

T.C.
BAŐKENT ÜNİVERSİTESİ
SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ
AMERİKAN KÜLTÜRÜ VE EDEBİYATI ANABİLİM DALI
TEZLİ YÜKSEK LİSANS PROGRAMI

GENERIC HYBRIDITY IN ADRIENNE KENNEDY'S DRAMA:
THE ALEXANDER PLAYS

YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ

HAZIRLAYAN

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MELTEM KIRAN - RAW

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YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZ ÇALIŞMASI ORJİNALLİK RAPORU

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ABSTRACT

This study will analyze African-American playwright Adrienne Kennedy's *The Alexander Plays* (1992), paying close attention to how she experimentally blends literary and dramatic genres. Comprising the one-act plays *She Talks to Beethoven*, *Ohio State Murders*, *The Film Club*, and *Dramatic Circle*, the tetralogy explores the costs of racist discrimination and violence to African Americans in general, and to African-American women and children in particular. The intellectual and political backdrop of the plays coincides with the years of the Civil Rights Movement, a period which also marked Kennedy's coming of age as an innovative playwright. All the plays feature the autobiographical character Suzanne Alexander as the protagonist. The process whereby Suzanne becomes a politically conscious and artistically sophisticated dramatist is reenacted through Kennedy's juxtaposition of several literary genres and genre conventions of autobiography, creative nonfiction, neo-slave narrative, and gothic fiction on the one hand, as well as the theatrical conventions of expressionism, surrealism, and radio drama on the other. As a dramatist, Kennedy possesses an artistic mind which goes beyond literature and drama into other performative arts such as the opera and the movies, as will be discussed within the context of *The Alexander Plays*. The intellectual and political center of the plays is inspired largely by the thinking of the Algerian activist and philosopher, Frantz Fanon: in this, too, Kennedy demonstrates that she has an all-inclusive approach to issues of race which does not remain confined within the borders of her native country. This thesis argues that although *The Alexander Plays* are still underappreciated, they testify to the artistic, intellectual, and political genius of Adrienne Kennedy at its best.

Keywords: Adrienne Kennedy, *The Alexander Plays*, Generic Hybridity, African-American women, Civil Rights Movement.

ÖZET

Bu tez, Afrikalı-Amerikalı oyun yazarı Adrienne Kennedy'nin 1992'de yayımlanan *The Alexander Plays* [*Alexander Oyunları*] eserindeki türlerarası geçişleri incelemektedir. *She Talks to Beethoven* [*Beethoven ile Sohbet*], *Ohio State Murders* [*Ohio Eyaleti Cinayetleri*], *The Film Club* [*Film Kulübü*] ve *Dramatic Circle* [*Oyun Okuma Grubu*] adlı tek perdelik dört oyundan oluşan eserin başlıca konusunu genelde Afrikalı Amerikalıların, özelde Afrikalı Amerikalı kadın ve çocukların maruz kaldıkları ırkçı ayrımcılık ve şiddet oluşturmaktadır. Oyunların entelektüel ve politik yönü tarihsel olarak Amerika'daki Sivil Haklar Hareketleri yıllarına denk gelir: Kennedy önemli tiyatro eserlerini bu dönemde vermeye başlamıştır. Oyunların baş kişisi Suzanne Alexander birçok açıdan Kennedy'nin özyaşamsal yansımasıdır. Kennedy oyunlarda Suzanne'in politik ve sanatsal gelişim sürecini açıklarken bir yandan özyaşam öyküsü, kurmaca dışı yaratıcı yazın, yeni-kölelik anlatısı ve gotik roman gibi yazınsal türleri; diğer taraftan da dışavurumculuk, gerçeküstücülük ve radyo oyunu gibi dramatic gelenekleri yaratıcı bir şekilde bir araya getirir. Kennedy ayrıca edebiyat ve tiyatro sanatlarının da ötesine geçerek opera ve film gibi diğer sanatları da *Alexander Oyunları*'nın tematik ve dramatik örgüsüne ekler. Oyunların entelektüel, düşünsel ve politik merkezinde Cezayirli aktivist ve düşünür Frantz Fanon yer alır: böylelikle, Kennedy tiyatro pratiğinde olduğu gibi politik ve entelektüel anlayışında da alışıldık sınırların dışına çıktığını kanıtlar. Bu tez, *Alexander Oyunları*'nın henüz yeteri kadar akademik ilgi görmemesine rağmen Kennedy'nin oyun yazarı olarak dehasını tam anlamıyla sergileyen bir eser olduğu savını öne sürer.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Adrienne Kennedy, *The Alexander Plays* [*Alexander Oyunları*], Türlerarası Geçiş, Afrikalı Amerikalı kadınlar, Sivil Haklar Hareketleri Dönemi.

INTRODUCTION

Born in 1931, the African American playwright Adrienne Kennedy is today recognized as “surely one of the finest living American playwrights, and perhaps the most underappreciated” (Isherwood, 2007: par. 3). While the best-known of her plays is *Funnyhouse of a Negro* (1964), Kennedy has written more than fifteen plays, many of which still await detailed critical attention. Published in 1992, *The Alexander Plays* is a tetralogy which demonstrates Kennedy’s dramatic experimentations: all of the four plays are inspired and structured by different literary, dramatic, and artistic genres, in effect bringing into existence a new idiom of drama marked by generic hybridity. With many autobiographical elements, *The Alexander Plays* links an African-American woman artist’s personal life to racist discrimination and violence during the years of the Civil Rights Movement.

1. Adrienne Kennedy: Biographical Overview

1.1. A Dramatist is Born: Life, Literature and Politics

Born in 1931 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Adrienne Kennedy spent her childhood and young adulthood in Cleveland, Ohio. Although she did not personally experience racism at first hand until she attended Ohio University, she learned a lot from her parents about racial discrimination (Kennedy, 1987: 69). Her father, Cornell Wallace Hawkins, was a politically active man; her parents’ friends were members of the NAACP and when they came together, they talked about the “Negro Cause” (1987: 48). When she mentions her father, she explains that “[h]e gave fine stirring speeches at meetings and banquets on the value of working hard for the Negro cause and helping Negro youth. He read me poetry of Negro poets and told me stories of Du Bois, Marian Anderson and Mary Bethune” (1987: 12). Besides sowing the seeds of his daughter’s political consciousness, Hawkins also wanted her to grow up to be a professionally ambitious woman. She mentions hearing about black actors and actresses or singers such as Ella Fitzgerald, Pearl Bailey, Butterfly McQueen and Stepin Fetchit from her father (1987: 8), adding that he “talked constantly of how great these women were, and urged me to be like them” (1987: 19).

Like Kennedy's father, Kennedy's mother, Etta Haugabook Hawkins, proved inspirational for Kennedy, especially in terms of the development of her artistic side. Keeping scrapbooks and writing about people whom she knew, Kennedy's mother would have sparked her daughter's desire to write autobiographically (1987: 33). It might be argued that Kennedy's autobiographical book *People Who Led to My Plays* (1987) carries echoes of her mother's scrapbooks, both in form and in content. Rather than giving a traditionally linear version of her life in the book, Kennedy focuses on who and what inspired her, inventories them, and provides anecdotes and even photographs while expanding upon them. The famous African-American poet and novelist Ishmael Reed describes *People Who Led to My Plays* a "new form of black autobiography" (qtd. in Kennedy, 2001: xiii). Kennedy was so fond of her family that when she first watched Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie*, she knew that she wanted to adapt her own family's story into drama (Kennedy, 1987: 81). In a sense, it was her affection for her family that led to her passion for drama.

From her childhood onwards, Kennedy was an avid reader. Initially, she was fascinated by English writers. She read Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* as a child; she even came to believe that her life resembled that of the protagonist. Besides *Jane Eyre*, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* were among her favorite books. Eventually, she became familiar with American writers such as James Baldwin and playwrights such as Tennessee Williams and Thornton Wilder (1987: 60, 61, 99). Besides literature and drama, Kennedy—again from her childhood onwards—showed great interest in classical music and the movies. She used to play Beethoven and Chopin when she was taking piano lessons. She was a fan of Hollywood actresses such as Bette Davis and Elizabeth Taylor. All of these interests eventually came to impact her practice as a playwright who always sought to present her life and times in innovative ways: hence the generic hybridity that characterizes her drama in general, and *The Alexander Plays* in particular.

In 1953, Kennedy graduated from Ohio State University with a Bachelor's Degree in Elementary Education. She studied creative writing at Columbia University between 1954 and 1956. Later, she studied creative writing with Edward Albee at Circle-in-the-Square School. Finally, she taught creative writing at Yale University, Princeton

University, the University of California at Berkeley, and the University of California at Davis (Sibley, 1994: 2). Kennedy “received an honorary doctorate in 2003 in celebration of the 50th anniversary of her graduation” (Program).

1.2. Kennedy’s Fiction, Nonfiction, and Plays

Kennedy started her writing career with a short story, “Because of the King of France” (1963). Two years earlier, she had already started writing her play *Funnyhouse of a Negro* as she travelled through Africa. *Funnyhouse of a Negro* opened off-Broadway in 1964 and won an Obie Award (Kennedy, 2001: ix). Besides *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, among Kennedy’s well-known plays are *The Owl Answers* (1965), *A Lesson in Dead Language* (1968), and *A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White* (1976).

Besides autobiographical writing, Kennedy has also published a book which, characteristically, blends the conventions of different literary genres once again: *Deadly Triplets: A Theatre Mystery and Journal* (1990). The first part, “A Theatre Mystery: Deadly Triplets” is a novella that tells the story of a playwright, Suzanne Sand, when she is in London. In the second part of the book, “A Theatre Journal,” Kennedy moves into nonfiction and recounts her experiences in London between 1996 and 1999 through photographs. She refers to those years as “rapturous times” (Kennedy, 1990: x), because she was not only welcomed by the theatrical community but also established professional contacts: “Diana Sands, who had lived in London while appearing in the West End, suggested that since *Funnyhouse* was recorded by the BBC I try to get an English production” (1990: ix). She also found the opportunity to cooperate with John Lennon on the dramatic adaptation of his nonsense books *In His Own Write* and *A Spaniard in the Works* (1990: 5).

1.3. The Alexander Plays: Production History

First published in 1992 as a tetralogy, Kennedy’s *The Alexander Plays* includes *She Talks to Beethoven* (1989), *Ohio State Murders* (1992), *The Film Club* (1992) (a monologue), and *Dramatic Circle* (a radio play version of *The Film Club* [1992]). All the plays feature Suzanne Alexander, a character who is Kennedy’s autobiographical

projection. Suzanne Alexander “is an American, black, a pretty woman in her thirties” (Kennedy, 2001: 139). As Barnett Claudia explains, “*The Alexander Plays* seems like a thinly veiled version of Kennedy,” because the protagonist Suzanne Alexander has also “grown up in the same time and place, attended the same university, suffered the same racism, taken the same voyage to Africa, and [...] become a playwright who has written plays with the same titles and subjects as Kennedy’s plays [...]” (2005: 167). Kennedy effectively uses Suzanne Alexander as an autobiographical character to dramatize her own life as one shaped by the social and political events of her time.

The first of the plays, *She Talks to Beethoven*, was first produced by River Arts in Woodstock, New York, and it was directed by Clinton Turner Davis in 1989. One recent production was at JACK in Brooklyn, New York in 2014 and it was directed by Charlotte Brathwaite in collaboration with Abigail DeVille. Natalie Paul played Suzanne Alexander and Paul-Robert Pryce played Beethoven in the play (Brown, 2014: par. 3). The most recent production was directed by Devan Wells in 2016 with the following cast: Julianne Lisk as Suzanne, Grace Cookey-Gam as Beethoven and Audrey Owusu-Manu as the radio voice (Casely-Hayford, 2016: par. 3).

The second play in *The Alexander Plays*, *Ohio State Murders* was commissioned by the Great Lakes Theater Festival and directed by Gerald Freedman in 1992. Ruby Dee played Suzanne-in-the-present and Bellary Darden played Suzanne-in-the-past; Michael Early played David Alexander and Allan Byrne played Robert Hampshire (Kennedy, 2001: 151). Later, the play was directed by Evan Yionoulis in 2007 with the following cast: LisaGay Hamilton as Suzanne and Cherise Boothe as younger Suzanne (Bacalzo, 2007: par. 2).

The Film Club is a monologue by Suzanne Alexander and *Dramatic Circle* is a radio play originally commissioned by WNYC (New York Public Radio) in 1991. *Dramatic Circle* was also produced and directed by Marjorie Van Haltern on Pacifica Radio in 1991 (*The Dramatic Circle*, Pacifica Radio Archives).

2. The Historical Context: The Civil Rights Movement and African-American Women

Although *The Alexander Plays* was published in 1992, the plays cover a span of almost four decades, starting in 1949 and moving well into the 1980s. The Civil Rights Movement, its political impact as well as its violent legacy inform not only characterization and plot but also provide the intellectual and thematic core of the plays. The Civil Rights Movement covers the years between the 1950s and the 1960s. The Civil Rights Movement is mostly described as a nonviolent protest against segregation and discrimination towards African-American people in the United States. Throughout history, African-American people struggled because of discrimination, and they had to fight for their rights and equality. Actually, it started with the period of slavery and even after the Civil War, segregation and discrimination continued. Jim Crow Laws were legalized in the South, leading to more acts of violence against African Americans since segregation in public areas was officially legitimized (Norton et al., 2005: 552).

The segregation principle was extended to parks, cemeteries, theatres, and restaurants in an effort to prevent any contact between blacks and whites as equals. It was codified on local and state levels and most famously with the “separate but equal” decision of the U.S. Supreme Court in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) (Urofsky, 2018: par. 2)

Although African Americans wanted to be equal to the whites, the “separate but equal” legislation made them live in an unfair world. With African Americans continuing their determined struggle against segregation, discrimination, and racial violence in the following decades well into World War II and beyond, Harry S. Truman’s term as president witnessed some positive developments: “in December 1946, Truman signed an executive order establishing the President’s Committee on Civil Rights. The Committee’s Report, *To Secure These Rights*, would become the agenda for the civil rights movement for the next twenty years” (Norton et al., 2005: 809). This was called “antilynching” and “antisegregation” legislation and later it was for laws that promised “equal employment opportunity” (2005: 809). In 1948, Truman declared two executive orders to end racial discrimination in the federal government (2005: 809). African Americans also struggled

against the ‘separate but equal’ legislation in public schools; consequently, with *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* in 1954, The Supreme Court made the decision that “in the field of public education the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place” (2005: 810). Although President Eisenhower did not want to deal with the Civil Rights Movement issues, a very important incident that took place in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1957, forced him to pay attention to the problems of African Americans. When governor Orval E. Faubus (who supported segregation) refused to allow nine African-American students to attend Central High School, a serious standoff ensued (2005: 810). In the end, President Eisenhower sent troops to protect the students during the school term.

In the 1960s, the more African Americans insisted in exercising their acts, the more violence they encountered from white supremacists. By the end of the 1960s racial strife in the United States had claimed many lives, including those of President John F. Kennedy, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King, Jr. (who were assassinated in 1963, 1965, and 1968, respectively). After all these struggles, the Civil Rights Act (which prohibited segregation) and the Voting Rights Act (in which African Americans who were hitherto prevented from voting were provided the right to vote were signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1965 (Norton et al., 2005: 838-39). Despite such significant gains, African Americans’ social and political struggle continued—and still continues—beyond the Civil Rights Movement.

African-American women took an active role in initiating the Civil Rights Movement, something which greatly impacted Adrienne Kennedy both as a woman and as a playwright. One of the most iconically historic events of the period, for example, was one which involved an ordinary African-American woman: “In 1955, Rosa Parks, a department store seamstress and long-time NAACP activist, was arrested when she refused to give up her seat to a white man on a public bus in Montgomery, Alabama” (Norton et al., 2005: 811). In the same year, another African-American woman stood against atrocities perpetuated by white racists. This woman was Mamie Till, who had to suffer the tragedy of her son being lynched. “In 1955, Emmett Till, a fourteen-year-old from Chicago, was murdered by white men in Mississippi who took offense at the way he spoke to a white woman” (Norton et al., 2005: 810). Mamie Till decided to have an open-casket funeral in order to show the world this terrible violence and its consequences.

The impact of these women's activism on Kennedy cannot be overstated. Philip C. Kolin notes that Kennedy's *Sleep Deprivation Chamber* refers to Emmett Till in the opening of the play: "Kennedy's theatre also evokes the hate crimes against black children as a result of segregation, and white brutality" (2007: 70). Although there is no direct link to the brutal murder of Emmett Till in *The Alexander Plays*, the horrific incident reverberates in the murders of Suzanne Alexander's baby daughters in the second play of the tetralogy, *Ohio State Murders*.

Kennedy integrates yet another violent event that took place during the Civil Rights Movement into her drama. The Birmingham Church Bombing, which took place in the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, claimed the lives of four African-American girls and left many others wounded in 1963. (Birmingham, par. 1). Well before she wrote *The Alexander Plays*, Kennedy deals more directly with the incident in another play: *A Rat's Mass* (1967) shows how children are affected by such atrocities. In the play, a young girl and her brother hide in the attic of their house, which they call a cathedral, to protect themselves from bombs (Kennedy, 2001: 47). Their conversation evinces how traumatized they are. With reference to characters in *A Rat's Mass* and *A Lesson in Dead Language* (1968), Philip C. Kolin makes the following comment:

Dramatizing their wounds, physically and psychically, these plays reverberate with terrifying imagery, nightmarish settings, and grotesque characters and punishments, reminiscent of the civil rights atrocities that stained America's conscience in the 1950s and 1960s. (2007: 70)

If Kennedy transposes the violent events during the Civil Rights Movement period into her plays, she also provides a running commentary on the intellectual background of the movement. The famous African-American feminist author and critic bell hooks explains how Kennedy's political thinking converges with—and even more interestingly—diverges from great African-American politician-thinkers of the twentieth century:

She is politically aware, conscious of the importance of antiracist struggle, of black tradition. In this way she reminds me of black

intellectuals, like Du Bois, and even Martin Luther King, who though passionately devoted to the civil rights struggle were truly enamored of white culture. King never writes about his fascination with black music, but he does write about opera. Kennedy always juxtaposes this obsessive interest in white culture with her keen awareness of imperialisms of racism. Her brief accounts of her college experience at Ohio State clearly show that she was deeply affected by white racism, that is assaulted her psyche. (hooks, 1992: 182)

bell hooks's comment provides valuable insights into the political subtexts of *The Alexander Plays*. Indeed, both in her autobiographical writings and in her plays, Kennedy acknowledges her indebtedness to (white) canonical writers and artists; however, especially in *The Alexander Plays*, their presence is always observed analytically, through the intellectual traditions of black political thinking. Ludwig van Beethoven, for example, becomes a major character in *She Talks to Beethoven*, but Kennedy's approach to this character becomes highly complicated when considered in connection with the theories of Franz Fanon, the intellectual center of the play. In choosing the Algerian thinker, rather than, say, the American Martin Luther King, Jr., Kennedy performs another intellectual feat not mentioned by bell hooks: she presents racism as an issue affecting all people of African origin, irrespective of their nationality.

Kennedy's interest in Fanon has its origins in her experiences in Ghana, something which brings together the autobiographical, political, and intellectual subtexts of *The Alexander Plays*. Having married the activist Joseph Kennedy three weeks before her graduation, she travelled with him to Ghana between 1960 and 1961 (Kennedy, 1987: 119). Obviously, they believed that the example of Ghana would give further encouragement to African Americans. In Africa, Kennedy was able to observe "the impact that Ghana's independence also had on America's civil rights movement, or the impact that black America had on Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, the man who would ultimately lead his country to freedom" (Veep, 2011: par. 1). Nkrumah had studied in America and became a member of the NAACP where he met W. E. B. Du Bois (2011: par. 1). An advocate of Pan-Africanism, Nkrumah called on African-American people to support going back to Africa, especially to Ghana at that time. "The Ghanaian leader [Nkrumah] was asked to

give the commencement speech, in which he invited African-Americans (then called Negroes) to return to Ghana and help develop the country” (Alex-Assensoh, 2007: 46). Therefore, “It was Nkrumah’s clarion call that inspired many African-American leaders to pack their bags and baggage to return to their ancestral country” (2007: 46).

