



Afro-Surrealist Dreams in Adrienne Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro*

Ganj Khanloo, Saeid¹



Studies in literature and Culture:
from Theory to Practice

2025, Vol. 1(1) 46-61

© The Author(s) 2026



Article reuse guidelines:

<https://slic.qom.ac.ir/>

[10.22091/slic.2025.14136.1002](https://doi.org/10.22091/slic.2025.14136.1002)

journals.qom.ac.ir

Abstract

The African-American playwright Adrienne Kennedy is known for her avant-garde approach and powerful indictment of racism. Her poetic and dreamy style of writing, molding simultaneously myth and personal experiences, has made her oeuvre delightful and indelible. Kennedy gives voice to the unrepresented thoughts and emotions that her plays' characters carry with themselves from the early childhood. Kennedy's works, similar to other black writers like Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire and Suzanne Césaire, are rich with surrealistic features and elements, which allows her to pursue the demand for freedom and liberation. This sort of surrealism, also called afro-surrealism, is anti-colonial and anti-racist in its black aestheticism. It is identified with the colors, dream imagery, and sounds, which are embedded in the African-American imagination and its artistic incarnations. Adrienne Kennedy's work straddles the long line of surrealist traditions and calls upon a gender-oriented interpretation of racism that is represented through her female protagonists. In this play, we examine how surreal concepts and their implications in *Funnyhouse of a Negro* are used to emancipate the oppressive thoughts and metaphorically challenge the social framework, if not in real world, in the world of drama.

Key-words: Surrealism, Automatic Writing, Femininity, Racism, Community

¹. PhD Candidate ,Kharazmi University, (saeid.ganjkhannloo@gmail.com)

How to cite this article:

Ganj Khanloo, Saeid. "Afro-Surrealist Dreams in Adrienne Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro*." *Studies in Literature and Culture*, vol.1, no.1, 2026, pp 46-61.
<https://10.22091/slic.2025.14136.1002>.

*Received 1 August 2025; Received in revised form 3 October 2025; Accepted 11 November 2025; Published online 29 March 2026.

Introduction

Adrienne Kennedy's plays have the cinematic feature of being fragmentary. Her plays are written like a screenplay for a movie that makes them more suitable for a television or cinematic show due to the references she drops in her stories to earlier time, to a dream, or to an imaginary conversation. She also has written one-act plays such as *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, *The Owl Answers*, *A Rat's Mass*, and *Sun*, to name only a few. Kennedy has developed a theater that resists the rigid forms of the preceding plays. Her plays are rather enigmatic and her heroines display their tormented psyches. The way she represents the female characters is not feminist. Her female characters are a playground for psychological interference, which embody a profusion of thoughts, memories, perturbations, and troubles. Kennedy's surrealistic form is apt enough to display a psyche haunted by hallucinations of a woman under constant pain and misery. Her thoughts not only are hers, but also are about her family and the community in which she lives. This feature of her plays conflict with the feminist works and their sole focus on the female troubles in the community. The current study's approach in the analysis of a play by Adrienne Kennedy entitled *Funnyhouse of a Negro* is to illustrate the implications of this play's form for black political and social movements and black struggle for the emancipation in the history. The sources used to accomplish this study were mainly based on André Breton's ideas and thoughts on surrealism. This study also uses the sources on Afro-surrealism to provide further historical background.

Historical Background

Adrienne Kennedy was active during the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and early 70s. The movement was rooted in the culture and politics of black nationalism. It aimed to celebrate black pride and identity, and the works produced during this period included poetry, music, theater, and visual arts. Also, the artists and writers engaged in the movement address interracial tension, sociopolitical awareness, and the relevance of African history and culture to black Americans. Moreover, the literature written in this period often employed black English vernacular to confront the dominant language. Kennedy, in her plays, explores racial difference and identity with her fragmentary narrative, but her critics thought that symbolic representation of white people in her works did service to them and it was more positive than negative. And the recurrent

theme of self-hatred and white idolization in the play was also criticised by the critics. Such criticisms were the reasons why her plays were not appreciated truly.

