation of Fornes' and Kennedy's plays was limited by my lack of experience in American culture due to my personal background as a Korean woman. Especially, the pop culture of the 1940s and 50s constitutes Kennedy's dramatic world in a significant way. My analysis of the effect of the use of movies and songs heavily relied on my intellectual research, rather than natural invocation of emotions that would happen with the American audience. Also, because of my geographical location in Seoul, Korea during the writing of this dissertation, I did not have access to the video recordings of the performances of the plays of my investigation. I am fully aware that the play script is completed when it is performed on the stage. Thus, to compensate my lack of access to audiovisual materials, I consulted reviews of the first productions of the plays as much as possible.

My study suggests that Julia Kristeva's and Hélène Cixous' theories can be applied to plays that explore the themes of women's sexuality, subjectivity and language. Although their theories are often criticized for the danger of essentialism, they are nonetheless effective tools to explicate the writer's process which ideally merges language and bodily experience in a conscious effort to discover and create identities. These theorists acknowledge the meaningfulness of women's embodied experiences. Fornes' and Kennedy's plays often illustrate the two theorists' views, but also supplement and correct them. Their plays demonstrate that women's bodies are always located in specific social contexts of class, race and gender, showing that the issue of women's bodies cannot be dealt with in general terms. Kennedy and Fornes create on the stage embodied expression of what the two theorists discuss.

In the process of this research, I realized that it was also my intention to find a possibility for a model of writing that could supplement the traditional model of writing which is taught in many playwriting classes. Because I am speaking from my personal background as a Korean woman, the playwriting classes I am referring to here are mostly the Korean classes I have experienced. In the class environment, in which a male teacher exerts his authority over both male and female students, what female students are interested in—their sexuality, their struggle to discover and create identities outside the boundaries of social restrictions, their bodily experiences, and their complicated relationships to their families and their men—is often turned down as a subject of playwriting mostly because the male teacher does not know how to deal with them. When a female student does explore an issue that is most urgent to herself, the traditional narrative structure taught in the classroom is, she realizes, not the right form for it. Again, the male teacher does not offer much help on this aspect either. Most often, he is comfortably used to the traditional plot structure of realistic dramas—exposition, rising action, crisis, climax and denouement—and the assumption that writing is the result of masterful knowledge of the object of writing. This approach to writing can be quite oppressive for many, if not all, female students.

Thus, both consciously and unconsciously, it has been my intention in my close reading of Kennedy's and Fornes' plays to find a model of a writing process which acknowledges, expresses, and yet opens up diverse meanings of women's embodied experiences; a writing process that neither obsessively digs into nor ignores women's bodily experiences; a writing process that neither objectifies nor idealizes women's bodies; a writing process that does not deny the validity of feminine sensibility. The finding of this dissertation indicates the possibility of this alternative writing process.

The writing process Kennedy and Fornes dramatize inside their plays reflects their own writing methods. Both Kennedy and Fornes not only write plays but also teach how to write plays in classroom environments. Kennedy has taught as a lecturer in many universities, including Harvard and Yale. Fornes has led various playwriting workshops, especially at INTAR, rearing many Latin American playwrights. Kennedy has talked about her playwriting pedagogy in interviews. Fornes wrote in theatre journals and books about her teaching methods. And the playwrights trained with her also wrote about their experiences of her class. These documents attest to Fornes' and Kennedy's methods of playwriting—how they delve into dreams and the unconscious, how they begin to write and structure a play, how they incorporate bodily sensations in the process of playwriting, and so forth. Thus, a future study investigating these two avant-garde playwrights' method of playwriting would be very interesting to me. It would be an investigation of a pedagogical model for playwriting that is applicable to classroom environments.

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