While living in Ghana, Kennedy witnessed Nkrumah’s political action at first hand: “(These men [Kwame Nkrumah and Patrice Lumumba] represented a vision of freed Africa.)” She admired the two politicians so much that she “carried the small gilt-edged photo of Nkrumah and Lumumba” with her¹ (Kennedy, 1987: 119). Therefore, besides Frantz Fanon, Kwame Nkrumah becomes important in *The Alexander Plays*. In *She Talks to Beethoven*, there is a photograph of Nkrumah in Suzanne’s home. If Nkrumah became the political symbol of black liberation for Kennedy, Frantz Fanon served as the catalyst of the intellectual background of *The Alexander Plays*. “Philosopher and psychoanalyst, revolutionary and writer, Frantz Fanon has justly been called the voice of the Third World. Throughout his brief but extraordinary life, Fanon was passionately committed to freedom” (Wyrick, 2014: 2). He was “a dedicated fighter of racial oppression” (Hansen, 1974: 25). His *Black Skin White Masks* (1967) argues strongly that black people should assert their identities as black. Fanon warns them that they should never think of themselves as inferior to whites: “I embrace the world! I am the world! The white man has never understood this magical substitution. The white man wants the world, he wants it for himself alone. He finds himself predestined master of this world. He enslaves it” (Fanon, 1967: 127-8). However, Fanon was well aware that many black people, because they were for centuries seen by whites as inferior, internalized a sense of themselves as being lesser human beings: “The black man should no longer be confronted by the dilemma, turn white or disappear; but he should be able to take cognizance of a possibility of existence” (1967: 100).

Fanon was not only a thinker but also an activist. He was in Ghana when Kennedy and her husband (and in *She Talks to Beethoven*, Suzanne and David) went there: in fact, both in Kennedy’s own life and in the play, the thinking of Fanon was one of the major

¹ Kwame Nkrumah (1909-1972) was a Ghanaian politician and Patrice Lumumba (1925-1961) was a Congolese politician. They were both nationalist leaders.

reasons which drew African-American intellectuals to Ghana. T. Owens Moore informs that after Ghana gained independence in 1957, Fanon participated in the first All African People's Conference as well as the second one: "Fanon was well known and respected by many other revolutionary figures, and he was invited by the Ghanaian president, Kwame Nkrumah, to participate in the second All African People's Conference in Accra, Ghana, in 1960" (2005: 755-6).

As a contemporary example of political liberation from colonialism, the example of Ghana affected not only Fanon, but also made African-American intellectuals—who, as discussed above, were also inspired by Nkrumah—entertain the thought of going back to Africa, the land of their origin. African-American playwright Lorraine Hansberry's 1959 play *A Raisin in the Sun*—a play which Kennedy admires as much as its writer (Kennedy, 1987: 109)—famously brings the debates about this issue into the lives of the Younger family. The daughter of the family Beneatha actually thinks of moving to Africa as a very real option: she wants to return to her origins (Hansberry, 1971: 375-76), but realizes, with the help of her brother Walter Lee and mother Lena, that African Americans do have a proud history, something which makes the United States, rather than Africa, their home. For the Youngers (and by extension, African Americans), Hansberry suggests, the future lies in the United States. Bayu Prakasa discusses Hansberry's play within the context of segregation, discrimination and "Back to Africa Movement."

Hansberry's rejection towards Back to Africa Movement as a solution for racial problems in America indicates her intention to provoke black pride among African Americans not by going back to Africa, but by struggling for equality in America. (2016: 102)

As this brief discussion suggests, Kennedy's understanding of racism covers a wide geographical and intellectual terrain. Making Fanon the explicit intellectual core of *The Alexander Plays*, Kennedy opens up highly original and rewarding horizons whereby her audiences can reevaluate the Civil Rights Movement: the more familiar names like Martin Luther King, Jr. are not directly alluded to, because they will already be in the minds of Kennedy's American audiences. In other words, *The Alexander Plays* invites the audiences

to understand racism as a multi-dimensional phenomenon, as seen both from a national and global perspective.

In *The Alexander Plays*, the protagonist Suzanne Alexander is an example of how Kennedy transforms her own life into a character in order to dramatize political messages about African Americans in general, and African-American women in particular, in the American society during the years of the Civil Rights Movement. African-American people fought for their rights during this period and Kennedy, as an African-American woman, touches upon some serious points of the Civil Rights Movement. Discrimination, segregation, and violence become central subjects in Kennedy's plays.

3. Generic Hybridity: Nonfiction into *The Alexander Plays*

Kennedy renders the historical and political context of *The Alexander Plays* all the more striking by experimenting with generic hybridity. Generic hybridity in the plays is the product of Kennedy's habits of thinking that span several branches of literature as well as the arts. In 2016, for example, when actor Ryan Spahn wrote to Kennedy in order to find out what inspired her to write *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, Kennedy replied by sending some photos to him. (Spahn, 2016: par. 5). This anecdote demonstrates that Kennedy finds inspiration not only in literature but also in visual arts such as photography. Although critics such as Philip C. Kolin concentrate largely upon the thematic aspects Kennedy's plays, there are still crucial points which are yet to be analyzed with respect to her experimental dramatic techniques. In terms of literary genres, *The Alexander Plays* is characterized by striking shifts between autobiographical theatre and creative nonfiction. Moreover, the plays not only utilize conventions of autobiography and creative nonfiction but also negotiate the traditions of African-American literature such as the neo-slave narrative (*Ohio State Murders*) and classical fictional genres such as the gothic (*Dramatic Circle*).

3.1. Autobiography

As critics such as Paul K. Bryant-Jackson and Lois More Overbeck explain, Kennedy writes autobiographically and she uses autobiography as in experimenting with

her generic hybridity. Autobiography is ‘life writing’ or ‘life narrative’ as Smith and Watson describe it (2010: 1). They explain that this kind of writing in the 1920s and 1930s was especially favored by women writers, who were excluded from the American literary canon. They were taken seriously only when they wrote autobiographically. Therefore, autobiographical writing has generally been accepted as ‘a marginal genre’ (2010: 6). African-American women have felt doubly excluded from the mainstream because white women were also unable or unwilling to see women of color as part of their own communities. Johnnie M. Stover describes the works of this minority group’s autobiographical works as ‘sub-literary’ texts, noting and that these kinds of texts reflect social or political concerns (*Autobiography* 2003: 21-22). In other words, African-American women have felt the need of placing equal emphasis on both their gender and racial identity in their autobiographical writings.

Smith and Watson claim that the main reason why women writers have been drawn to autobiography has to do with their objective of confuting the images of classical patriarchal representations (Smith and Watson, 1998: 7). Smith explains how culture identifies human beings through their “bodies that were sexed and gendered, bodies that were racialized, bodies that were located in specific socioeconomic spaces, bodies that were deemed unruly or grotesque” (1998: 109). As a result of their writing, African-American women have gained a voice within society. In other words, they have created their own representations of themselves and rendered themselves visible, in ways that are very different from the images created by white male supremacists.

In African-American literary history, there are other autobiographical works that are called ‘slave narratives’: they deal with their authors’ sufferings as slaves and their eventual escape from slavery. Emerging in the antebellum period, the slave narrative is one of the most significant genres of African-American literature. African-American male writers such as Frederick Douglass and women writers such as Harriet Jacobs undertook to write the stories of their lives in a way that would demonstrate the true face of the peculiar institution. Interestingly, because white readers tended not to believe former slaves, they demanded that the truthfulness of the narratives be confirmed by a white writer: the aim was to turn public opinion decidedly against slavery. This proof was generally provided by an introduction in which a white abolitionist asserted that “the narrative is a plain,

unvarnished tale and has been set down in malice, nothing exaggerated, nothing drawn from the imagination” (Olney, 1984: 50). Despite being almost policed by white abolitionists, slave narratives eventually came to serve important functions for African-American writers and readers alike:

The autobiography then [in the nineteenth-century] became the African American’s way of preserving cultural memory while at the same time challenging their marginalization and oppression by the sociopolitical, economic, and literary establishment. African American autobiographers were always conscious of history and memory. (Stover *Autobiography*, 2003: 34)

In contrast to African-American autobiographers, white writers generally do not feel the need to mention social or political subjects in their autobiographical writings. The critic, Johnnie M. Stover notes that there is a gender aspect to the issue as well: “Unlike the black women autobiographers that followed [such as Harriet Jacobs], these white men writing autobiography did not have to prove their worthiness as human beings, writers, or citizens” (Stover *Autobiography*, 2003: 22). African-American women’s autobiography, on the other hand, is radically different since they have had to overcome established prejudices of race and gender by emphasizing the complexities of their identity as blacks and women.

3.2. Creative Nonfiction

Kennedy uses the elements of autobiography in her drama by blending them with creative nonfiction. Theorists and critics still argue whether autobiography should by definition be “historical (supposedly factual)” or “literary (supposedly fictional)” (Stover “Nineteenth-century,” 2003: 138). With creative nonfiction, it becomes quite acceptable to blur the boundaries between the historical and the literary, between fiction and nonfiction. As Jocelyn Bartkevicius explains, autobiography and fiction are traditionally regarded as diametrically opposite to each other.

Fiction is ‘made up,’ and thus crafted, invented ‘made.’ Fiction is art because its creator draws upon imagination. Nonfiction is ‘not made up,’ and thus recorded, reported, ‘unmade.’ Nonfiction makes itself, the writer is a mere tape recorder or camera. (1999: 255)

Creative nonfiction, however, has the advantage of going beyond such binarisms. In terms of structure, creative nonfiction writers make use of elements of fiction such as the exposition, the climax, and the resolution. With respect to the representation of autobiographical detail, they do not always find it desirable or necessary to mention exact names, places or times (Hampl, 1999: 302). In terms of characterization, they create characters which, although originating in real people, acquire fictional qualities as well. In other words, they use their imagination to reinforce the truths provided through factual information.

In describing the genre, Philip Gerard claims that “[w]riting nonfiction is simple: You find out some facts, you figure out how to arrange them in the light of a larger idea, then you do something artful with the arrangement” (2018: 11). Gerard does not discuss what “that larger idea” might be, but Robert L. Root and Michael Steinberg’s definition of the agenda of creative writing demonstrates that the genre is not as “simple” as Gerard makes it out to be:

As a result, creative nonfictionists may write to establish or define an identity, to explore and chronicle personal discoveries and changes, to examine personal conflicts, to interrogate their opinions, or to connect themselves to a larger heritage or community. (1999: xvi)

Creative nonfiction, then, goes beyond the artistic representation of mere factual detail by also revealing an author’s cultural or social concerns. Similarly, Barrie Jean Borich notes that creative nonfiction can be variously seen as memoir, personal essay, autobiography or “cultural commentary” (2013: par. 3). Behind Kennedy’s success in blending the personal with the social, the racial, and the political lies her adept use of the generic flexibility provided by creative nonfiction.

Especially in the latter half of the twentieth century, creative nonfiction became a genre particularly associated with minority groups. Douglas Hesse points out that writers belonging to minority groups have a special preference for creative nonfiction, as they feel excluded from other genre conventions. These writers are generally “men and women from less privileged social classes or geographies, women, people of color, gays and lesbians, and so on” (2003: 239). Besides, Paul Lauter explains which writers are not counted as part of the literary canon. “That task, the revision of the literary canon, has been necessary because in the twenties processes were set in motion that virtually eliminated black, white female, and all working-class writers from the canon” (1983: 435). Additionally, he continues to describe what “American literary canon” is: “I mean by the ‘American literary canon’ that set of authors and works generally included in basic American literature college courses and textbooks, and those ordinarily discussed in standard volumes of literary history, bibliography, or criticism” (1983: 435). In other words, except for the white male writers, others, who belong to minority groups, feel that they are not considered as the part of the literary canon. African-American women also from a minority group; creative nonfiction is a suitable genre for them to discuss their own issues in relation to race and gender. Therefore, creative nonfiction becomes a field in which authors can emphasize their social or political messages. They do not simply relate their life story but their works also include some social or political implications. Cheney’s description of creative nonfiction also expresses this aim as follows:

Creative nonfiction tells a story using facts, but uses many of the techniques of fiction for its compelling qualities and emotional vibrancy. Creative nonfiction doesn’t just report facts, it delivers facts in ways that move the reader toward a deeper understanding of a topic. (qtd. in Smith et al., 2016: 59)

While the critics discussed above provide useful insights into creative nonfiction, they rarely detail the actual techniques of the genre. As an innovative playwright, Adrienne Kennedy successfully combines the techniques of creative nonfiction and autobiography in *The Alexander Plays*. By fusing autobiography and creative nonfiction, Kennedy’s drama goes beyond traditional generic boundaries to create a new hybrid genre.

Creative nonfiction writers can invent characters that are a combination of fact and fiction, but Kennedy takes it one step further, and she turns historical characters, real people in the past, into real people in the present. With reference to her character, Beethoven, for example, he “is definitely more real to me than members of my family (Barnett, 2005: 157). Therefore, in her play, *She Talks to Beethoven*, she uses Beethoven as a real person in the present. In the play, there is an African-American woman, Suzanne, who waits for her husband David: has had to go into hiding because of his political activism. Beethoven accompanies her during David’s absence, and Kennedy uses Beethoven as a character to imply her own psychological difficulties at that time since this play is also an autobiographical play. Kennedy wants to emphasize how they were in struggle as African-American people and to emphasize this political message strikingly, she comes up with a famous person in the play.

Besides giving Suzanne a great artist as a companion, Kennedy also uses Beethoven in order to address white people through a universally respected famous person. Towards the end of his life, Beethoven became completely deaf; using this well-known fact of the composer’s life, Kennedy makes him represent the white community who turn a deaf ear to what the people of color say. However, although Kennedy’s white audiences traditionally share the attribute of whiteness of Beethoven, the difference here is that whereas he *cannot* hear, the white audience *will not* hear. In the play, Beethoven asks Suzanne to communicate with him through writing and not speaking because he is deaf: “You must write what you want to say to me [...]. I cannot hear you” (Kennedy, 2001: 147). Kennedy’s message is obvious: African-American artists (as represented in the play by Suzanne Alexander) need to continue reinscribing their trials and tribulations themselves.

3.3. The Politics of the Gothic

Kennedy’s desire to give political messages is evinced also in her use of gothic fiction in *The Film Club* and *Dramatic Circle*. In Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, Dracula represents a threat to the English characters, not only because, on the literary level, he is a vampire but also, on the political level, he comes from a distant, mysterious, and even dangerous land. Kennedy subtly connects the British people’s fears of the “other” to many white Americans’ fear of African Americans. As a result, African Americans become

outsiders as well. Being regarded as outsiders sometimes lead African Americans to “self-hatred”: its impact on Suzanne will be discussed in detail in relation to *The Film Club* and *Dramatic Circle*.

Kennedy subtly connects this political message to Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* in terms of the idea of colonialism. Some critics argue that *Dracula* is based on the idea of reverse colonialism. Dracula wants to go to Britain and buy houses; this is the reason why he invites Jonathan to his castle. Jonathan will be the guide for Dracula and make money. However, the prospect of Dracula settling in Britain is a fearful idea for the Western people, representing “the threat of the primitive trying to colonize the civilized world” (qtd. in Arata, 1990: 626). In both plays, *The Film Club* and *Dramatic Circle*, Kennedy makes use of Stoker’s *Dracula* which enables her to subversively highlight the ideology of colonialism through whites’ fears concerning black people. In this way, Kennedy is able to demonstrate the parallels between American racism and European colonialism.

3.4. The Neo-Slave Narrative: Toni Morrison

In *The Alexander Plays*, Kennedy intertwines her own and her community’s history by drawing upon certain African-American writers, especially her contemporaries. As discussed above, Lorraine Hansberry is one such writer whose play *A Raisin in the Sun* is woven into the thematic fabric of *The Alexander Plays*. In fact, Hansberry is much more than just a playwright for Kennedy:

I had abandoned playwriting by the time Lorraine Hansberry made her sensational entrance into the Broadway theatre with the classic *A Raisin in the Sun*, because I thought there was no hope; but with Lorraine Hansberry’s success, I felt reawakened. I read every word about her triumph and took heart. (Kennedy, 1987: 109)

Kennedy is also a keen reader of James Baldwin: she mentions, for example, that Baldwin was the one who “sharpened” her vision of America (1987: 99). Yet another African-American writer Kennedy admires is Toni Morrison, whose acclaimed novel *Beloved* is one of the earliest masterpieces of the genre of the neo-slave narrative. In

Beloved, Sethe attempts to murder all her four children in order not to submit them to her white master. One of the children, a baby girl, dies. In a sense, the murderer of the child is not Sethe, but the master representing the depraved system of slavery. In Kennedy's *Ohio State Murders*, the protagonist Suzanne Alexander is seduced by a white male professor, Robert Hampshire: she gives birth to female baby twins. Hampshire eventually murders the babies. The similarities between Morrison's novel and Kennedy's play suggest that Hampshire takes on the role of the slave master, although the play takes place about a century after the Emancipation. The dramatic aspects and the political implications of Kennedy adapting *Beloved* will be given detailed consideration in due course.

4. Generic Hybridity: Dramatic Experimentation into *The Alexander Plays*

4.1. Autobiographical Drama

As part of her experimentation in generic hybridity, Kennedy uses autobiography in *The Alexander Plays*. Autobiography can be used in almost every genre such as drama, and it is called as autobiographical drama or autobiographical theatre. Autobiographical theatre is a reflection of a playwright's personal life. Referring to this theatre as “*self-referential* or *personal* theatre,” Susana Pendzik, Renee Emunah and David Rad Johnson define it as “theatre in which the content of the performance consists of material from the actual lives of the performers” (Pendzik et al., 2016: 2). Autobiographical theatre can be categorized into two different types: the autobiographical form (concerning the actor's personal life), and the *autoethnographic* form (concerning the actor's ethnicity, class, gender, or social grouping) (2016: 2). People who belong to the different cultural or ethnic groups prefer writing autoethnographically, because “autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*)” (Ellis et al. par. 1). In other words, although many African-American women writers write about their own lives, they actually emphasize something beyond their personal concerns in order to represent their racial or social group within society. Moreover, as Deirdre Heddon notes, “many of these performers are lesbian, gay and/or black and/or transgender, and their work also addresses explicitly their particular location(s) and the experiences that are inscribed there” (2007: 2). That is to say, the authors of autobiographical theatre are generally minority groups and

they aim to “speak out” (2007: 20). As Bonnie Marranca notes, the use of autobiography does not mean to be “self-centered” but “self-projected” (1979: 85). In other words, one does not write autobiographically in order to merely present his/her own life as an individual but also in order to incorporate it into his/her society’s culture and politics. Therefore, Kennedy’s work transcends the limits of a “self-centered” approach; she projects her own life onto that of her society, and vice versa, in order to embrace issues concerning African Americans:

Like many African-American women writers, however, Kennedy’s intense engagement with personal experience has not led to the exclusion of social involvement or political issues in her plays. If much of her dramatic work is highly personal, sometimes autobiographical, Kennedy always investigates the personal self in relation with the social and political world from which it unfolds. (Benesch, 2014: 96)

Sandra Shannon explains that “some black playwrights do not use black experience as cultural or racial signifiers but as dramatic devices...” (2005: 603). Kennedy does both. Moreover, she also renders issues of gender the central concerns of her plays. *The Alexander Plays* is a good example of this combination: by means of thinly disguised autobiographical details, Kennedy actually criticizes the plight of African-American women within its historical context.

Kennedy’s interest in autobiographical theater She is always interested in theater, especially autobiographical theater dated back to her teenage years, when she saw Tennessee Williams’s *The Glass Menagerie* on stage (Kennedy, 1987: 61). In *People Who Led to My Plays*, Kennedy mentions how she was influenced by white canonical playwrights like Tennessee Williams and Thornton Wilder. Philip C. Kolin analyses the influence of Tennessee Williams on Adrienne Kennedy: one of the most obvious similarities is that both Williams and Kennedy become characters in their own plays (2005: “The Fission.” 50). However, Kennedy’s originality stems from the fact that she uses autobiography as a result of her being influenced by Williams. On the other hand, Kennedy is so original that she links her own life with the issues relating to African-American

women. Therefore, her aim to write autobiographically is not just to represent her own life on the stage but also to deal with important issues like gender and racial identities. *The Alexander Plays* is a good example of this combination; while she is giving her autobiographical details, she is actually criticizing the difficulties of an African-American woman by referring to some historical events. In other words, Kennedy uses hybridity in *The Alexander Plays* blending black and white literature, fiction and nonfiction, as well as the past and the present. In this way, she highlights issues of race and politics:

As the black play developed into a new dramatic form and a new genre of English, traditional blackness was replaced by hybrid modes of being, creating spaces for the new African American identity. The hybrid characteristics and discursive practices, the rhetoric and aesthetic techniques of the playwrights vary, depending on how they think they should – or could – theatricalize their political thinking. (Haviara-Kechaidou, 2008: 92)

Kennedy's awareness of her gendered and racial identity gains added interest when her insistence on historicizing her life experiment is examined closely. As many literary critics discuss: "Beyond question, Adrienne Kennedy stands as one of the most daring African-American woman playwrights for both her dramatic techniques and her representation of history" (Kolin, 2007: 80). It is clear that Kennedy aims to connect the parts of her life to African-American historical issues such as slavery and the Civil Rights Movement. Moreover, Kennedy is well-aware of the restrictions imposed upon women: As Susan Stanford Friedman puts it, "a woman cannot experience herself as an entirely unique entity because she is always aware of how she is being defined as a woman, that is, as a member of a group whose identity has been defined by the dominant male culture" (1998: 75). In *The Alexander Plays*, Kennedy challenges these gendered restrictions by creating conflicted yet strong African-American women characters.

In *The Alexander Plays*, many incidents that happen to Suzanne are actually related to Kennedy's life. Kennedy's *People Who Led to My Plays* helps the spectator to find such implications. For example, like Kennedy, Suzanne also studies at Ohio State University. Even though the audience may not know much about Kennedy's own life, they can easily

recognize how the historical issues have affected her. She rewrites her life according to some important African-American historical events in her plays. In this respect, Kennedy should be considered as an activist, as Margo Perkins explains the connection between autobiography and activism as follows:

Because History is traditionally written from the vantage point of victor and not the vanquished, activists who write autobiography aim to fill in or recast important information about key events or issues in the struggle that have been elided in the dominant accounts of the period. (2000: 70-71)

Another proof of Kennedy's innovative technique is that she uses fictional characters for herself and her family, Suzanne Alexander becomes Adrienne Kennedy in her *The Alexander Plays*. This can be possible in autobiographical writing: As Philippe Lejeune states:

In the case of a fictitious name (that is, one different from the author's) given to a character who tells the story of his life, it can happen that the reader has reason to believe that the story of what happened to the character is exactly that of the author's life, because of parallels in other texts, or because of other information already in the reader's possession. (1982: 201)

Kennedy reflects her personal experiences in Ghana in the early 1960s in *She Talks to Beethoven*: Suzanne and David are in Ghana to support the independence of Ghana. During the Civil Rights Movement period, quite a few African-American intellectuals, authors, and artists decided to go there to support Ghana's independence.

The independence of Ghana and emerging African states had an impact on black Americans' consciousness and worldwide. Black expatriates in Ghana represented an independent black radical critique of cold war liberalism. During the early civil rights era, Ghana was, for the expatriates, and other supporters, an inspirational symbol of Black Power. (Gaines, 2008: 294)

As Gaines suggests, Ghana was a kind of symbol of Black Power. Black Power has its origins in the Civil Rights Movement. It started with a slogan by Stokely Carmichael who was a civil rights activist: “Between May 1966 and January 1967 the inscrutable slogan “black power,” particularly as it was being defined by Stokely Carmichael, stood essentially for the employment of conventional group-tactics to attain greater political and economic benefits” (McCormack, 1973: 390). Therefore it was related to the Civil Rights ideas, related to them within a historical continuum:

You can think about civil rights and Black Power as two different branches on the same historical family tree. So they are actually two separate social movements. But they intertwine, and they converge with each other, especially by the late 1960s, because Black Power becomes the dominant face and paradigm for black politics. (Williams, 2014: 92)

The Black Power movement started in 1966 and it continued until 1975 (Joseph, 2008: 8). In terms of ideology, Black Power actually follows the Civil Rights Movement: both support the idea of stopping discrimination against black people. “Negroes are no longer willing to rely on whites for their political emancipation, and find it necessary to achieve their freedom, in both economic and political terms, on their own” (Altbach, 1996: 233). That is why Ghana became a symbolic center for black people because they tried to defend and protect their own rights.

As discussed above, every play in *The Alexander Plays* individually gives social, political, and racial messages. In the first play, *She Talks to Beethoven*, David supports Ghana’s independence and—intellectually and literally—follows Fanon. Fanon was in Ghana because “[he] wanted to be in the center of things. He wanted to be where the action was” (Hansen, 1974: 32). Fanon was a revolutionary writer and philosopher, and most of his works explore the struggle of living as a black person in a white world. David Caute argues that “[t]hroughout his life, Fanon was plagued and embittered by his encounters with racism. As a young man he believed that he could break through the color barrier on the strength of his education and personal capacities” (1970: 3). J. E. Seigel also summarizes Fanon’s life as “Until he died in 1961 Fanon worked for the Algerians, writing articles and editing a newspaper, serving for a time as ambassador to Ghana, traveling

through Africa to encourage solidarity among anticolonial movements” (1968-9: 85). In *She Talks to Beethoven*, Suzanne and David also follow Fanon’s ideas as black intellectuals, who, as we learn in *She Talks to Beethoven* and in *The Film Club*, were teaching at the University of Legon.

The second play, *Ohio State Murders*, also deals with another African-American political issue: discrimination and violence. At the beginning of the play, we see Suzanne, the writer, returning to Ohio State University—where she was an undergraduate from 1949 to 1952—to give a talk on the violent imagery in her work. Looking back on her past, she comments on the events as they are being acted on the stage. She remembers how she experienced discrimination in the dorms because of her color: white students did not want to share the same room with a black person. Kennedy herself encountered the same problem when she was at Ohio State University, although she had an unproblematic childhood in Cleveland where she lived in a community of blacks and whites peacefully. In this way, the play emphasizes the discriminatory practices that eventually led to the Civil Rights Movement.

Besides discrimination, violence against African-American women is another issue in *Ohio State Murders*: as will be discussed in detail in the following chapters, Suzanne’s twin babies are killed by their own father, a white professor. It is obvious that Kennedy’s memories of racist violence led her to imagine such a horrific incident. Discussing Kennedy’s position during the Civil Rights Movement, Philip C. Kolin makes the following observation: “When Kennedy thinks of racial crimes in white America, she has remembered, and dramatized, the nightmares of its black victims, past and present” (2007: 80). Kolin reminds the audience that Kennedy wrote some of her plays during the Civil Rights period “—the years of church bombings, the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the beatings and murders, the riots, the bloody protests, and valiant sit-ins” (2007: 64). All of these issues, especially violence, have shaped Kennedy’s consciousness and conscience; consequently, she reflects them into her drama in a politicized manner.

The Film Club and *Dramatic Circle* also emphasize another important issue facing African-American women: self-hatred. While *The Film Club* consists entirely of monologue, *Dramatic Circle* is a version of *The Film Club* turned into drama with several

characters. One common point between Kennedy the playwright and Suzanne the character in *The Film Club* is their adoration of white Hollywood stars. In her memoir *People Who Led to My Plays*, Kennedy explains that she has always admired actresses like Bette Davis and Elizabeth Taylor²; hence her teenage desire to become famous like them. Although hybridity will be discussed specifically later, in both plays, using Hollywood stars leads Kennedy to experimentation with hybridity because she deals with, among other arts, the movies:

As Werner Sollors has pointed out, *The Film Club* and *Dramatic Circle*, the other two of *The Alexander Plays*, continue Kennedy's exploration of popular culture, particularly the movies; taken together, they represent two different theatrical modes, dramatic monologue (*The Film Club*) and the dramatization of events via performing interlocutors (*Dramatic Circle*). (Benesch, 2014: 104)

In the play, Suzanne mentions they have a film club in which she and her sister-in-law Alice act the parts Bette Davis played in her films. Kennedy shows that Suzanne and her sister-in-law Alice, black though they are, want to become like glamorous white film stars. On the theoretical level, these characters experience what the great African-American intellectual W. E. B. Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) refers to as “double consciousness.” Du Bois explains that living in a white supremacist society, African Americans have to look at themselves through the view of the dominant group. “It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks in in amused contempt and pity” (Du Bois, 1903: 9-10). Du Bois wanted to create a world in which a black person could live proudly and equally as an African American: “He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face” (1903: 10).

² Kennedy mentions Hollywood stars, especially Bette Davis (1908-1989) and Elizabeth Taylor (1932-2011) because when Kennedy was growing up, these actresses were famous.

It can be claimed that Suzanne and Alice's admiration for white Hollywood actresses go beyond "double-consciousness" into "self-hatred," a state of mind suffered by those African Americans who internalize white perceptions of themselves. As Richard Allen explains, one of the first to use the term was American sociologist Charles Horton Cooley in the first decade of the twentieth century, with the theorist William E. Cross who, several decades later, calling the years between 1939 and 1960 as "the Negro self-hatred period" (Allen, 2001: 57-59). This overlaps with exactly period (the 1960s) that Kennedy presents the situation of African Americans in her plays. It can be argued, then, that Kennedy's experimentation in generic hybridity dramatically accompanies her thematic exploration of the notions of "double consciousness" as well as "self-hatred." The interplay of generic hybridity and theme in each of *The Alexander Plays* will be discussed in detail in the following chapters.

In the last play, *Dramatic Circle*, the topic remains the same: David is missing and Suzanne is waiting for him but the difference is that this time the narrator is her sister-in-law Alice. This play emphasizes African-American political issues, especially through Frantz Fanon's ideas. Besides this political issue, there are historical and literary references that become part and parcel of the play's characterization, plot structure, and theme. Alice explains that Suzanne has a health problem: she can hardly breathe. Her psychiatrist Dr. Freudengerger thinks that it is a psychological problem. Therefore, he invites Suzanne and Alice to his Dramatic Circle in which he, his wife and his patients read some passages from books. Attending the reading sessions, Alice and Suzanne are assigned to read excerpts from Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. They sometimes act out some scenes while they are reading. Moreover, Alice mentions that Suzanne while sleeping, speaks aloud to some historical people. One of them is Napoleon. For example, Suzanne remembers his letter to Josephine.

As an experimental playwright, Kennedy uses radio drama in *Dramatic Circle*. Besides, the radio is used as an important prop in *She Talks to Beethoven* to contribute to the plot as well as to provide information about the intellectual debates in the play. Although she writes autobiographically, Kennedy is an unconventional since she uses novel techniques in her plays as well. "Kennedy's work is so important to the development of contemporary American drama because of her willingness to be experimental, and she

most definitely charts new journeys for aspiring black women playwrights” (hooks, 1992: 181). In other words, Kennedy experiments non-traditional forms such as radio drama and by combining it with autobiographical drama, she proves how she innovatively creates hybridity.

4.2. Expressionist and Surrealist Elements

Kennedy’s drama is mostly considered expressionist or surrealist by critics such as Robert Scanlan (1992: 94). Kennedy’s first play, *Funnyhouse of a Negro* was staged first in 1964 (Kennedy, 2001: ix). Ruby Cohn emphasizes Kennedy’s style in *Funnyhouse* as follows:

Often cited as her best work, this drama announces her main style, sometimes called surrealist and sometimes expressionist, and actually a delicate blend of aspects of both. Kennedy's plays are expressionist in their subjectivity, with inner conflicts externalised as different characters; they are surrealist in their close dependence on dreams with strong visual images. (1991: 117)

In other words, the inner world of the main character, Suzanne is reflected by means of surrealist and expressionist elements. Expressionism actually criticizes extreme realism; therefore, it creates a dreamlike or nightmarish atmosphere. Even the settings of surrealist works suggest a nightmare. Characters are represented in a grotesque way and dialogues are fragmented (Yüksel, 2017).

Theatre historian Sevdâ Şener also identifies the main elements of expressionism as the presentation of a playwright’s mind on the stage through a symbolic character and as the communication of the play’s main idea in a highly emphatic manner (2012: 248). Kennedy reflects her own mind onto the stage in an expressionistic manner, she avoids expressing the themes in a strongly exaggerated fashion. Consequently, one can observe Kennedy once again adapting theatrical conventions to her own plays in an individualistic and innovative way. Kennedy’s special blending of surrealism and expressionism makes her create a dreamlike, even nightmarish atmosphere, historical characters on stage, and grotesque images. First of all, the dreamlike atmosphere is actually created by using

fragmentation which is another element of surrealism. Kennedy's visual images appear like they are from dreams and that is why almost her all stages are fragmented (the fragmented stage will be discussed in relation to the plays in detail). The critic Klaus Benesch lists this technique as one of the most masterful ones employed in *The Alexander Plays* (2014: 102). Since Kennedy's desire is to represent the struggles of her life, not just personally but also politically, fragmentation helps her to express strikingly her psychological situation as an African-American woman in a white dominated society. "Kennedy's dramatic work has an unmistakable style, characterized by fragmentation, ritualistic repetition and variation, and radical experimentation with character, setting, and plot" (Celebrating par. 2).

Kennedy uses fragmentation in terms of characterization as well. In the first play of *The Alexander Plays*, Beethoven is transformed into David at the end of the play. In other words, a character is divided into two in *She Talks to Beethoven*. As it will be discussed in detail, this represents Suzanne's desire to develop herself of an artist with strong political motivations. In the absence of David, Suzanne can herself create a play. Kennedy aims to show the struggles of racial discrimination and violence. She does not just tell the story but also shows some parts of Suzanne's past on the stage in order to emphasize the evil side and the result of racial discrimination. Therefore, because of Kennedy's surrealist style, fragmentation is frequently used in her plays. Besides fragmentation, another significant surrealist element of *The Alexander Plays* is the use of historical figures: Beethoven and Fanon become characters as her as well as her husband's friends. "Blurring the lines between living and dead, visible and invisible, black and white, and form and content, Kennedy's statue communicates the heroine's inner thoughts, revealing to her own secrets" (Rodriguez, 1999: 143).

If fragmentation in characterization represents one element of surrealism in the *Alexander Plays*, the setting is another. Gaby Rodgers, the director of Kennedy's *A Lesson in Dead Language* (which was at Theatre Genesis at St. Mark's Church in 1970), stresses Kennedy's setting as surrealist: "She places these traumas [about identity as a black woman within the society] in a surreal setting. The emotion lies underneath the images. It's there, the feelings, and strongly so. The director must convey these feelings with everything she's got, all the tools" (Rodgers, 1992: 200). Besides, her surrealist style is so

effective that “[t]he Kennedy images stay in your mind” (1992: 200). In *She Talks to Beethoven*, there is a striking change of setting by going back to Beethoven’s past. Although Beethoven and Suzanne are in the present time, all of a sudden, Beethoven takes Suzanne to his own time so that the setting changes strikingly. Therefore, one can claim that Kennedy uses fragmentation for her setting as well as her characterization.

Like *She Talks to Beethoven*, *Ohio State Murders* also represents the fragmented stage: on the one hand, Suzanne-in-the-present is narrating her memories, and on the other hand, Suzanne-in-the-past is acting some of these memories. In other words, all of them happen on the same stage and her unusual style makes her audience think and get involved in her plays as the director Gerald Freedman expresses with reference to *Ohio State Murders*: “Mystery, imagery, flights of imagination, lack of cliché and structure, the unexpected, and the surprise of it. Kennedy makes me work harder, think harder, and go into another part of myself, and I enjoy that. I use less, I think, of my intellect, in some way, and more of my instinct” (1992: 207). Freedman also expresses that Kennedy uses a “storyteller” as a technique in *Ohio State Murders*, and this makes the audience create their own images in their minds. “Interestingly, you create images in your head; that’s what I try to get on stage—these images that the stories put into my mind” (1992: 214). In other words, Kennedy’s process of creation works in a way which seamlessly blends the verbal and the visual.

Besides the dreamlike atmosphere through fragmentation, Kennedy uses historical characters on stage: Beethoven, for example, becomes a reflection of Suzanne’s inner world. In addition to this, Kennedy uses grotesque images in her plays: for example, in *Ohio State Murders*, since she is tired of being discriminated against by the white students of the dorm, her inner world is reflected onto the stage through the white student Bunny’s giggling echoing along dark corridors (Kennedy, 2001: 167). The auditory imagery at this point turns nightmarish, a device Kennedy adopts from expressionism. “Expressionism typically presents a nightmarish vision of human situation” (Brockett and Ball, 2004: 177). In other words, Kennedy carries expressionism into surrealism, even into the gothic tradition in order to emphasize her themes. Another example of images in relation to the nightmarish style has to do with Suzanne’s unspecified illness: in *She Talks to Beethoven*,

her arm is wounded, but the cause is not given (Kennedy, 2001: 141). These oblique references to the protagonist's physical health problems, coupled with her psychological anxieties, make the audience realize the complexity of the difficulties faced by African-American women.

To sum up, all the techniques that Kennedy uses are equally important to express the complicated links between her inner world and that of her society. Kennedy was not the only one who experienced discrimination or violence and also other African-American women experienced them during and after the Civil Rights Movement. Therefore, Kennedy does not "speak up" just for herself but she tries to emphasize all African-American women's struggle by using striking techniques. In this way, she aims to defamiliarize her audience in order to make them think about all these racial and political issues.

4.3. Radio Drama

As Richard J. Hand and Mary Traynor explain, "*Radio drama came after drama*" (2011: 36). Although it has generally been regarded as inferior to the latter by virtue of lacking the elements of visual spectacle, it actually has a great advantage "in that it cannot be seen other than inside the mind of the listener" (2011: 36). The radio first appears as a prop in *She Talks to Beethoven*, the first play of the tetralogy. In *Dramatic Circle*, the last play of the tetralogy, Kennedy explores the full potential of radio drama. In this way, she makes the voices of the African-American characters literally heard by the audiences. As Hand and Traynor explain, in radio drama, the voice is the essential element: "While sound effects atmos can provide some additional support to performance, the voice will always be the primary means of creating performance" (2011: 174). Therefore, it can be argued that Kennedy removes the distractions of spectacle in drama in order to make the audience concentrate on the message through the voice.

To conclude, this study will analyze generic hybridity and its intersections with race, gender, and politics in Adrienne Kennedy's *The Alexander Plays*. Chapter I will discuss the first play of the tetralogy, *She Talks to Beethoven*, as a generically hybrid play: Kennedy uses both the conventions of autobiography and creative nonfiction while giving her life and using Beethoven as a character in her play. Besides, referring to Beethoven's

life work (specifically *Fidelio*), she also touches upon certain issues such as gender roles (David's control on Suzanne through Beethoven's obsessive interest in his nephew, Karl) and politics (*Fidelio*'s theme of freedom). The other reason why Kennedy uses Beethoven as a character is that she wants to reach white audience in order to express African-American's situation. Besides, Fanon becomes a character of Kennedy's play and the reason is clear: to discuss the contemporary debates about going back to Africa. By this way, she becomes aware of her African ancestors, then, it leads her audience into the idea of decolonizing the mind in the following chapters. In short, she creates a nightmarish atmosphere (because of Suzanne's illness and worries during David's absence) and fluid identities (Beethoven into David) that are important because it reflects the inner conflicts of Kennedy during the 1960s through her characters.

Chapter II will analyze the second play, *Ohio State Murders*, which dwells on one of the most serious problems in American history: discrimination and violence against African Americans. The most significant part in *Ohio State Murders* is violence. Although Kennedy never shows violence on stage, she deals with it in other ways. Violence is the subject that Kennedy uses most as Paul L. Bryant-Jackson claims: "Violence is to be found in both image and text and has been in Kennedy's dramaturgy from the beginning" (Bryant-Jackson, 1992: 52). Referring also to Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, the chapter will discuss how Kennedy succeeds in highlighting her social and political concerns through generic hybridity. *Beloved* shows Kennedy's desire of rewriting history of African Americans. *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* also implies one of the most serious problems that Kennedy suggestively explores: rape. In this way, she touches upon the "unspeakable" that emphasizes how African-American women were suffering the racial violence and discrimination. Lastly, this chapter will discuss in detail how Kennedy transposes elements of creative nonfiction into drama.

Chapter III will discuss how *The Film Club* and *Dramatic Circle* exemplify generic hybridity because Kennedy adopts certain conventions of gothic fiction into drama. Beyond her dramatic concerns, she focuses on another political issue in this play: the decolonization of the mind. Later, African-American women characters internalize but also challenge "self-hatred," something evinced especially through the references to white Hollywood stars. As the two plays demonstrate Kennedy's interest in the common aspects

of the colonized peoples' state of mind and self-hatred, the chapter will once again revisit Frantz Fanon. Since this is a radio play, the visualization is absent but again, Kennedy gives her message through human voice in order to place emphasis on African-American women. In summary, Kennedy contributes African-American literature as an innovative and an experimental playwright by using generic hybridity in *The Alexander Plays* to discuss social, political, and racial issues about African Americans, especially African-American women.

CHAPTER I. *SHE TALKS TO BEETHOVEN*

The first play of *The Alexander Plays* is *She Talks to Beethoven*. In the play, Kennedy achieves generic hybridity by combining creative nonfiction and autobiographical drama. The play is set in Ghana in 1961. In this way, Kennedy highlights an important aspect of the political atmosphere of the early 1960s. In the play, Beethoven and Fanon emerge as important historical figures to accentuate Kennedy's racial and political concerns. First of all, Beethoven's *Fidelio* expresses the importance of freedom. The protagonist and Beethoven become similar characters as both are artists whose works are marked by a close involvement with politics. Kennedy's political message is gleaned in the scene where Beethoven tells Suzanne to write: in this way, Kennedy emphasizes the crucial importance of writing to African-American women in communicating their struggles to the society at large. Secondly, Fanon becomes a character in this play, through him, crucial political issue is explored: the concepts of "self-hatred" and "decolonization" that remind her audience of Fanon. Her aim is to bring different perspectives to African-American issues and she accomplishes this political aim through Fanon. For this, her travelling to Ghana is significant because after she went there, gained deeper insights into her African heritage.

1.1. Introduction

She Talks to Beethoven begins with the description of Suzanne and the setting, which is a house on the campus of Legon University in Accra: "Suzanne is dressed in a robe of kinte cloth," ("colorfully patterned cloth traditionally woven by hand in Ghana" [Kente Cloth]) and in her living room there are photos of Kwame Nkrumah, Ludwig van Beethoven, a wedding photo, and a radio. (Kennedy, 2001: 139). Suzanne is anxiously waiting for her husband David: he has disappeared on learning about "a plot against his life while he [is sitting] at his wife's bedside, [choosing] to vanish to protect her" (2001: 145). Suzanne is trying to recover from an unspecified illness: according to the stage directions, "part of her arm and shoulder are wrapped or bandaged in gauze" (2001: 139). In the absence of her husband, Suzanne is accompanied by the character of Beethoven: while she is reading about Beethoven in preparation for a text she plans to write about him, the composer suddenly appears and Suzanne starts to talk to him.

Suzanne and Beethoven's dialogue is interspersed with the voice of an announcer on the radio, providing information about David. At first, David's is heard reading an excerpt from Frantz Fanon; then, the radio announcer explains that David is missing. Later, the announcer mentions that both Suzanne and David are working for an African literary journal, *Black Orpheus*, by collecting some stories, poems and novels by African and African-American writers. In the meanwhile Beethoven informs Suzanne that "[t]onight is the opening of *Fidelio* [Beethoven's only opera]" (2001: 141). Then, Beethoven answers Suzanne's questions about some details of his life; in this way, he helps her continue writing a play about him. She declares that David has been helping her with the play but since he is missing now, she has some difficulties on her writing. For example, she is not sure what happened in Vienna when Beethoven was there. Then, Suzanne takes notes as Beethoven talks about his life. He even takes Suzanne to Vienna: while he is talking about his nephew Karl, the setting changes; according to the stage directions, they leave Suzanne's house and walk by the Danube. Meanwhile, the radio declares the time when David disappears; it is the time when Suzanne is ill. It is clear that David disappeared a very short time ago because Suzanne is still ill and he was with her before he left. Beethoven finds David's behavior "romantic" because he has left to protect his wife and believes that David will return by morning (2001: 145).

Suzanne and Beethoven then move backstage, where the composer's orchestra is rehearsing *Fidelio*. At that moment, Beethoven tells her the "secret" about his problems with his hearing: he can hear sounds but he cannot understand the words clearly (2001: 147). Beethoven wants Suzanne to write in his conversation book in order to understand her because he cannot hear her anymore. The onset of Beethoven's deafness is literally enacted on the stage: at the beginning, he hears and answers Suzanne's questions well, but eventually he confesses to having difficulty with hearing. As soon as Beethoven tells his secret, the radio informs that David is safe now because the people who tried to kill David are arrested and he can return to Accra. Beethoven, who is on stage to conduct *Fidelio*, calls Suzanne to his side. Suzanne begins to describe how he conducts the orchestra. After the concert, she starts reading aloud about the death of Beethoven. As soon as she announces that Beethoven is dead, David returns. She understands that David is the one who has sent Beethoven to keep her company.

1.2. Hybridity

1.2.1. Ludwig van Beethoven and *Fidelio*

Although Kennedy was influenced by white canonical writers and artists as a dramatist in formation, she does not depend on only white culture or African-American culture but she mixes both cultures and literatures in her plays. Like Kennedy, Suzanne in *She Talks to Beethoven* interweaves white and African-American literary cultures. Referring to hybridity “as a new genre of English,” Eleni Haviara-Kechaidou makes the following comment with reference to Kennedy’s *Funnyhouse*: “Kennedy’s discursive technique of mixing Euro-American and African cultural imagery introduces a theatrical mode of cultural hybridization [...]” (qtd. in Haviara-Kechaidou, 2008: 83). As it was discussed before, Kennedy’s using of a hybrid genre is her main concern in *The Alexander Plays*: because of the biographical details, this play can be considered as an autobiographical drama like many of her other plays. Also, in *She Talks to Beethoven*, she uses Beethoven as a dramatic character in a way that echoes similar devices used in creative nonfiction. Moreover, by making use of a conversation book in the play, Kennedy reminds the audiences of another genre, the diary: it has now become part and parcel of Kennedy’s play. Although it is not specified who the diary actually belongs to, Suzanne reads out quotations from it throughout the play to give biographical details about Beethoven. Kennedy’s Beethoven is a complicated character: he becomes a role model for Suzanne in terms of his identity as a politically conscious artist on the one hand, and he exemplifies oppression with respect to his identity as a man on the other. In other words, if Suzanne has a lot to learn from Beethoven’s artistic genius and his political convictions, she also feels disturbed by his stifling compassion for his nephew Karl: the latter is not unlike David’s seemingly protective but actually oppressive treatment of Suzanne herself.

First of all, since Beethoven is a historical character, his life should closely be analyzed in order to gain deeper insights into his role and function in the play. Born in 1770, the great German composer Ludwig van Beethoven lived in Bonn and Vienna (Lockwood, 2003: 25). In *She Talks to Beethoven*, Kennedy uses his one and only opera *Fidelio*: the theme of freedom in the opera is related historically to the French Revolution. During the French Revolution, which erupted in 1789, Beethoven gave great support the

idea of freedom, a byword implicit in the revolutionary cries of ‘Liberté! Egalité! Fraternité!’ that led to the removal of the French upper classes” (French, par. 1). Jocelyn Hunt describes the ideals that led to the French Revolution as follows: “concepts like egalitarianism, justice, organizational rationalism and anticlericalism led to a search for a better society” (Hunt, 1998: 2). Paul Robinson briefly summarizes the connection between Beethoven’s opera and the French Revolution: “Indeed, in 1805 one would need to be politically illiterate not to know that an opera trumpeting the idea of freedom would automatically be associated with the Revolution, albeit at the highest level of generalization” (1991: 29). Since then, the opera has come to be regarded as a work of art conceptualizing freedom as a universal idea: “Beethoven’s protagonists devote themselves to the cause of human freedom: freedom for all people, in all places and at all times” (Singer, 1974: 216). Hence Kennedy’s interest in the composer as a great artist whose idea of freedom could easily be adapted to every society or social group, including the African Americans.

However, Kennedy’s play does not lose sight of the fact that Beethoven the artist was also a fallible human being, especially in his personal relationships. Lewis Lockwood explains that Beethoven’s mother lost four children before she died in 1787 (Lockwood, 2003: 5-6). Both his siblings’ and his mother’s death made Beethoven feel responsible from his other siblings. Lockwood links these biographical details to Beethoven’s overbearing interest in his nephew, Karl:

The family crisis and his new struggle to take on responsibility for his brothers was a harbinger of Beethoven’s later relations with his family members—his brothers, their wives, and, much later, his nephew Karl. His entanglements with all of them in his later years would grow to take the form of obsessive interference. (2003: 6)

Kennedy reflects Beethoven’s excessive interest in Karl in the play with a scene in which Karl refuses to see his uncle. She then goes on to establish parallels between Beethoven and Suzanne’s husband. Suzanne has some problems with David because he takes it upon himself to treat Suzanne as if he were her doctor or mentor besides her husband. Beethoven, for example, notices David’s overprotective attitude: “Is it true that David

made drawings of your surgery as he sat by your side so that you would not be frightened?" he asks her (Kennedy, 2001: 145). Here, David behaves like Suzanne's doctor in order to calm her down before the surgery. Also, while Suzanne is writing a play about Beethoven, David interferes instructing her play. As a result, the audience feels that David exerts a negatively dominant influence over her. Suzanne actually rejects his dominance: when he is absent, she expresses her creativity by using Beethoven as a fellow artist.

At this point, one can argue that Kennedy makes use of the techniques of creative nonfiction. Kennedy's actual relation with Beethoven was impossible but he was a real person and a symbol as a white famous composer. When Kennedy was in Ghana, she was alone and in *People Who Led to My Plays*, she expresses that "[i]t was now that I felt increasingly that I was just accompanying another person as he [her husband] lived out his dreams [travelling over Ghana]" (Kennedy, 1987: 122). Although she does not openly say who this accompanying person is, in the play she uses Beethoven because Kennedy was interested in Beethoven from her childhood. "[...] Beethoven is more real to me than the members of the family at that time" Kennedy stated in one of her interviews (Barnett, 2005: 157).

Therefore, Beethoven appears in this play as a character inspired by the devices of creative nonfiction, but Kennedy also has other aims in using the famous composer. Suzanne creates a character for herself when her husband is away and she does it by herself. In other words, Beethoven is in the play to testify to Suzanne's artistic creativity. If Kennedy makes Suzanne sharpen her writing skills through the conversation with Beethoven, she expresses Suzanne's artistic frustration through reference to her illness. Suzanne's frustration has its origin in Kennedy's life. In *People Who Led to My Plays*, she expresses people whom she met asked her about her children and marriage when they came together. On the other hand, she wanted to discuss about her works but they preferred to talk academic issues to her husband:

They [people at Columbia University] 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? (Kennedy, 1987: 81)

Suzanne's wounded arm can be considered as a sign of her desire to write, which David and others keep disregarding at best, and actually hindering at worst. Moreover, in the play, Suzanne has been ill for more than two years:

Beethoven: How long have you been sick?

Suzanne: Two and one half years?

Beethoven: You mustn't worry. I've foreseen my death many times.
(Kennedy, 2001: 146)

Beethoven's remark suggests how anxious Suzanne is with respect to her future as an artist. Beethoven puts her depressive mood into words by mentioning death. This can be a reference of Kennedy's psychology since Kennedy uses a wounded arm as a symbol of her obstacle but actually, her pregnancy, her children, her marriage or her husband prevent her from writing so that David is not reflected as a positive character. Not only David but also Beethoven does not help Suzanne to write. However, Kennedy uses Beethoven in order to emphasize her writing ability. In other words, Beethoven is not actually alive but he is a symbol how she creates a play by herself (not with the help of David). It is because Kennedy creates a resemblance between Suzanne and Beethoven: Suzanne's process of writing her play parallels Beethoven's composing his opera. Therefore, Beethoven indirectly emphasizes her creativity.

As a black woman, Kennedy had social and psychological conflicts because of being in between black and white cultures. This struggle is dramatized through some conflicts in *She Talks to Beethoven* such as whiteness—blackness, life—death, absence—presence, past—present. The conflicts also inform the problems in Suzanne's relationship with David. Further highlight, these characters' conflict, Kennedy uses Beethoven and his nephew Karl in the play. At first glance, this is just a biographical detail, yet Kennedy actually points to something deeper: she connects Beethoven's relationship with Karl to David's relationship to Suzanne. As discussed above, Beethoven has two functions in the

play: here, in terms of gender roles, he is negatively represented as an overbearing force in his nephew's life.

In this way, the parallels conflicts come to highlight between David—Suzanne's and Beethoven—Karl's conflict. Karl attempted suicide because of Beethoven's stifling presence. That is why Suzanne talks about death: she is in between life and death because she cannot live her life exactly in the way she wants. Like Karl, Suzanne also wants to choose death and Kennedy gives this idea by Suzanne's illness. She is not sure about her treatment: her wound may not heal, she feels that she might even die. Giving the relation of Karl and Beethoven, Kennedy expresses if David's pressure continues, then it may come to a point where Suzanne will not care whether she lives or dies.

1.3. Politics

1.3.1. Whiteness and Beethoven

Kennedy uses Beethoven not only as a dramatic element to effectively use creative nonfiction but also as a part of her political discussions. First of all, her admiration for classical music comes from her childhood. In *People Who Led to My Plays*, Kennedy explains that she took piano lessons when a child: her piano teacher used to assign her pieces by Mozart, Chopin and Beethoven. (Kennedy, 1987: 42). Although her family must have been well aware that listening to or playing classical music was associated with white mainstream culture, they wanted their daughter to receive the best possible education, so that she could be as successful as any other white person. Her father's main concern was not money: he knew that his daughter would have to face great difficulties as a black woman; hence he wanted to make her a politically conscious and intellectually sophisticated person to enable her to survive the traumas of racial and gender discrimination.

Since there is a strong political subtext in almost every one of her plays, in this play too, Kennedy relates the character of Beethoven to a political aim. One of the reasons why Kennedy uses Beethoven and *Fidelio* is the significance of this opera. The opera, *Fidelio*, consists of two acts. Leonore, to save her husband, Florestan from prison, disguises as a

man called Fidelio (Robinson, 1996: 9). Florestan is imprisoned as a result of his political activities (Green, 2019: par. 1). Under this disguise, Leonore begs Rocco, the head jailer, to employ her and Rocco accepts (Robinson, 1996: 10). In Act II, Rocco and Leonore enter Florestan's cell and they think that he is dead; however, he awakens (1996: 18). After Pizarro, the governor, learns that the minister, Don Fernando, will visit the prison. He is worried that the governor finds out about his cruelty by talking to Florestan and he decides to kill Florestan (Green, 2019: par. 2). As Pizarro draws his dagger to kill Florestan, Leonore "throws herself between them. She then reveals her own identity: 'First kill his wife!'" (Robinson, 1996: 18-19). When Pizarro says that he is going to kill both Leonore and Florestan, Leonore draws her pistol and then two officers announce that the minister, Don Fernando has arrived (1996: 19). When Don Fernando realizes that Florestan is actually his old friend and learns from Rocco that Florestan acted heroically, he tells Leonore to unlock her husband's chain (1996: 20). The opera ends with joy and the celebration of freedom.

The reason why Kennedy chooses *Fidelio* specifically is that Beethoven's characters are also created in an untraditional way. In *Fidelio*, the woman protagonist Leonore tries to rescue her husband Florestan from prison by disguising herself as a man. One can easily see that Beethoven's Leonore is not a conventional woman: she does not passively wait for her husband but she acts to save him. Singer explains how Leonore is against the traditional understandings: "She takes arms against a sea of troubles; she chooses her destiny as a liberator, and in her transvestite disguise she behaves like the traditional male hero who seeks to free his beloved from imprisonment" (1974: 213). In other words, she is a character with ideals. In *She Talks to Beethoven*, Suzanne initially appears as a passive wife, helplessly waiting for her missing husband; however, the whole play actually emphasizes the fact that Suzanne is very much an artist in formation, one motivated intellectually and politically as well. Ruminating on Beethoven as well as on Fanon through the play, Suzanne is in the process of writing her first artistic work.

The other function of Beethoven is that he is a symbol of classical music and this kind of music is associated with white mainstream, and even elite, culture. The political and racial problems Kennedy negotiates are given through the figure of Fanon: the figure of Beethoven is used to emphasize the general indifference, if not hostility, of whites to

African Americans. Kennedy turns the deafness of the composer to a brilliant metaphor for white people's refusal to hear the problems blacks have to suffer in a racialized, and racist, society. In the play, Beethoven confesses that he is deaf but he fails to admit it publicly: "Yet I cannot bring myself to say to people 'Speak up, shout, for I am deaf'" (Kennedy, 2001: 147). The critic Michael Broyles suggests that Beethoven is at least willing to listen to what Suzanne has to say:

Possibly they [Kennedy's woman character and Moisés Kaufman's woman character] recognize that Beethoven has the capacity to hear without the sense of hearing that he listens so deeply that he hears what hasn't been said. Beethoven is hearing sound in his head that hasn't been sounded. They recognize Beethoven's ability to hear and understand that which is inaudible. (2011: 263)

In the play, Beethoven asks Suzanne to write down what she wants to communicate to him: "You must write what you want to say to me in them [his conversation books]. I cannot hear you" (Kennedy, 2001: 147). As a well-known white composer, Beethoven wants an African-American woman to write, because this is the only way for her to explain herself and for him to understand her. "Sometimes, too, I can scarcely hear a person who speaks softly," says Beethoven to Suzanne, "I can hear sounds, it is true, but cannot make out words" (2001: 147). In a sense, Kennedy creates an intelligent, open-minded white character admitting to his own handicaps: by suggestion, Kennedy appeals to her white spectators to regard Beethoven as a role model. It can also be argued that she urges her black spectators to "speak up," to make themselves heard by whites.

1.3.2. Ghana and Frantz Fanon

Kennedy was in Ghana at the beginning of the 1960s and in the same period, Suzanne is also in Ghana. Ghana's cultural and political atmosphere affected Kennedy directly. In *People Who Led to My Plays*, Kennedy explains that after her time in Ghana, her themes and topics became more and more focused on racial issues. Her best-known play, *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, for example, was written soon after she lived in Ghana. This play explores an African-American woman's struggles while she is searching for her

identity: she has a black father and a white mother. In *People Who Led to My Plays*, Kennedy shares her feelings when she arrived in West Africa; at that time Patrice Lumumba, an African nationalist leader, was assassinated. Then, she started to be curious about African-American leaders or writers. “When we arrived in West Africa everyone talked of Patrice Lumumba, the Congo’s young and heroic Prime Minister” [...] “Just when I had discovered the place of my ancestors, just when I had discovered this African hero, he had been murdered” (Kennedy, 1987: 119). Kennedy herself expresses she creates her characters under the influence of these African cultural elements such as ‘African mask.’

A few years before, Picasso’s work had inspired me to exaggerate the physical appearances of my characters, but not until I bought a great African mask from a vendor on the streets of Accra, of a woman with a bird flying through her forehead, did I totally break from realistic-looking characters. (1987: 121)

Kennedy’s keen interest in African culture is evident in *She Talks to Beethoven*. In the play, the radio announces Suzanne and David’s reason for living in Ghana: “Although the couple are American they have lived on West Africa for a number of years and together started a newspaper that was a forerunner to *Black Orpheus* bringing together poems, stories, and novels by African writers as well as Afro-Americans, some in exile in England” (Kennedy, 2001: 141). In *People Who Led to My Plays*, Kennedy mentions a literary magazine, called *Black Orpheus*: she says her first story “Because of the King of France” was published there in 1963 when she was living in Ghana.

In the play, the most significant reason why David and Suzanne are in Ghana is that David, as he is working on Frantz Fanon’s biography, often travels with Fanon. In *She Talks to Beethoven*, the radio continuously gives information about David: saying that he has gone to Blida with Fanon, and that he was subsequently gone missing. David is a supporter of Fanon; he teaches his students Fanon’s ideas by reading from his poems and political writings at University of Legon as the American professor of African poetry and the radio expresses “[...] Alexander has become highly vocal in keeping Fanon’s words alive” (2001: 143). In *She Talks to Beethoven* and also both in *Dramatic Circle* and *The*

Film Club, David and Suzanne frequently quote Fanon. Therefore, David's literal togetherness with Fanon implies Kennedy's interest in Fanon's political thinking. Suzanne is not with Fanon because of her unspecified illness: she has to stay in her house. This is again connected to Kennedy's own life, she could not travel when they were in Ghana because of problem during her pregnancy.

I had never seen my husband less than I did now that we were in Africa. He left very early before day light and was often in the bush two or three days. And now that I was pregnant, I would not be able to travel freely with him over Ghana. (Kennedy, 1987: 122)

Since it was risky to travel for Kennedy, she used to wait for her husband for days on end. Kennedy does not mention her own husband's relations with Fanon; however, she uses Fanon—a real person—as a character in this play in order to demonstrate her support of Fanon's politics. Kennedy created the character of David as a friend of Fanon's. Her characters as herself refuse to remain silent, as they have to fight against racial oppression. In other words, she again blends her personal life and political convictions both in her autobiographical works and in her drama.

Kennedy was influenced by what she read or what she saw so that after they went to West Africa, she changed her vision and she focused on her black identity. As it was said previously, Kennedy is influenced by white famous historical characters and in this play, with Fanon it is obvious that Kennedy is affected by her connection to her African ancestors. Accordingly, this brings her audience's mind the idea of "double consciousness" that is mostly known by W.E.B. Du Bois in African-American history. Since Kennedy is influenced by both white and black literature or culture, she is in between and she creates her characters, especially Suzanne, in this way. Similarly, T. Owens Moore claims that Fanon was also one who discussed "double consciousness" and supports his argument with Fanon's own words: "Without a Negro past, without a Negro future, it was impossible for me to live my Negrohood. Not yet white, no longer wholly black, I was damned" (qtd. in Moore, 2005: 752). Fanon's sentiments come very close to W. E. B. Du Bois's description of the "double consciousness." She directly uses Fanon in her play to show her support of this idea and that is why she, on the one hand reads and uses the traditions of white

American literature and on the other hand, she applies the ideas. In exploring Suzanne's inner conflicts then, Kennedy deftly brings African or African-American thinkers. In the end, it becomes clear that Kennedy's desire of using hybridity is actually related to the concept of "double-consciousness."

Kennedy will carry this idea of "double consciousness" into "self-hatred" in *The Film Club* and *Dramatic Circle* by using Fanon. Like Suzanne in the play, Kennedy, indicates that she was into her African identity after visiting Ghana because in an essay, she expresses that she stopped to straighten her hair when she went to Ghana (Als, 2018: par. 12). This shows that before Ghana, she used to live like a white American and since she has curly hair, she felt the need to straighten her hair because of the oppression. After visiting Ghana, she realized there was no need to get rid of her curly hair. In both plays, *The Film Club* and *Dramatic Circle*, she uses Frantz Fanon as a character who does not show up on the stage. In other words, as Fanon discusses, Kennedy decides to assert a black identity and wants to be heard by white people. Actually, Fanon is known by his famous books, *Black Skin White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth* and as a philosopher and psychoanalyst, Fanon focuses on African people's psychology in a white dominated society in these books. Emmanuel Hansen summarizes the life of the Algerian thinker in a few sentences:

Frantz Fanon's life history falls into five main parts: his birth, bourgeois upbringing and early education on the island of Martinique; his service in the French Army; his higher education in France and his exposure to the French intellectual Left; his work in North Africa as a psychiatrist committed to the cause of the Algerian revolution; his life and work as a professional revolutionary, both in North Africa and in sub-Saharan Africa. It is useful to look at Martinique in 1925 to understand the social environment in which Fanon grew up and the forces which moulded his early life. (1974: 26).

In other words, he contributed as a philosopher or psychiatrist the places that he went. Actually, he tried to fight for the Third World's freedom and struggles. All of them affected Kennedy so that Fanon becomes a character of her.

Not only Fanon, but also other African revolutionaries such as Kwame Nkrumah have influenced Kennedy. In the first stage direction of *She Talks to Beethoven*, while describing their place, it is said that “on the shelf is a photograph of Kwame Nkrumah” (Kennedy, 2001: 139). It is used as a shorthand to suggest the political activism of David and Suzanne as well as their admiration for Nkrumah’s role in the independence of Ghana. During these times, some of the American intellectuals, writers or poets decided to go to Ghana to actively participate in the liberation of Africa:

At the height of the civil rights movement—between the late 1950s and 1966—hundreds of African Americans, including intellectuals, technicians, teachers, artists, and trade unionists, left the United States for Ghana, the first sub-Saharan African nation to gain its independence from colonial rule. (Gaines, 2008: 294)

That is because Kwame Nkrumah wanted to come together “in the name of Pan-African solidarity” (2008: 294). Therefore, by mentioning Nkrumah in the stage directions, Kennedy implies how they support Ghana’s liberation and how they became active in African politics. As a result, Suzanne and David follow Fanon’s promote Ghana as African-American intellectuals. Paul K. Bryant-Jackson also touches upon this issue an interview with Gerald Freedman:

I have a theory that there is a continuum. Adrienne talks about playwriting and making plays from dreams. And I believe that a continuum exists within the subconscious and links African-Americans to Africa. Kennedy, on some very mystical level, is in touch with that continuum. And I think that’s a unique aspect of her writing, and it shows itself in her productions. The storyteller/Griot [the African storyteller] aspect that you talked about in the performance of this continuum. (Freedman, 1992: 214)

The stage direction also emphasizes Ghanaian music: “From outside Ghanaians play stringed musical instruments as they walk in the evening procession” (Kennedy, 2001:139). Music or musical instruments are important elements to express culture so that Kennedy uses music effectively in order to make the audience aware of African culture. Suzanne’s appearance also supports Kennedy’s aim since “Suzanne is dressed in a robe of kinte cloth” (2001: 139). Her dress is also a part of African or Ghanaian culture.

The unconventional means by which Kennedy explores the political and intellectual background of the early years of the Civil Rights Movement in *She Talks to Beethoven* are accompanied by equally unconventional dramatic methods. Kennedy is well-known for the nightmarish atmosphere she creates in many of her plays. Accordingly, Elaine Aston describes her nightmarish style as being ‘uncomfortable’ (2004: 58). *The Alexander Plays* can also be considered in the same way, since Kennedy makes her audience feel the anxiety of the main character, Suzanne. Suzanne’s physical and psychological situations are not so well because she is trying to recover from an unspecified illness and she is on her own. The stage direction describes Suzanne as “[p]art of her arm and shoulder are wrapped or bandaged in gauze” (Kennedy, 2001:139). Also, David suddenly disappears while waiting beside Suzanne’s bedside after her surgery. These inner and physical problems are reflected to the spectators and they feel that something is going wrong at the very beginning of the play. Therefore, the idea of creating a nightmarish atmosphere becomes true in this play: her best-known plays *Funnyhouse of a Negro* and *The Owl Answers*, Kennedy divides the characters into selves and this fragmentation implies Kennedy’s inner conflicts. Although this division of a character into two or more characters is not a dominant technique in *She Talks to Beethoven*, Kennedy again plays with the characters in order to emphasize the problems of identity. Kennedy creates dramatic characters out of historical and real person. Ross Posnock claims that Kennedy makes a very little distinction between fictional people and real people, dead people and living people (1998: 268). In this play, Kennedy uses Beethoven and Frantz Fanon as characters. Beethoven becomes a friend to Suzanne. In a very interesting way, Kennedy makes Beethoven and David merge into each other in the play. For example, Suzanne finds David’s handwriting in Beethoven’s conversation book. Beethoven also implies this by saying “I feel David will return by morning, perhaps on the road with the musicians, perhaps even in disguise” (Kennedy, 2001: 145). Moreover, at the very end of

the play, the stage direction describes David's voice as "not unlike Beethoven's" (2001: 150). In other words, Suzanne creates her other self in David's absence. This, of course, relates to a racial aim as Kolin claims:

As members of the same creative family, Beethoven and Suzanne will break all the color, time and gender barriers that fragment, categorize, or valorize art. The famed composer becomes Suzanne's other self, or confidant, a role often supplied by another woman such as the twins in *June and Jean in Concert* or her younger self in *The Ohio State Murders*. (Kolin, *Understanding* 2005: 121)

In other words, the characters are so fluid that identifications among the characters are unstable. In the end, Suzanne becomes all of these characters or rather all these characters become parts of Suzanne.

The setting of the play also demonstrates Kennedy's dreamlike style. Since Suzanne tries to complete her writing about Beethoven's biography, she writes down what Beethoven tells her about his memories. When Beethoven tells his story about his cousin, Karl, the setting suddenly changes: they are now by the Danube, near Karl's house. For a while, Beethoven relates and acts out what happened between Karl and himself. In other words, Beethoven's past and present become intertwined on the stage. Then, they come back to Suzanne's room and Suzanne continues her writing. Besides this, when Suzanne writes about the day of staging *Fidelio*, they all of a sudden find themselves in Beethoven's room. Beethoven is formally dressed and his orchestra is rehearsing while Suzanne keeps writing. The quick shifts between the settings (with respect to both place and historical time) makes the spectators feel as if they were having a dream.

In conclusion, Kennedy uses various techniques in writing this generically hybrid play. She uses autobiography not only to express her personal life but also to give voice to the African-American community. In other words, she connects her autobiographical writing to the politics of African-American people. In addition to her autobiography, she also uses creative nonfiction and this also has a political aim: she uses Beethoven to address the white audiences. Moreover, the use of the diary about Beethoven's life also

creates hybridity since she turns the diary into drama. Whatever Kennedy uses can actually lead to a message or create a meaning behind that. *She Talks to Beethoven* depicts the years when Kennedy was in Ghana, the time when she actually discovers her African identity. Fanon becomes the leader for her to follow her African origins. By incorporating autobiographical elements into the play, by using historical characters, and by exploring the theoretical background of blacks' contemporary struggles, Kennedy creates a generically hybrid and experimental play with a strong political edge.

CHAPTER II. OHIO STATE MURDERS

Having set *She Talks to Beethoven* in the 1960s, Kennedy breaks the chronological sequence in *Ohio State Murders* to return to the time between 1949 and 1952: through her main character Suzanne who, like Kennedy herself, studied at Ohio State University, the playwright adopts her own life onto the stage. In this way, Kennedy once again blends autobiographical drama and creative nonfiction. The autobiographical elements of the play have to do with the racial segregation and violence which confronted Kennedy—and her protagonist Suzanne—at Ohio State University.

The play demonstrates how racial segregation and violence eventually culminated in the Civil Rights Movement. Kennedy, as an African-American woman, focuses on her African-American identity in this play although she focuses on her African identity in *She Talks to Beethoven*. She signifies generic hybridity in this play as well: although she deals with race issue and the problems of African-American people especially African-American women (by intertextually referring to *Beloved*), the most noticeable thing is one of the most famous author, Thomas Hardy and his novel *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. The other significant point is that Kennedy uses creative nonfiction in a striking way in *Ohio State Murders*. She mixes autobiographical drama and creative nonfiction in an experimental way.

2.1. Introduction

Ohio State Murders revolves around Suzanne's memories of her traumatic years as a student at Ohio State University. This play is a play-within-a-play: at the beginning, Suzanne appears as her present self, "a well-known black writer visiting Ohio State to give a talk on the imagery of her work" (Kennedy, 2001: 151). While she narrates the traumatic experiences she underwent, such as the murders of her twin babies, another actor acts them out on the stage. The play does not follow a strictly chronological order; we learn, as the story unfolds, that Suzanne initially wanted to study English but because of her color she was made to major in child education instead. (Kennedy herself encountered the same problem at University: despite her desire to read English Literature, she eventually graduated from elementary education). Suzanne explains that "[...] there were no 'Negro'

students in the English Department” (2001: 154). Still, she took two English courses from white professors: one of the professors was Robert Hampshire, who eventually seduced her, fathered her twin daughters, and committed suicide after killing both babies. In an early scene, Suzanne-in-the-present tells about being summoned by Hampshire to his office. She explains that although he wanted to discuss the paper, he seemed not to care about her once she went to his office. Suzanne was then invited to his house, where their affair began.

The play goes on with a scene with Suzanne-in-the past realizing her pregnancy and talking to Hampshire. He simply refuses to believe that he is the father. In the following scene, Suzanne is expelled from the dorm because her notes on T. S. Eliot and Richard Wright are found by Miss Dawson, the head of the dorm: the latter submits them to a committee who find her “unsuitable” to campus life. Suzanne-in-the present explains that her parents were humiliated by her pregnancy and sent her to her Aunt Lou (her father’s sister) in New York. After the babies were born there, Suzanne returned to Columbus to continue her education, and started to stay with Aunt Lou’s friend, Mrs. Tyler.

Suzanne-in-the-present then goes on to detail how her two daughters were violently murdered by their father. As she took her daughter Carol to hospital, she had to leave her other baby, Cathi, in the car for a short while: the baby went missing, and was eventually found drowned. As the investigation into the baby’s death continued, Suzanne met David, her future husband. One day, when Suzanne was out, Hampshire walked in to Mrs. Tyler’s house, injured the elderly woman, stabbed his baby daughter to death, and killed himself with the same knife. Suzanne explains that after this unspeakably traumatic incident, she moved to Washington, D.C. to live with David’s sister Alice: isolating herself in her room for months on end, she finally married David. Towards the close of the play, Suzanne reveals another horrific fact: for years, the university concealed Robert Hampshire’s crimes by spreading the false story that Robert was murdered in the “Negro” section of Columbus. The denouement of the play comes with Suzanne mentioning that she has never been able to tell the story to anyone until now: hence, Suzanne explains, the violent imagery she uses as a writer.

In the play, Suzanne writes a paper on Thomas Hardy's novel *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* for Robert Hampshire's class. Everything starts with a note Hampshire writes on her paper that reads "make an appointment to see me" (2001: 155). When she goes to his office, Hampshire asks her what reference books she has used. However, he obviously has no interest in her paper or her references: he just gathers his books to end the meeting. Suzanne-in-the-present says that before Hampshire leaves the office, he "stares" at Suzanne (2001: 156). This long gaze suggests that Hampshire is not interested in her paper but her physical appearance. Before Suzanne realizes she is pregnant and tells Hampshire about her pregnancy, in the play, some scenes are given from the class in which they are reading from *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and her life in the dorm. Then, Suzanne-in-the-present tells that she was pregnant at Christmas in 1950 but "it was February 1951 when [she] told him [she] was pregnant" (2001: 161). The scene focuses on Suzanne-in-the-past telling to Hampshire about her pregnancy. He does not believe her: "That's not possible. We were only together twice. You surely must have other relationships. It's not possible" (2001: 161). It is obvious that Kennedy refers to a stereotype of a black woman here because Hampshire implies that Suzanne is a hyper sexual woman because she is black. Later, Suzanne declares the time of their intercourse "I went to his office twice before I went to his house after Christmas" (2001: 163). Meanwhile, Suzanne-in-the-present confesses that she was expelled from the dorm. Miss Dawson comes on to the stage and says "I have observed you sitting alone behind the dorm. The committee read your notes on T. S. Eliot and Richard Wright. You will not be allowed re-enter" (2001: 162). Simply because what Suzanne wrote was about "loneliness and race at Ohio State" the professors believed she was "unsuitable" for campus life. Then, Suzanne left the dorm and she was sent to Harlem; eventually, returned to Columbus and stayed with Mrs. Tyler who was a friend of her Aunt Louise's.

Suzanne-in-the-present, then, focuses on the time when one of her daughters was kidnapped and killed. "Near the beginning of March, Robert Hampshire kidnapped and murdered our daughter. She was the one called Cathi. He drowned her in the ravine" (2001: 165). As soon as she says this, Suzanne shares another memory: she drove to the river with her daughters because she was depressed and trying to decide what she would do. They were in the car in the stadium near the river, she hold twins' hands and fall asleep. She woke up with a sound and saw someone was running from the car. Then,

Suzanne-in-the-past appears on the stage outside the doctor's office: because of Carol's cough, Suzanne takes her babies to the doctor. She takes Carol into the lobby first and Cathi is in the car. When she returns to the car, she realizes Cathi is gone, the scene ends. Cathi was found dead and the investigation started and Suzanne felt like the murderer was someone she knew and someone white. After Suzanne-in-the-present declares this, the stage directions indicate that Bunny's and her friends' giggling is heard from dark corridors. Then, Suzanne explains who Bunny is: "Why I thought they were capable of murder I don't know but sometimes I suspected a group of girls who lived at the end of the corridor in the dorm. They had been headed by an overweight, dark-haired girl called Patricia 'Bunny' Manley" (2001: 167). The girls are white: with this scene, Kennedy shows the mercilessness of racism found its way into the university campus.

Then, Suzanne met David and she told everything to him: "[Her] pregnancy, [her] expulsion, the murder, and how [she] had returned to Columbus to see if [she] could find the murderer of [her] daughter" (2001: 168). David helped her to look for the murderer. Meanwhile, Suzanne started to work in the library to save money with David. One day, when they returned from work, they realized the second nightmare happened at home: Carol was killed as well. The murder is not shown on the stage but Suzanne-in-the-present tells what happened. Hampshire is in fear of ruining his life and he killed Carol because he supposed that Suzanne would reveal everything; Hampshire confessed to Mrs. Tyler. He also says that he tried to ignore Suzanne with his father's advice but he was unsuccessful to do that. He looked mad, pushed Mrs. Tyler, took a knife and the murder was occurred. After Suzanne gives her speech, Suzanne-in-the-past appears on the stage, in the library and says "[a]byss, bespattered, cureless, misfortune, enemy, alien host, battle groups fated to fall on the field today" and the scene ends (2001: 172).

2.2. Hybridity

2.2.1. Creative Nonfiction and the Neo-Slave Narrative:

Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

According to some critics, Kennedy is accepted as a surrealist playwright but still her plays are autobiographical. In other words, Kennedy uses dreams or fantasies but she

also uses the conventions of autobiographical writing. Kennedy describes her protagonist, Suzanne as follows: “[w]ell it’s a blend of fiction and nonfiction. I really love doing that, obviously. It’s a blend. It’s a blend of part-truth and part-fiction. It’s so obvious that I love to do that. I love to try to do that” (Barnett, 2005: 163). There is no suggestion in Kennedy’s writings that her children or other relatives were victimized in such a horrific way as Suzanne’s twins: she makes this event up as the fictional counterpart of what African Americans in general, and African-American women/children in particular, went through during the Civil Rights Movement. It is enough to remember the Birmingham Church Bombing, for example, to realize that children at that time suffered untold experiences, even lost their lives, like Suzanne’s baby twins in the play. “Kennedy’s theatre also evokes the hate crimes against black children as a result of segregation, exploitation, and white brutality” (Kolin, 2007: 70). *Ohio State Murders*, then, is one such play where the victimization of black children accentuates the most atrocious aspect of racism.

By experimenting with different genres within the space of one play, Kennedy effectively re-writes African-American history. What African Americans have experienced ever since the period of slavery (the echoes of which in the play are to be found in Kennedy’s ingenious take on Morrison’s re-writing of the history of American slavery in *Beloved*) is reality such as rape, violence, and murder: Kennedy dramatizes every one of these atrocities in *Ohio State Murders*. Chwen-Woan Kuan and Lisa Anderson assert that Kennedy actually “unravels the repetitive nature of history” on the one hand, and “challenges and revises the historical narrative with which her audience may feel most acquainted, blurring the boundaries between fiction and fact in her dramatic realm” on the other hand (2007: 31). In other words, Kennedy’s experimentation in generic hybridity enables her to rewrite African-American history in a subversively creative manner.

Consequently, Kennedy’s desire of rewriting of African-American women’s history as well as the dramatic techniques she uses in *Ohio State Murders* reminds us of Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*. Today, the novel is regarded one of the best examples of the neo-slave narrative. “What Toni Morrison does in *Beloved* is to escape from the limitations of the traditional slave narrative by using modernist technique within the framework of another generic tradition, the gothic, to extend and critique its range.” (Hamilton, 1996:

431). Especially from the 1960s onwards, African-American writers wanted to re-write their history, fictionalizing it not as a repetition of the white writers but as their own representation. Toni Morrison was also one of these writers and *Beloved* is accepted as a text that demonstrates how African-American writers undertake the difficult project of “rewriting history.” Cynthia Griffin Wolff describes Morrison’s accomplishment as follows:

Morrison intends to speak to this moral need, both urging and enacting the process that she has named “rememory” and her immense aesthetic achievement is a reconstruction of this element of America's history—a retrospective that replaces the slave woman’s silence with eloquent language. (1991: 418)

Beloved is a novel that draws upon the story of an actual slave called Margaret Garner. While she was trying to escape from slavery with her four children, Garner was caught by the slave owners. In order not to hand in her children as slaves, she thought it was better to kill them. Three of the children survived Margaret’s attempt, but the baby daughter died. In *Beloved*, Sethe, like Margaret, kills her own baby daughter to save her from slavery. Sethe also has four children—two boys and two girls. She also tries to kill them, with three—except one baby girl—surviving (Morrison, 1997: 149). “Readers who know Toni Morrison’s novel *Beloved* may feel that they have finally met ‘Margaret Garner’ in that novel; certainly her ‘tale’ is told here as never before” (1991: 434). In other words, Morrison transforms African-American women’s history into fiction in *Beloved*.

This is actually what Kennedy does in *The Alexander Plays*. She touches upon the issue of slavery because there is an African-American woman who is seduced by a white man (like in the slavery time, white plantation owners raped African-American women slaves). As a result of their relationship, Suzanne has two children. Besides autobiographical details, Kennedy also uses the “neo-slave narrative” within the context of creative nonfiction. In other words, Kennedy expands the need to use “real” events from autobiographical details into African-American history. Besides, she does this by referring to Morrison’s *Beloved*. Her aim of using this technique is to make her audience aware about one of the some significant issues: racial violence, especially against women and

children. The reason is that racial violence was still a serious topic before and during the Civil Rights Movement. In Kennedy's play which means that in the late 1950s, African-American women were still under the threat of white masculinity: "[t]his traumatic history repeats itself in this timeless dramatic world, where nothing is sealed in the past; it is omnipresent" (Kuan&Anderson, 2007: 31). Obviously, Morrison's historical story and Kennedy's drama in the context of creative nonfiction are similar to each other. Both of these women writers bring the past as present by their imaginations. First of all, the strongest resemblance is killing a child or children: the main characters lose their child/children. On the other hand, what Kennedy does is that the murderer is not the mother in her drama. Although Sethe kills her daughter, Kennedy's character, Suzanne has no intention to do that. In the play, the murderer is the white man: the father of the children. Her aim is to show who the real murderer is. In a way, Sethe saves her daughter because seeing her daughter as a slave is more difficult for Sethe than seeing her dead. Kennedy, in contrast, openly shows the actual murderer.

Besides the historical context, there are some other similarities between Sethe and Suzanne: The most critical issue of rape from the history of slavery also appears both in *Beloved* and *Ohio State Murders*. Sethe is raped by Schoolteacher; Suzanne is seduced (raped as suggested) by a professor. In addition to this, like Suzanne who is a successful playwright in the present, Sethe is also a kind of artist because she produces ink. Finally, a male character, Paul D., supports Sethe so that she can recover from the haunting of her daughter's memory with his help. Like Sethe, Suzanne also has a male helper in the play: David accompanies her in her search for the murderer of her daughters and emotionally supports her as she is recovering from the trauma of losing them. Yet, there is a difference between the novel and the play because at the end of the novel, the readers see that Sethe is getting better. On the other hand, there is no sign for Suzanne that shows her recovering. Morrison gives positive message by saving Denver who supports her mother but in Kennedy's play, both daughters are killed. If a daughter is accepted as a sign of hope, Morrison reflects this hope to her readers. Unfortunately, the audience cannot feel this kind of hope at the end of Kennedy's play.

If Morrison refashions the classical slave narrative by using radically novel techniques, Kennedy seeks to dramatize contemporary African-American history in an

experimental way. She does not simply show the whole story on the stage but she combines different genres and techniques in her drama. Not only Suzanne-in-the-present tells her story strikingly but also some parts are acted on the stage in order to emphasize the murder of her children. For example, in *Beloved*, in order to make the readers fully understand how Sethe is haunted by the memory of her daughter, Morrison uses gothic elements. In a similar way, Kennedy constructs the play in such a way that the murders of Suzanne's baby daughters remain a central issue, haunting Suzanne and rendering certain events of her past through gothic details.

There are other significant similarities between Morrison's novel and Kennedy's play. Firstly, all three events (that happened to Suzanne, Sethe and the historical character, Margaret) take place in Ohio. Secondly, Margaret's incident was in the newspaper and it means that everyone could learn what happened to the slave's daughter. Whereas in Kennedy's play, things are different: as it was said, her concern is not to deal with controversial things but to emphasize the situation of black people. The title of the play sounds like it is from the newspaper: *Ohio State Murders*. Therefore, although there is an inspiration from Garner's event, Kennedy changes this as well. At the end of the play, Suzanne says since university protected Hampshire, there is no reference to killing her twins in the news. It just focuses on the white male, spreading the false information that he was killed in the area of black people. It is because whites are superior to blacks and the superiority did not let them speak to tell who the real murderer is. As it is said, creative nonfiction requires an event that really happened, however it does not need to be confined to the author's autobiography as Lee Gutkind claims in the following sentence. "Creative nonfiction writers write about themselves and others, capturing real people and real life in ways that can and have changed the world" (2006: 7). That is what exactly Kennedy intends: she wants to re-write the history of African-American women in order to show how African-American women artists do write themselves into existence on their own terms. By means of the play, Kennedy also challenges another stereotypical view of African-American women: the audience expects the main character, Suzanne Alexander, to live and die basically as a victim because she has been seduced and her children are killed but she becomes a successful playwright. In other words, Kennedy subverts the image of the victim that is related to African-American women in many fictional and nonfictional works.

In discussing creative nonfiction, Lee Gutkind notes the general perception that a text containing fictitious characters or events disqualifies it from the genre of creative nonfiction:

The words ‘creative’ and ‘nonfiction’ describe the form. The word ‘creative’ refers to the use of literary craft, the techniques fiction writers, playwright, and poets employ to present nonfiction—factually accurate prose about real people and events—in a compelling, vivid, dramatic manner. (2012: 34)

However, Lee Gutkind argues, writers can use not only their own but other people’s memories in creative nonfiction:

the public side of creative nonfiction is mostly somebody else’s story; anybody, potentially, owns it, anybody who wants to go to the time and trouble to write about it. Or, conversely, it could be your story in that you have a theory or an idea or a larger point to make about the world. A bigger and more universal idea. (2012: 120)

This is actually what Kennedy does: she incorporates someone else’s story—from the history of African Americans—and rewrites it in dramatic form. Through her deft incorporation of several genres in her plays, she also renders what she has to represent on stage, as Gutkind puts it, “more universal.” *Ohio State Murders* is one other example of why Kennedy’s work cannot be confined to the limits of one specific genre: she uses autobiographical elements but her plays are not fully autobiographical, or she uses creative nonfiction but sometimes she makes up some of the dialogues or characters in her plays. In that case, Kennedy is aware of them: by this way, Kennedy also creatively uses the conventions of creative nonfiction. She weaves the memory of African-American women from history into the memory of her own history. In a way, as an African-American playwright, she identifies herself with African-American women who suffered from racial violence. It means that Kennedy, herself experienced discrimination and her aim is to emphasize how these experiences made her feel extremely unhappy. Her feelings about

such situations are actually parallel to the feelings of African-American women who were seduced or whose children were killed.

2.2.2. Fiction: Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*

Besides using hybridity genre, using both autobiographical drama and creative nonfiction, she also benefits from white literature by mixing it with African-American literature. In *Ohio State Murders*, on the one hand, she refers to African Americans' racial and literary history such as Civil Rights Movement or Toni Morrison. On the other hand, in the class reading, Hampshire is assigned his students to read Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* that is one of the most iconic work in English literature. In spite of the fact that Kennedy (so as Suzanne) wants to study the department of English literature, her concern is actually African-American people's history and her attribution to African American literature. In the end, she achieves her aim: she combines English or white canonical American literature and African American literature in *Ohio State Murders* as well. However, there is a reference to mixing two different literary people or work in the play and this is not approved by the authority. Suzanne writes something about Richard Wright and T.S. Eliot. Being black, Richard Wright was at the time not regarded as a canonical writer. Because Suzanne attempts to discuss him in connection with T.S. Eliot, a white literary figure already admitted into the literary canon as a great artist, she is expelled from the dorm. By highlighting the racist frame of mind of Suzanne's lecturers, Kennedy radically questions the notion of canonical literature. In this way, she not only unmasks the bigotry of the academic establishment but also demonstrates her conviction that great black writers such as Richard Wright are part and parcel of the Western literary canon.

In *Ohio State Murders*, as it is given, Suzanne reveals her past on the stage. Therefore, this reminds us of Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie*. Tom is the main character here and he also is on the stage in the present time and shares his past. Kennedy reflects her admiration of Tennessee Williams as follows: "Tennessee Williams: The writer whose career and plays I coveted. It took ten years to stop imitating him, to stop using his form and to stop stealing his themes, which were not mine" (Kennedy, 1987: 94). The concern here is not about imitation but she uses his technique or style while talking about

one of the most important issue about African-American history: violence in African-American women's history.

Like Tom Williams (a.k.a. Tennessee Williams), Suzanne becomes a 'well-known writer,' but only after the events of the play she narrates have occurred. Like Tom Wingfield, the narrator/character in *The Glass Menagerie*, she does not follow the strict rules of time but reveals clues to the mystery before it happened, before it was encapsulated in her memory. As narrator, then, Suzanne Alexander is character, chorus, actor, an author. (Kolin, *Understanding* 2005: 139)

Although the memories are not similar to each other, the technique is the same. She always wanted to see her family on the stage but she also thought that "[w]as what our family did important enough to write about? To read about?" (Kennedy, 1987: 60). Therefore, she also wants to get rid of the limitations of writing autobiographically. In other words, she does not simply talk about her family's or her own memories but she connects the events to the history of African-American people. In this way, she is able to discuss one of the most important issues (that are violence and discrimination) during the period of Civil Rights Movement. She uses her inspiration in an innovative way since she creates a hybrid genre.

Besides Toni Morrison's and Tennessee Williams's works, Kennedy also alludes to Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. In the novel, the main character Tess, who is a young country girl, is sent to Mrs. D'Urberville because Tess's father John Durbeyfield is misled into thinking that the wealthy D'Urbervilles are his relatives (Hardy, 1978: 46). Tess comes to Wessex and she meets Alec, who is the son of the family. Alec rapes her when she falls asleep (1978: 118-19). As a result, Tess gives birth. The similarity between the novel and the play in terms of plot structure become clearer: both Tess and Suzanne suffer at the hands of privileged males, and both give birth to these men's children. Both Tess in the novel and Suzanne in the play are outsiders: as an African American, Suzanne is an outsider because of her race and as a country girl, Tess is an outsider because of her class. However, Kennedy's aim is not simply use white canonical fiction in her play. Her aim is to connect this intertextual reference to her social, political, and racial discussion:

Though employing similar techniques as some of earlier plays, particularly the interspersions of literary para-texts such as quotations from Thomas Hardy's novel *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, *Ohio State Murders* may thus well be said to be Kennedy's most straightforward political play, in which personal catastrophe serves to illuminate the larger problem of race relations and racially defined identities. (Benesch, 2014: 104)

What gives Kennedy's play a stronger political edge than that in Hardy's novel is that while the issue of rape in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is openly revealed, Kennedy (deliberately) steers shy of naming Suzanne's rape as rape: in this way, Kennedy subtly emphasizes that when African-American women were concerned, there were still sufferings that were "unspeakable" such as interracial rape. Hence Kennedy's references to Hardy's novel: by means of Tess's rape, Kennedy obliquely draws attention to the extreme physical, psychological, and emotional violence African-American women have been suffering since the period of slavery. In the novel, while Tess's child gets sick and dies a natural death (Hardy, 1978: 146), but in the play, Suzanne's twins are murdered. This difference also proves that Kennedy wants to create a stronger message with a highly political content. Her aim is to show who the real murderer is: white supremacists.

In conclusion, in terms of plot and characterization, *Ohio State Murders* is a rewriting of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. The difference is that Tess stabs Alec in the end although Suzanne does not do anything with violence. Suzanne, through Kennedy transforms violence into art so that she can achieve to reveal unspeakable issues of African Americans. Lois More Overbeck summarizes *Ohio State Murders* as follows:

Although given A's for her brilliant analysis of Hardy's *Tess*, Suzanne is prevented from becoming an English major because of race; seduced by her white professor, Suzanne and her children become the victims of violence and guilt. The narrative structure allows past and present to merge in a timelessness that permits repressed fears to be a presence on the stage. (1992: 37)

In other words, Kennedy reveals the past on the stage in order to break the unspeakable. Therefore, what Kennedy does also shows African-American women's attitude towards violence during the Civil Rights Movement.

2.3. Politics: Racial Violence and the “Unspeakable”

Before *Ohio State Murders*, Kennedy studies on her African origins in *She Talks to Beethoven* by giving details from her own life. Now, she discusses her African-American identity in this play and she still continues to give autobiographical details. The most striking issue in this play is racial discrimination since Kennedy herself experienced this when she was at the university. Although until attending to the university, Kennedy did not experience racial discrimination in Cleveland, she did when she was at Ohio State University. In the play, Suzanne-in-the-present expresses her childhood times “[t]he schools I had attended in Cleveland were an even mixture of immigrant and black. You were judged on grades. But here [at Ohio State University] race was foremost” (Kennedy, 2001: 154). These parts of the play are the autobiographical reflection of Kennedy's own life; places, events and even the time are the same. In other words, examples that Suzanne gives in the play are actual autobiographical details from Kennedy's own life. The reason of these discrimination examples is that Kennedy wants to lead her audience into the main event—the murder of the twins. In other words, she wants her audience to feel inside how racial discrimination hurt Kennedy deeply. One example is that black students lived together because white students did not want to be with them. “In my dorm across from the Old Union there were six hundred girls. Twelve of us were blacks. We occupied six places, rooming together two in a room” Suzanne says (2001: 154). While the events are given, Suzanne-in-the-present sometimes gives examples of discrimination that she and her friends experienced in their university and dormitory. Above the university, there is a ravine that is the most significant element for Suzanne's memory because “[a] year and half later one of [Suzanne's] baby twin daughters would be found dead there” (2001: 154). When she describes this part of the university she says: “Very few Negroes walked on High Street above the university. It wasn't that you were not allowed but you were discouraged from doing so” (2001: 154).

At this point, Suzanne's roommate, Iris Ann becomes an important character in the play. She is described in the stage directions as "[l]ike Suzanne she wears a pale skirt and sweater (possibly pink) and like Suzanne her hair is in a soft page boy" (2001: 157). Iris Ann appears on the stage for the first time while she is crying and lying on her bed. She is crying because her boyfriend broke their engagement but Iris often cries at night as Suzanne says. The reason why she feels so sad is that they—as black people—are discriminated against by the white girls in the dorm. For example, white girls gave parties in the dorm but they were not invited, they stayed in their rooms or they went to the movies. Iris Ann later dropped out of the university but the exact reason is not expressed in the play. Iris wanted to be a music major and she played the violin well. One day, Iris Ann's uncle, "a well-known doctor in Akron," comes to the university to see them and he tells Iris "[t]hat department is putting you under too much pressure [...] I don't think they want you" (2001: 160). (Iris Ann will be discussed specifically later.) One of the most significant points is that Suzanne wants to study in the English Department but professors discourage her and she has to give up her desire because of her race. It is because as Kennedy says "[white people] tried to hold you back. That implied a great challenge existed in life" (Kennedy, 1987: 14). Suzanne is not just discriminated against by her professors or white friends but it happens at any kind of place. Suzanne remembers: it is when she tied her hair so tightly with her curlers so that her head bled. "When I went to the university health center the white intern tried to examine my head and at the same time not to touch my scalp or hair" (Kennedy, 2001:168). Since she is black, he examines Suzanne by "looking away." Most probably it is because he thinks blacks are dirty and as a white person, he tries to be away from her even if he is a doctor, he is unwilling to examine her.

Kennedy uses hybridity in this play as well as in her previous play, *She Talks to Beethoven*. Kennedy's main concern, using a hybrid genre, remains important in *Ohio State Murders* as well: she combines autobiographical drama and creative nonfiction. This was already discussed but in this paragraph, using creative nonfiction and autobiographical elements will be discussed by giving detailed examples from the play. First of all, the characters become important in the play since most of them are true to Kennedy's own life. For this, Kennedy says "Every character I write is based on someone. All the characters I write are a blend of people I know and myself" (Barnett, 2005: 164). This is one of the evidences how she writes autobiographically. She does not simply talk about herself but

she also gives the details of other people's lives that she knows. In a way, she is not just inspired by these people but she also identifies herself with them. In *People Who Led to My Plays*, she also expresses that on one of her plays, *June and Jean*, she uses her kindergarten school friends (Kennedy, 1987: 6). Moreover, she does not limit herself with the people whom she knows but she also uses characters from the books that she read. Kennedy expresses that for a long time, she identifies herself with Jane from *Jane Eyre* or Laura from *The Glass Menagerie*.

The point in this connection is that Kenney blends her own life and the lives of the people she knows. As it is understood from her expressions that this is not a new technique for Kennedy. The most significant and striking point in the play is the seduction of a young woman and the murder of her twins. Therefore, it can be considered as this story is some else's story that Kennedy knows. As it is already discussed, the whole story reminds the audience of the history of African-American women in general. By referring African-American women's history, she supports her political message with the help of creative nonfiction. She may also complete the autobiographical part by sharing what her friend or relative experienced indeed. Sometimes, she does not want to talk about some parts of her life. There are some parts in *People Who Led to My Plays* that can be showed as an evidence of this. On a few pages, she starts her sentence with "I remembered" then she uses a dash. "I remembered—" (Kennedy uses this on the pages 85, 91, 97, 111 and these times are from her university and after university times). Also, she does not write too much about her university years. It is obvious that although she wants to share something she cannot reveal everything explicitly and freely. This reminds us of the "unspeakable" as conceptualized by Toni Morrison:

Thus, in spite of its implicit and explicit acknowledgment, "race" is still a virtually unspeakable thing, as can be seen in the apologies, notes of "special use," and circumscribed definitions that accompany it — not least of which is my own deference in surrounding it with quotation marks, [sic] (1988: 126)

In other words, Morrison shows how race becomes an unspeakable thing in literature. In one of her interviews, Kennedy remembers that some things could not be openly discussed at school or at home when she was a child:

Boundaries, I think boundaries is a good word, too. I don't know what kind of black world you grew up in,...the kind I grew up in—I respected. But it really was a very rigid childhood. I wasn't allowed to speak, just arbitrarily; I had to speak when I was spoken to. I wasn't allowed to express what I was thinking. I had to say things that were correct in school and at home. So all these people were burning inside of me. (Bryant-Jackson and Overbeck, 1992: 5)

Kennedy calls “boundaries” when she discusses about what she could not say when she was a child. It can be said that these boundaries still affected Kennedy during and after her university years. One can clearly conclude that something happened in the period that she studied at university but this may have not happened to her specifically. At this point, since she turns people that she knows in real life into characters, Iris Ann becomes a likely autobiographical character in the play. One of Suzanne’s African-American friends in the dorm, Iris seems to have a minor role at first glance: the audience sees her on the stage just once, while she is crying. Suzanne attributes Iris’s sadness to her fiancé breaking their engagement, but this character’s all-too-human response to suffering in a play that otherwise concentrates uncompromisingly on violence turns her into a memorable person, a dramatic counterpart to one of those women with “unspeakable” stories, as suggested in Kennedy’s *People Who Led to My Plays*.

Kennedy uses Iris’s reaction to what is probably an “unspeakable” experience to enhance the terrifying experiences Suzanne undergoes because of Robert Hampshire. In other words, Iris’s and Suzanne’s experiences come to mirror each other in terms of their horrifying consequences for these women. In the play, Suzanne says that she “had totally believed sex was a sin before marriage” (Kennedy, 2001: 170). Suzanne’s misgivings about premarital sex suggest that Robert Hampshire coerces her into the relationship. Therefore, what Hampshire does is related to violence. First, when she visits his office and wants to discuss about her paper, Hampshire does not listen to her. Like the other

academicians who do not approve of what she reads and what she writes, Hampshire discourages her intellectually. Secondly, he forces her into a sexual relationship without any emotional or ethical involvement on his part: on learning about her pregnancy, he accuses her of having other relationships. And lastly, he murders the baby daughters, leaving her bereft of any consolation. In other words, Kennedy asks the audience to assess how overwhelming the sufferings of African-American women are through what remains “unspeakable” in Suzanne’s as well as Iris’s stories.

Suzanne and Iris are not the only autobiographical characters in *Ohio State Murders*. In *People Who Led to My Plays*, Kennedy mentions the head of her dorm was a woman called Miss D.: in the play, the head of the dorm is appears as Miss Dawson. Miss Dawson is there as a negative character because with strong prejudice against the African-American students: she looks through Suzanne’s papers and gives them to the authority. Kennedy describes Miss D. as “a white haired spinster with a cane, as hated in my mind as the cruel Mr. Brocklehurst of Lowood in *Jane Eyre*, a figure of authority to rebel, plot and dream against” (Kennedy, 1987: 111). Although Miss D. did not expel Kennedy from the dorm (there is no information about it), she became a negative person for Kennedy so that she turns Miss D. into Miss Dawson in the play in order to explain how she was exposed to this woman’s racism while studying at Ohio State University.

Besides autobiographical characters, Kennedy includes her childhood memories of her parents talking about atrocities against African Americans. In *People Who Led to My Plays*, Kennedy relates that her parents would send her outside to play whenever they had to talk about violent incidents: “Often they’d say, ‘No one really knows the truth, but people say...’ Contradictory voices, different versions of a story as a way of penetrating to the truth of things, would become important in my work” (1987: 86). Kennedy adds that she realized what was going on despite her parents’ desire to protect her: “But I knew whites had killed Negroes, although I had not witnessed it” (Kennedy, 2001: 168). In *Ohio State Murders*, Suzanne also says: “Now I remembered my father’s sermons on lynching and the photographic exhibits we often had in our church Negroes hanging from trees” (2001:168). Once again, Kennedy deftly turns her own life into the raw material of her drama.

What becomes different in this play is that the events are not chronologically given because Suzanne does not follow a certain order; while she is giving some details of the past, she can suddenly change the subject and focus on a different thing. In other words, the transitions of scenes are unconventional because not only the past and the present are staged but also there is a non-chronological order in the representation of Suzanne's past. For instance, after Suzanne recounts events that take place event in 1951, her following monologue or scene can be related to an event at an earlier date. Although she continues to tell the events that happened in the 1951 when her daughters were born, Suzanne suddenly returns to 1950 when she was pregnant at university. She informs her audience that in the dorm, Iris and Suzanne "often cried at night" (2001: 163). By saying this, Kennedy actually implies that Iris and Suzanne are so lonely that they just support each other because there is no one around them to share their feelings about their problems. The reason why she goes back to the dorm time is that Kennedy wants to emphasize how Suzanne experiences really hard times during pregnancy that actually means she suffers from the sexual violence that happened because of her race. As Philip C. Kolin explains, the temporal shifts serve to suggest the extreme painfulness of the unspeakable experiences which Suzanne goes through:

Moving from present to past and then back to the present, Kennedy involves the audience in the mystery of Suzanne's life. We become entangled in the darkness with her. (*Understanding* 2005: 141)

In conclusion, employing various techniques, Kennedy uses hybridity again: she mixes autobiography and creative nonfiction. In *Ohio State Murders*, it is for discussing the most important issues during the Civil Rights Movement— violence and discrimination. The references to Morrison's *Beloved* show Kennedy's desire to rewrite the African Americans, especially African-American women. Not only *Beloved* but also *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, in this chapter, is significant because through this novel, Kennedy implies that Suzanne's pregnancy occurred because she was forced into a sexual relationship, another serious issue demonstrating physical violence that African-American women experienced. Throughout the discussion, Kennedy actually refers to the "unspeakable" things that African Americans still suffered from this at those times. As a result, the audience is clear that Kennedy's

concern is not only about using dramatic devices well but also presenting serious issues of concern for African-American women.

CHAPTER III. *THE FILM CLUB AND DRAMATIC CIRCLE*

The last two plays of *The Alexander Plays* are *The Film Club* and *Dramatic Circle*. While using the same story in both plays, Kennedy dramatizes the plot in different ways. As a familiar practice, she again creates a narrator in these two plays. In the first, the narrator is Suzanne Alexander, and in the second Suzanne's sister-in-law Alice: the main difference is that *The Film Club* is presented entirely as a monologue, whereas *Dramatic Circle* features several characters as well as the narrator.

In terms of plot-structure and theme, *The Film Club* and *Dramatic Circle* plays are very similar. Suzanne is waiting for her husband David to return to London from Ghana. Kennedy emphasizes black activism through David who is writing Fanon's biography. What happened to David when he was in West Africa is significant with respect to the exploration of the history of black people in the play, because he talks about violence and torture.

Technically, intertextuality and metatheatre (there is a theatrical group) appear both in *The Film Club* and *Dramatic Circle*. In both plays, there are references to Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. There are also references to Bette Davis's movies. But the references are not mere allusions: through generically hybrid elements, Kennedy introduces intertextuality into her drama art by experimenting with, for example, the conventions of the gothic or radio drama.

3.1. Introduction

3.1.1. *The Film Club*

The Film Club is a monologue performed by Suzanne Alexander, who is both the narrator and the main character. Waiting for her husband's return from Ghana in London with her sister-in-law Alice, Suzanne is pregnant. At the very beginning of the play, Suzanne tells us that Alice has died "last week of an asthmatic attack" (Kennedy, 2001:174). She remembers Alice creating a film club for the family in which she "typed our scripts, directed, and filmed scenes with all of us [the family members] playing parts" (Kennedy, 2001: 174). In a way, she "adapted" the films and that is why Suzanne calls

them as “Alice’s movies.” In the beginning, Suzanne reminds the audience of *She Talks to Beethoven* by explaining that her husband went missing for fifteen months when they were in Accra. After David safely reunited with Suzanne in Accra, she left for London with her sister-in-law Alice: although David is supposed to join them soon, as in *She Talks to Beethoven*, he arrives only at the end of the play. Suzanne develops some health problems such as “ailments, nausea, and breathlessness;” apparently, her problems are psychosomatic because of her husband’s absence.

There is also another character, a psychiatrist called Dr. Freudenberger. He and his wife run a theatrical group, a dramatic circle, where his patients read books aloud. The group at present are reading Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*. On being invited to this group, Suzanne is assigned to read Lucy’s part and Alice is assigned that of Mina. Suzanne uses quotations from *Dracula* and Fanon throughout her monologue. In the end, Suzanne returns to Washington to live with David’s family and her daughter Rachel is born here. There is news from David that there was a plot against him and that the person who planned to kill David is actually the person who had also tried to kill Fanon. It is thought that David was poisoned with filicin, but survived: “[...] Alexander, who worked with Fanon, had been trying to uncover a plot against the revolutionary writer’s life. During the dinner observers say Alexander became violently ill after having an aperitif and was admitted to the hospital. Nothing more known but it is suspected he was poisoned with filicin” (2001: 180). Suzanne ends her monologue by reading a passage from Fanon.

3.1.2. *Dramatic Circle*

Interestingly, *Dramatic Circle* is a radio adaptation of *The Film Club*. Suzanne and Alice are London in 1961 and they are awaiting news from David. There are several differences between *The Film Club* and *Dramatic Circle*: in the radio adaptation, the narrator is Alice. Secondly, David’s voice is heard throughout the play: he sometimes gives information about his life in West Africa and sometimes reads quotations. In a sense, his absence is compensated for by his voice. In London, Suzanne sees Dr. Freudenberger for her complaints and the doctor says “Mrs. Alexander, I’ve examined you and can find no reason in your heart or blood for your breathlessness. I recommend rest, especially since you’re expecting a child” (2001: 184). It is clear that her anxieties cause

her complaints. Dr. Freudenberger asks about her husband and Suzanne informs him: David is a friend of Fanon's, writing a biography of him and they travelled to Blida together. "You see, in Blida with Fanon, David saw soldiers who were prisoners. Their disorders took various forms, states of agitation, rages, lamentations. I'm afraid David will be imprisoned. He has enemies. He insists West Africa has not yet achieved independence" (2001: 185). When Alice talks to the doctor, she also says that Suzanne "[...] has inexplicable dreams of historical characters and she speaks as the characters in her sleepwalking" (2001: 185). In order to reduce Suzanne's stress, the doctor invites them to his dramatic circle and they accept it. Suzanne and Alice go to Dr. Freudenberger's house and they start to read Chapter 15 of *Dracula*. This is the part from Dr. Seward's diary, where he discusses the wound on Lucy's throat. When they stop reading to have tea, the doctor asks Suzanne about her life and she talks about herself. Since Suzanne feels so bad about David, Dr. Freudenberger says he knows someone from the American Embassy and he promises he will talk to the American ambassador. He also walks with the women to their home because Suzanne does not feel well. At home, she listens to the radio to hear about David: "... again, David Alexander is still missing" (2001: 189). At night, Suzanne sees a shadow in their garden and awakens Alice to show it to her as she thinks it is Dr. Freudenberger. Alice makes Suzanne sleep but she is also sure that the man in the garden is Dr. Freudenberger. The problem is that the doctor has dark hair but this man has white hair, Alice is confused. The next day, Alice wakes up with the voice of Suzanne reading the true love letters of Napoleon and Josephine. She says "Reading it and rereading these historical letters seemed to give her strength at a time when... there were no letters from David" (2001: 190). Then, both David and Suzanne's voices are heard, reading a part of the letter together.

Suzanne and Alice attend the dramatic circle again but no one mentions the figure in their garden. Dr. Freudenberger, from *Dracula* where Dr. Van Helsing reads Lucy's death: Alice suspects that if Dr. Freudenberger might be suggesting that Suzanne will die. The next night, the doctor appears in their garden one more time but as Alice says his white hair is gone this time. Yet, Alice and Dr. Freudenberger never mention his white hair when they come together. In their dramatic circle, Suzanne reads the scene where Lucy dies.

Finally, the Ghanaian ambassador informs Suzanne and Alice that David is now fine and explains how he was imprisoned and poisoned with filicin. David has survived, but there is sad news: “And one final note: In the morning there will be an article in the *Herald Tribune* that Frantz Fanon has died in a hospital in Washington, D.C. I’m terribly sorry” (2001: 195). Suzanne cries. They go to the dramatic circle for the last time and when they return, Alice again makes Suzanne sleep. She goes out to the garden and waits for Dr. Freudenberg. He comes and Alice asks “Sebastian, why have you walked in the garden at night, limping hair white, almost as an apparition?” (2001: 196). He answers as it is because he wants to be seen like an apparition and he explains himself. “To prepare Suzanne’s mind for the darkness I knew she must face. The moment I met Suzanne I fell in love with her. [...] I had a premonition that David, like Jonathan Harker, was going through bad times and she, like Lucy, would become the victim of an unfair, tragic plot” (2001: 196). The doctor kisses Alice then disappears and that is the last time she sees Dr. Freudenberg.

At the end of the play, Suzanne and Alice go to Gatwick to meet David. Suzanne wears David’s favorite dress “[...] white silk with a kinte cloth sash” (2001: 196). Since David has changed so much that they hardly recognize him. “He limped like an old man and his black hair had turned white” (2001: 196). David embraces them and says they will continue to live by Fanon’s example.

3.2. Hybridity

3.2.1. *The Film Club: Bram Stoker’s Dracula*

It is now clear that since Kennedy deals with unspeakable issues, she gives the main ideas by giving references to different texts. In these two plays, Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* comes forward in order to complete her aim: one is about technique (hybridity) and the other is about topic (her political message). First of all, *Dracula* is a well-known gothic novel by the British writer Bram Stoker. This time, she mixes autobiographical drama with gothic elements so that she again uses generic hybridity. Actually, gothic elements are again a reflection of Kennedy’s own life because the dark and mysterious elements in the play from her experiences of racial discrimination, as discussed above with

reference to *Ohio State Murders*. In *People Who Led to My Plays*, Kennedy mentions some gothic works other than *Dracula*: she was also fascinated by *Jane Eyre* and *Frankenstein*. “Metamorphosis and that change of identity would, twenty years later, become a theme that would dominate my writing. The characters in my plays and stories would also change personae at an alarming rate” (Kennedy, 1987: 16-7). As in her previous plays which challenge racial identity, in *The Alexander Plays*, identity becomes so fluid that we see the characters literally turning into each other.

The first striking example of racial transition in the play is the one between Suzanne and Lucy, the main character of *Dracula* who is identified as white. Besides, David transforms into Beethoven and Dr. Freudenberg. As a proof how Suzanne identifies herself with Lucy, in the play, Suzanne declares: “Dr. Freudenberg gave me the part of Lucy. These readings were for our amusement and I don’t think the others realized how strongly I was affected by the passages I read on Lucy” (Kennedy, 2001: 176). In the novel, Lucy is accepted as a victim; she dies at the end because *Dracula* drinks her blood (Stoker, 1994: 195). Since Dr. Freudenberg assigns Suzanne to read the part of Lucy, it can be said that the doctor sees her as a victim like Lucy. As in *Ohio State Murders*, there is a white man who plays the evil character in both plays as well. In other words, there should be a reason why Dr. Freudenberg sees Suzanne as a victim.

3.2.2. *Dramatic Circle: Drama into the Radio Play*

What she has done so far in *The Alexander Plays* is a part of her experimental practices and Kennedy’s other experimental practice as a part of generic hybridity is radio play. Similarly, in this play, she uses radio drama as an experimental practice in order to focus on voice. Thanks to the radio play, Kennedy gives an idea to her audience and they have to fill in the gaps by their imagination. This also a familiar practice for Kennedy because there are still “unspeakable” things in her plays. Before, she does not just openly say and now she does not openly show the main issues in this play as well. Therefore, the voice becomes significant. Although as a radio play, *Dramatic Circle* looks different than the other plays in *The Alexander Plays*, this play still is a kind of continuation of the other plays because hybridity continues. As it is clear from its name, radio drama is a play of radio broadcasting. In *Dramatic Circle*, Suzanne, Alice, Dr. Freudenberg, and David’s

voices are heard. Except from Dr. Freudenberger, all of these characters are African American. Besides, Suzanne's and Alice's voices are heard a lot. Kennedy has a specific aim to do that as a politically strong woman. Throughout African-American history, the voice becomes an important element both literally and symbolically because they tried to be heard especially by white people. What they suffered or experienced must be listened to in order to understand how hard times they had. Kennedy becomes a voice of African-American people with her plays because almost in her every play, she emphasizes a black political issue. However, while she is doing this, she also expects her audience to fill in the gaps that she creates. In other words, there are some issues that are still "unspeakable" through the history of African Americans. Although Kennedy seems that she cannot completely break "the unspeakable," she tells them loudly. Therefore, she could achieve her aim. What she expects from her audience is that she gives the idea or the implications so that the audience can get the historical reference to understand the political issue in her plays. Radio drama is a good way to do because people just hear the voices and the rest depends on their imagination. Although she uses this style, to leave aspects of the play to the audience's imagination, in *The Alexander Plays* in general, it becomes more evident in *Dramatic Circle* thanks to radio drama. In other words, since using absence is a kind of tradition of Kennedy's plays, with the absence of the visual, Kennedy would like to foreground the strong presence of the voice and the verbal.

Besides, this is not the only play that Kennedy discusses voice issue because in *She Talks to Beethoven*, she again emphasizes voice of the other. In *She Talks to Beethoven*, Beethoven is deaf so that Suzanne has to speak loudly that he can hear her. In *Dramatic Circle*, the narrator is Alice Alexander; an African-American woman has something to tell. Since her brother is missing in the play, Alice and her sister-in-law Suzanne are nervous while waiting for David. David tries to be the voice of African people in the play as well and that is why he is imprisoned in Ghana. During his absence, they are worried as a reflection of other African-American people and Alice, as a narrator, tries to tell these horrible times and events through radio drama. One can interpret this situation as Kennedy turning absence (invisibility) into presence (visibility) by the way she makes use of voice. In the first play of *The Alexander Plays*, Beethoven is absent (since he was not alive at those times in the play) but he becomes alive through his music. In other words, his music makes him present. In the same play, David and Fanon's absence are compensated through

the radio because their existence is corroborated through the radio news. This brings to the audience Fanon's concern of blacks absence of the white supremacy. White people make black people wear mask and Kennedy touches upon Fanon's concern in *Ohio State Murders*: at the end of the play and the event, white authority never mentions the dead black children. Although such white people would (and sometimes literally) disappear physically, their presence is vindicated through their voices.

3.3. Politics

3.3.1. Fanon and Decolonization through *Dracula*

In adopting the conventions of gothic fiction, Kennedy does not use supernatural elements, but focuses instead on the darkness of gothic tradition. Metaphorically, she connects darkness to a political message that is related to one of the famous intellectual Fanon's ideas. As it is said, although he does not appear, Fanon becomes a character in both plays. David and Suzanne not only mention him but also express that they will follow Fanon's ideas. As they state in *Dramatic Circle*, especially the following quotation will inspire them: "But the war goes on and we will have to bind up for years to come the many, sometimes inefaceable, wounds that the colonialists have inflicted on our people" (Kennedy, 2001: 196). This is the part from his famous book *The Wretched of the Earth* in which he discusses decolonization. Fanon explains the evil impact of colonialism and Kennedy, through Suzanne and David, stresses the significance of Fanon's critique of colonialism.

In both plays, Kennedy emphasizes *Dracula* and Frantz Fanon's idealism and the common subject becomes colonialism. As it was mentioned Stephen D. Arata's suggestion in the Introduction, Stoker actually studies the fear of colonialism in terms of colonizers so that he discusses the dark side of colonialism. Benesch's approach is also related to Arata's idea:

Blending the events of Kennedy's trip from Accra to London in 1961 with quotations from *Dracula* and poems by revolutionary African poet David Diop, Suzanne Alexander's dramatic monologue powerfully underwrites the hopes, desperation and fears of

postcolonial Ghana and the sympathetic African American expatriate community. (Benesch, 2014: 104)

Kennedy reflects the same issue into her plays as well. Suzanne is ill and this is the reflection of her fear for David. He is in trouble because he supports freedom of Ghana. At this point, Ghana becomes important since it gained independence from the British Empire in 1957. Like Kennedy herself, David and Suzanne follow Fanon's ideas in terms of these political issues. David Cate relates Fanon's idealism of accepting black identity to James Baldwin's statement and expresses this with Baldwin's lines: "Then he [Fanon] decides, like James Baldwin, that 'there is no reason for you to try to become like white people and there is no basis whatever for their impertinent assumption that they must accept you'" (qtd. in Cate, 1970: 16). Kennedy also touches upon Fanon's idea about rejecting the black body and trying to become like whites both in *The Film Club* and *Dramatic Circle* (that will be discussed later in the context of self-hatred). *The Wretched of the Earth* explains the effects of colonialism in terms of the colonized people and the colonizer. Kennedy uses a quote from this book, which belongs to the chapter called "Colonial War and Mental Disorders." This chapter focuses on the psychology of both colonizer and colonized people and he believes that colonialism makes people "dehumanizes". This can be the reason why Kennedy uses Fanon's statement that is related to violence. Kennedy not only mentions violence by Fanon's words but also uses it in an effective way through David's memories. In the play, Suzanne remembers what David told her:

Evenings in Accra David had often told me of soldiers who were prisoners. Generally speaking they had a noise phobia and a thirst for peace and affection. Their disorders took various forms, as states of agitation, rages, immobility, many attempted suicides, tears, lamentations, and appeals for mercy. (Kennedy, 2001: 176)

In this passage, it becomes clear that Davis is the mouthpiece of Fanon. In other words, Kennedy touches upon Fanon's idea about the process of colonialism. Actually, Fanon's aim was to help the colonized people as a psychiatrist, especially during the Algerian war. This can be the reason why Kennedy deals with Fanon's ideas since both Kennedy and

Fanon show how individuals suffer psychologically under the hegemonic regime. As explained by Blake T. Hilton, Fanon's role in the Algerian Revolution is essential:

Reacting to the horrors of oppression he witnessed both as a child and as a young adult, Fanon devoted his life to helping oppressed individuals, and became the world's foremost authority on oppression related to colonization. Working as a psychiatrist in the heart of Algeria during the Algerian Revolution, Fanon treated many patients suffering from what he believed to be oppression-related mental illness. (2011: 45)

Therefore, since Fanon was interested in the psychology of oppressed people. As Hilton claims, his famous books are based on this topic: psychological situations of these people. Fanon writes about his patients in *Black Skin White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*. "In each book Fanon discusses the psychological aspects of oppression through concepts such as racism, alienation, segregation, dehumanization, and psychopathology" (2011: 49). Actually, Fanon aims to show the evil side of colonialism; oppressed people experience great difficulty in asserting their identity because they are in-between. The mental and emotional conflicts lead people to ask a very significant question: "In reality, who am I?" (Fanon, 1963: 250). In other words, oppression leads these people to question their own identity. Fanon also expresses these difficulties in his *Black Skin White Masks*: "The Negro enslaved by his inferiority, the white man enslaved by his superiority alike behave in accordance with neurotic orientation." (Fanon, 1967: 60). In other words, because of the white supremacy or oppression, black people are confused about their identity. This process also effects the past of oppressed people as Fanon claims. "Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it" (Fanon, 1963: 210). As these lines express, as a consequence of colonialism, Fanon mostly focuses on how these oppressed people are damaged and in Kennedy's discussion, these damages appear in the minds of African-American women which will be later discussed in details.

Pramod K. Nayar also explains that what Fanon tries to tell is that colonialism can make people develop mental problems. Since Fanon generally focuses on the colonized or

oppressed people and understands that they are confused about their identity, he concludes that these people end up losing their identity. He asserts that colonizers make the colonized wear masks:

This wearing of masks in a quest for acknowledgement does not contribute to the acquisition of identity. It results, Fanon suggests, in neurosis, a schizophrenic condition of being split between black and white, and an inferiority complex born out of a conviction that his own culture is worthless and that the only culture worth possessing is that of the white man's. (2013: 46)

Since they are in between, black and white, Kennedy looks at this situation from a different point of view and makes Suzanne go through the debilitating process of decolonizing her mind. The process can be defined as follows:

Unlike decolonization in the practical sense, decolonizing the mind means engaging with colonialism—including its history and its present-day impacts—not just in the physical or even economic sense. Instead, it calls on us to critically reflect on how colonialism has affected our mind, how it influenced how we think, and how we process the world. (Danaparamita, 2019: par. 3)

Kennedy introduces Fanon to follow the aim of Morrison's in terms of going beyond borders because her character, Suzanne is looking for a way to understand her racial past and to assert an identity so that she is trying to decolonize her mind. That is why she has an unspecified illness in the play. This is related to slavery: slavery was a serious issue in African-American history and African-American people have still effects of it on themselves. However, they are determined to save themselves from the trauma of the past. In other words, Kennedy also deals with colonialism in a different way by supporting Toni Morrison's idea. Richard L. Schur claims that Morrison's characters (African-American women) in *Paradise* try to decolonize their minds. "Morrison insists that there can be no simple escape from the effects of race, racism, gender, and sexism without some sort of decolonization" (2004: 277). Race is a kind of limit for African-American people. "The border of race exists in our mind because it is people—African Americans, indigenous

persons, Latinos, and whites— who have filled the concept of race with meaning” (2004: 287-8). However, Morrison creates her characters that can go beyond borders. Kennedy also creates this kind of idea; she goes beyond borders by using Fanon in her drama.

Paradise tells the story of the inner life of events that have become larger than life and have been subsumed under the names of heroes like Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. The institutionalization of civil rights heroes displaces the inner struggles that many others fighting in the movement may have felt and reduces a mass movement to the actions of a few great “men.” (2004: 285)

In other words, Kennedy, in *The Alexander Plays*, does not mention great black writers or socialists who led Civil Rights Movement such as Martin Luther King or Malcolm X. The reason why Kennedy does not prefer these famous activists is that she, like Morrison, wants to break the boundaries.

Kennedy’s character Suzanne enacts this psychological complication in both *The Film Club* and *Dramatic Circle*. Therefore, although Suzanne tries to get rid of her feelings about her past, Kennedy actually stands up to this affect of colonialism through Fanon because she creates her character, Suzanne explores the aspects of the African origin. Through her unspecified illness, the audience sees the process of decolonization of African American mind by meeting ordinary African-American people and historical people such as Franz Fanon. Previously, Kennedy achieves this in *She Talks to Beethoven* by showing the meeting of Suzanne and Beethoven. Although these people such as Beethoven and Fanon are not actually from the American context, Kennedy wants her audience to look at the issue of race in their country and refresh perspectives.

In other words, Kennedy makes her audience think about her plays to understand the feelings of African-American people, especially women. Besides, using these historical characters leads Kennedy into the process of healing. As a reflection of herself, her character Suzanne grows out of Beethoven and then Fanon to become herself. Finally, she finds herself within the context of African-American Civil Rights identity in which she fights for all African Americans, especially for women in order to express their own

struggles. In other words, she can assert an identity in the end, which means she completes the process of decolonization of the mind. As Nayar claims, Fanon also believes that the oppressed people should decolonize their minds: “A decolonization of the mind, Fanon insisted, was mandatory for the colonized to be truly and completely free of the colonial” (2013: 137). Nayar also believes that some intellectuals can decolonize their minds through their imagination and enunciation (2013: 137). Kennedy is also one of these intellectuals, she can survive this process through her drama, in other words, through her imagination.

In the American context, the Civil Rights Movement is similar to Fanon’s ideas about the effects of colonialism. Before and during the Civil Rights Movement, the oppression of black people becomes a crucial point to discuss, so Kennedy’s plays lead the audience these ideas of the Civil Rights Movement. In fact, Fanon also mentions the Civil Rights Movement as:

Two centuries ago, a former European colony decided to catch up with Europe. It succeeded so well that the United States of America became a monster, in which the taints, the sickness, and the inhumanity of Europe have grown to appalling dimensions. (Fanon, 1963: 313)

Because of oppression, the story of oppressed people has been covered. For example, even though Kennedy’s previous play, *Ohio State Murders*, happens during the period of the Civil Rights Movement, black people are still oppressed by whites. Hampshire—the white professor—killed his own daughters born from a black woman. However, this event is covered up by the authorities. Nevertheless, in any case, African-American people never stop being active and they try to learn or understand black leaders as Fanon and they tell the world about the life of these leaders. Not only black leaders’ life is important but also ordinary African-American people’s life becomes important during the Civil Rights Movement since Kennedy emphasizes violence that happened in those times. *Ohio State Murders* is not the only example that handles violence:

Although politics, like dreams, forms substrata of many of Kennedy’s plays, four of them can be grouped overridingly as political morality plays—*Sun: A Poem for Malcolm X Inspired by His Murder*, *An*

Evening with Dead Essex, Sleep Deprivation Chamber, and Motherhood 2000. Each concentrates on the tragic fate of real-life young black man whose identity and worth are attacked by a racist society. (Kolin, *Understanding* 2005: 147-8)

In other words, Kennedy was aware all the violence before and during the Civil Rights Movement. On the one hand, Kennedy observes the violence in America and on the other hand, she follows Fanon's ideas.

3.3.2. "Self-Hatred" through Hollywood

Wearing masks remind Fanon's *Black Skin White Masks* and his main concerns about being black. Fanon touches upon the black self-hatred issue and this is related to the white supremacy. While black people try to accept their racial identity and appearance, white people make blacks feel inferior because of their color within the society. Therefore, they wanted to look like whites and started to change their appearance. Fanon explains this situation:

If he is overwhelmed to such degree by the wish to be white, it is because he lives in a society that makes him inferiority complex possible, in a society that derives its stability from the perpetuation of this complex, in a society that proclaims the superiority of one race; to the identical degree to which that society creates difficulties for him, he will find himself thrust into a neurotic situation. (Fanon, 1967:100)

Because of the white oppression, black people's psychology was affected and the whole experiences that they had lead them into the concept of "self-hatred." Fanon also gives a clear expression: "However painful it may be for me to accept this conclusion, I am obliged to state it: For the black man there is only one destiny. And it is white" (1967: 12). Joseph A. Baldwin defines "self-hatred" as follows:

It proposes, in short, the Black self-hatred derives from the Black individual's attraction for the high status and privileges associated

with the White community. The Black person therefore symbolically shares in these attributes by identifying with and incorporating the attitudes and characteristics of the White community. (1979: 53)

Significantly, Kennedy also refers the concept of self-hatred both in her plays and in *People Who Led to My Plays*. In her autobiography, she mentions that as a child and young woman, she not only admired white women such as Bette Davis and Elizabeth Taylor, but also actively derived to be like them. This is another autobiographical reflection of Kennedy and she connects her autobiography, white admiration, to a political issue in this play as well. In other words, both Suzanne and Kennedy, although they are black, want to become like famous white actresses. Consequently, Kennedy focuses on “self-hatred” that is an important issue for African Americans to discuss in the twentieth century. For example, the famous white actress Bette Davis is one of her favorites and she expresses: “The heroines in her movies were reflective and independent and had options. They also dressed beautifully and were adored by men. I wanted to be like that” (Kennedy, 1987: 47). Kennedy desired to be like a white female and she also tried to change her appearance to look like the actress: “We saw Elizabeth Taylor in *A Place in the Sun*. I asked the hairdresser to try to cut my hair like Taylor’s. We all wanted a formal dress like the one she wore when she danced with Montgomery Clift” (1987: 71). Similarly, when Kennedy was in New York and walked around the streets, she also stated: “Perhaps if I wore more eye makeup I’d look like Audrey Hepburn. Everything seemed to happen to her” [...] “I bought a black treader pants and a black sweater and gathered my hair in a ponytail—like Audrey Hepburn and the girls in *Vogue*” (1987: 80). Especially, Bette Davis becomes important since in *The Film Club*, Alice has a film club in which her family plays the parts of Bette Davis’s movies. It is clear that the concept of beauty belongs to white female as Kennedy realized. Fanon also stresses how beauty is related to the white people. “Indeed no, the good and merciful God cannot be black: He is white man with bright pink cheeks. From black to white is the course of mutation. One is white as one is rich, as one is beautiful, as one is intelligent” (Fanon, 1967: 51-2).

Besides *The Film Club* and *Dramatic Circle*, Kennedy uses these Hollywood stars (as characters) in her play, *A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White*. According to E.

Barnsley Brown, Kennedy uses these movie stars in order to show the inequality between white and black people in *A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White*.

Here by juxtaposing clips from classic American movies such as *Viva Zapata!* (1952), *Now, Voyager* (1942), and *A Place in the Sun* (1951) with scenes in the life of her protagonist, Kennedy rewrites the family drama to create an uncomfortable disparity between the public, white-dominated sphere of movies and the private domestic sphere of an ordinary back family. (2007: 198)

Besides, as Klaus Benesch argues, Kennedy shows her interest in popular culture by using icons in her plays. “Thematically, *A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White* clearly revolves around the cultural iconicity of Hollywood movies and their power to influence – both aesthetically and imaginatively – our own daily lives” (Benesch, 2014: 101).

Obviously, Kennedy’s aim is not only to create a hybrid genre while using popular culture. She also discusses another political issue in both her plays: the representation of African-American people in movies. In *People Who Led to My Plays*, from 1943 (that covers her junior high school years), Kennedy mentions Elizabeth Taylor and Bette Davis admiringly. Undoubtedly, this is because there was no positive or inspiring representation of African-American people on TV so that even black people admire white Hollywood stars. They believe that the world belonged to the whites as Kennedy interprets Rita Hayworth as follows: “If a person had red hair and could dance, the world belonged to her” (Kennedy, 1987: 32). Unfortunately, African Americans were always stereotyped as Stuart Hall emphasizes: “There have been many twists and turns in the ways in which the black experience was represented in mainstream American cinema. But the repertoire of stereotypical figures drawn from ‘slavery days’ has never entirely disappeared [...]” (Hall, 1997: 252). Whereas white women are role models for them as Kennedy defines Audrey Hepburn: “A role model in her portrait of intelligent, intuitive young women” (Kennedy, 1987: 104). Therefore, stereotyped representations did not attract black people since they did not reflect the actual selves of African-American people. Hall signifies how stereotyping creates differences between people:

Stereotyping, [...] is a part of the maintenance of social and symbolic order. It sets up a symbolic frontier between the 'normal' and the 'deviant', the 'normal' and the 'pathological', the 'acceptable' and the 'unacceptable', what 'belongs' and what does not or is 'Other', between 'insiders' and 'outsiders', Us and Them. (Hall, 1997: 258)

In other words, in the Hollywood representation, 'the normal,' 'the acceptable' and 'insiders' were white people so that African Americans admired them rather than their own race. As a result, because of the white supremacy, black people became aware that beauty is associated with the white people and that is why they started to change their appearance as white as Kennedy did herself.

To sum up, in both plays, Kennedy again creates a generically hybrid play. *Dracula* becomes significant because Kennedy uses a famous gothic fiction in her own drama; she combines a gothic fiction with her autobiography. This also has another political aim since Kennedy actually discusses decolonizing the mind by demonstrating *Dracula*. In other words, as an African-American woman, Suzanne Alexander tries to save herself from the impact of white dominant society. This also leads the audience to think about Fanon because decolonization is related to Fanon's ideas. Kennedy also indicates how she supports Fanon because she also uses him as a character in her drama. *The Film Club* and *Dramatic Circle* become two plays that present African American's (especially African-American women's) struggle of being in between; being black or white. In the end, although Kennedy asserts an identity that is being an African American within the white dominated society, she still touches upon the idea of self-hatred through famous white Hollywood stars.

CONCLUSION

In *The Alexander Plays*, Adrienne Kennedy combines many genres and traditions. Kennedy not only writes autobiographically but also gives many political messages through an African-American woman's life. As Philip C. Kolin expresses, Kennedy explores political issues concerning African Americans in her drama: "Given this strong dynamic in Kennedy's works, her plays should be read as part of a theatre of racial resistance" (Kolin, 2007: 64).

Kennedy's *The Alexander Plays* provides examples of hybrid drama; although she seems to write autobiographically, she actually transforms and fuses fictional, nonfictional, and dramatic genres. The dominant form of hybridity is engendered by the combination of autobiography and creative nonfiction. Besides the fusion of these two genres, Kennedy also uses gothic fiction, radio drama, and slave narrative. Moreover, photography and film are frequently used visually, thematically and technically in the plays.

Kennedy's hybrid dramatic imagination is evidenced in her techniques of characterization as well. In order to represent the problems of African-American people, especially African-American women, on stage, Kennedy uses not only fictitious characters but also those drawn from her own life as well as history.

The individual's struggle with self and internalized social and cultural forces is the focal point of most of her plays. Writing from the inside out, as it were, Kennedy's works are autobiographical and surrealistic, and project onto the stage an interior reality. She uses her family and personal experiences as metaphors rather than literal examples. The name of a family member, for example, may be assigned to a character who is in fact a composite of historical and mythical as well as living figures. (Wilkerson, 1992: 70)

As Wilkerson explains, Kennedy is inspired not only by people whom she actually knew but also by historical figures in *The Alexander Plays*. Since this thesis claims the political messages of Kennedy's plays are in the foreground, these historical characters become

important. In three of *The Alexander Plays*, Kennedy represents aspects of the black politics of the time, particularly through Fanon. Since the autobiographical character, Suzanne, is trying to assert an identity, she prefers to follow Fanon's way that approaches African American's psychology in a psychic manner. Besides, she does not simply mention these names but she uses them as characters in her plays in order to attract her audience and to make them think deeply. As given from her autobiography, Kennedy was aware of all the African-American famous black leaders of the Civil Rights Movement. However, what she desires is to make her audience defamiliarized, and that is why she prefers to refer to Fanon explicitly in these plays.

Besides Fanon, another historical character is Beethoven whom she uses in *She Talks to Beethoven*. Since Kennedy's artistic formation as a dramatist coincides with the period of the Civil Rights Movement, as an African-American woman, she is in need to explain herself and her race. For this, achieving her own community is not sufficient for such a political playwright. For example, as it is discussed, Beethoven is used in order to attract white people's attention. Beethoven is an icon of classical music, and classical music is associated with the white community. Besides her African-American audience, Kennedy aims to reach a wider audience, which is white, through Beethoven and classical music.

In *She Talks to Beethoven*, she does not only use creative nonfiction with autobiographical drama but she also uses the opera in order to achieve her aim of writing a hybrid drama. The main reason of using this opera is to create a connection between her life and Beethoven's famous opera *Fidelio*. She finds some points to connect the creative representation of her life to *Fidelio*. For example, characters become important at this point: like her other plays of *The Alexander Plays*, she connects her real-life characters to other famous works' characters. In this play, Florestan is the husband in prison that can be related to David because he is absent and Suzanne is wondering if he is in prison. Leonore is the wife who disguises as a young man to save her husband so that is also related to Suzanne. Although she is with her for her husband when she helps her, she writes a play to reflect their suffering that is also another way to act.

In *Ohio State Murders*, Kennedy uses the neo-slave by relating the plot to Morrison's *Beloved*. *Beloved* is a historical novel so that Kennedy actually creates a historical drama in *Ohio State Murders* because this is not only the past of Suzanne but it is the past of all African Americans, especially women. Besides, since she deals with the Civil Rights Movement, she is aware that everything comes from slavery time. Therefore, she is interested in slave narration that is the history of African Americans. In other words, she again achieves her aim: she can connect her life to the history of African-American women in order to show that although all these things—violence, murder, discrimination—happened before, they are still fighting for their rights during the Civil Rights Movement. At this point, *Beloved* is a kind of guide for Kennedy so that the characters are similar to each other: Suzanne is related to Sethe as the mother and both lose their child. However, both of Suzanne's twins are murdered in the play and Kennedy shows the murder of more than one child in order to imply that the tragedy repeats. History of African-American women continues as same as it continued in the past.

In *The Film Club* and *Dramatic Circle*, Kennedy uses the radio play, gothic fiction and popular culture with autobiographical drama. Using hybridity shows how Kennedy is an experimental playwright but also using radio drama (in *Dramatic Circle*) also reflects her as an experimental playwright. This thesis discusses that since voice is important for the African-American people (because they, for the most part of their history, were forced into silence) so that Kennedy wants to use voice only. Through the radio play, she can achieve her aim of emphasizing voice of African-American people who still suffer from discrimination, violence and murder during the Civil Rights Movement.

Not only radio play but also gothic fiction is also used to create hybridity in her play to refer to Bram Stoker's famous gothic novel, *Dracula*. Both in *The Film Club* and *Dramatic Circle*, Suzanne's doctor creates a dramatic circle in which the participants read from Stoker's *Dracula*. Someone can easily figure out that some of Kennedy's techniques are actually related to the gothic tradition but she uses this not as fiction but in autobiographical drama. For example, Dr. Freudenberg suddenly appears in Suzanne's garden at night in *Dramatic Circle* or his hair becomes white in a day so that Kennedy technically uses gothic elements in her plays.

Besides, the reason why Kennedy uses *Dracula* is that she wants to emphasize the disadvantages of colonialism through the reference to the people's fear that Dracula may come to England. Through *Dracula*, she, in fact, discusses decolonizing the mind by also indicating Morrison and Fanon's ideas. Following Fanon's way implies Kennedy's desire that is looking for another point of view. She has already known all the African-American leaders but she needs to look from different perspectives so that she uses an African, Fanon. Besides, discussing Morrison's idea of adopting African-Americans' identity is also significant for these characters, David and Suzanne. Although they support going back to Africa, they understand that they are African Americans now so they return to America at the end of the play. In other words, they decide to remain their African-American identity.

In *The Film Club*, Alice and Suzanne's interest in white actresses also show that Kennedy deals with movies and mainstream culture. Kennedy connects this to the issue of self-hatred. As black women, they admire white actresses and at this point, she again implies Fanon's ideas. Since Suzanne and David are the supporters of Fanon's acts and thoughts, they also understand that there is no need to admire white people but discovering their own identity is significant to live as black within the white dominated society.

Kennedy does not limit her life story to a single work but she apportions her important subjects among the four plays, setting them in different historical periods as well. Marc Robinson expresses Kennedy's works as follows:

Why is Kennedy's so fascinating? Perhaps because Kennedy never contents herself with simply putting chapters of her life on display and leaving them alone. That's too complacent, certainly not appropriate for an art as dynamic as theater. Rather, she exploits the temporal aspects of theater in order to push into her autobiography so thoroughly that its tale of suffering, joy, or confusion becomes almost iconic. (1994: 122)

To sum up, *The Alexander Plays* focuses on Adrienne Kennedy's life through the autobiographical character, Suzanne Alexander. "Through Suzanne Alexander, Kennedy not only tempts but defies her audience to draw connections between art and life" (Barnett, 2005: 160). The four plays in *The Alexander Plays* handle an African-American woman's life before and during the Civil Rights Movement. From the beginning to the end, one thing is clear that Suzanne is getting better. In *She Talks to Beethoven*, *The Film Club* and *Dramatic Circle*, she is anxious about her life and her husband's life. However, in *Ohio State Murders*, she tells what happened to her so that she breaks the unspeakable. It makes her feel relieved and she heals herself by telling or writing her past: murdering black twins daughters. Obviously, some conflicts are appeared such as life-death, illness-health, black-white, past-present, absence-presence in Kennedy's plays in order to reflect African-American women's psychology during the Civil Rights Movement. However, although these conflicts are in the foreground in the plays, in the end, Suzanne—actually Kennedy—becomes a famous playwright so that she can heal herself through writing. Kennedy uses all these traditions or genres as hybridity in her plays both thematically and technically.

This study concludes that Kennedy's *The Alexander Plays*, by means of the plays' highly experimental characterization, structure, and dramatization, not only provide a highly striking theatrical rendition of the Civil Rights Movement years from the perspective of African Americans, but also place the period within a historical, literary, and intellectual continuum that transcends national borders. With her innovative methods of generic hybridity as well as her focus on African-American women characters, Kennedy attains a special place in American drama in general, and in African-American women writers' literary tradition in particular.

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