Literature Review

According to Claudia Barnett, Kennedy's characters remain fragmented, both physically and thematically, and they dramatically portray a series of selves who speak, act, and exist independently of one another. Throughout her dramas, Kennedy presents pregnancy and motherhood not as traditional symbols of life and growth, but as signs of madness and death (Barnett 141, 142). Kennedy's characters become pregnant only through oppression, often as a result of rape. Race and rape become confused but inextricably connected issues, the violent causes of self-hatred and abuse. This is the case in *funnyhouse* where Sarah's mom frantically says that a black man raped her. Sarah's self-hatred splits her into opposing selves and she cannot forgive neither her father nor herself. In the last scene, she is found hanging in her bedroom. The circumstances of Sarah's birth become the cause of her death (143). But still within the greater scope of Kennedy's writing, the oppression against black people is scarcely so clearly dealt with. In her plays, family traumas, private obsessions, and recurrent images from dreams is rewritten and rehearsed. Certain dreams and daymares are, for example, displayed in one of her plays, *Sleep Deprivation Chamber* (1996), in Suzanne's mind, an African-American writer and mother whose son Teddy was beaten by a police officer in suburban Virginia and later was accused of assaulting the officer and brought to trial. Almost the whole story takes place in interrogation room and in the court, and fragments of memories and dreams are interwoven throughout the play. In the beginning of scene one, Suzanne has a nightmare of Teddy's body being drawn while dismembered and his carcass cast into a fire. In another scene, she narrates a dream scene of a summer evening in Cleveland in the 1940s with her father and his friends while she walks down a path lined with whitewashed stones. There are also fragments in which Teddy remembers the night he had the argument with the officer. The scattered memories and dreams are presented to us as unexplained symptoms rather than coherent narratives.

Autobiographical elements are part of the material Kennedy uses and they are personal experience and memory which constitute her writing. The meaning of the text becomes sensible only through reading it as acts of memory and recollection. Kennedy does not eschew the memories, rather she remains truthful to a torturous psyche which has double bearing: it at once liberates and also produces anxiety. In other words, instead of controlling and ordering her

thoughts, she allows her fragmented thoughts to pour beyond control. According to Randi Koppen, it is similar to psychoanalysis' method of gathering information and the process that Lacan says is transindividual which means it is not at the disposal of the subject. Therefore, the fundamental condition for attaining psychoanalytic insight is 'a dialogic structure in which the subject allows himself to be taught by his own forgotten knowledge, and where signifiers that are not in mastery of their own meanings are afforded symptomatic function' (Koppen 123). Writing for Kennedy is not retrospective in a realist manner, rather it is recollective. *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, as her first play, thus becomes a personal act of self-analysis that proceeds through confessional monologues and narrative revisions in which the subject recalls her biography and the act of recollecting is divided between several selves. Sarah, the central character of the play, was born to a black man and a nearly white woman. For Sarah, writing is a way of arriving at a desired white identity but this longing is mocked by the other occupants of the funnyhouse who are her projected different selves: The Duchess of Hapsburg, Queen Victoria Regina, Jesus, Patrice Lumumba. Sarah's self-analysis is done through a dialogic self-reflection in which 'an other informs the subject of the knowledge that proceeds from herself. In this relationship, ... whenever she speaks, she appears to do so with less immediacy and affect, more muted than her alter egos' (125). Both Sarah and her narrative are split and her biography is a field of knowledge which is already fragmented by contradictions that the conscious subject is unable to master.

Whiteness is a preoccupation for Sarah in *Funnyhouse*. Faedra Carpenter, in her article on theatrical representations of whiteness and blackness, states that Afrocentric readings of Kennedy's play criticise the protagonist's psychological exile from her African American identity. Sarah, who is a victim of societal racism and her own self-hatred finds refuge in the creation of her four alter egos (Carpenter 175). The 1960s' mantras of 'Black Power' and 'black is beautiful' resisted against the black self-hatred and communal disunity in dramas. Carpenter says that unlike what critics claimed about Kennedy's work, hers is far more aligned with the professed goals of the Black Arts Movement than often credited. Throughout *Funnyhouse*, Kennedy deconstructs the whiteness by staging perverse images of whiteness (176). One of the methods of Kennedy to challenge the perceptions of whiteness is the use of whiteface in describing the characters of Queen Victoria and the Duchess of Hapsburg. Whiteness is not only a constructed identity, but it is depicted as being strange and even terrifying. And by saying that Victoria and the duchess look exactly alike, Kenney suggests that whiteness works in recurring ways as a

process and system of power. By staging whiteface, Kennedy illustrates that pure whiteness is a mythic notion and white is a color like other colors (177). Furthermore, by including the figure of Jesus as a hunchback, yellow-skinned dwarf, Kennedy disdains modern representations of a white, beautified Jesus, and at the same time, challenges the sanctity of Christianity (179). Through her unconventional representations of Queen Victoria, the Duchess of Hapsburg, and Jesus, Kennedy resists the hegemonic representations of these three figures while pointing to the potential of her depictions for both racial and religious transgression.

Kennedy's protagonists have fractured and de-essentialised identity who fail to embody their real selves. But Georgie Boucher argues that the fluidity of Kennedy's characters can enable them to achieve agency and an empowered self-in-process. Her characters' psychological fragmentation is shaped by multiple socio-historical forces. On the surface, the fragmented personae seem to escape meaning and recognition for their audiences. However, on a more complex level, they are dramatised in a way that shows the familiar psychological experience of an African-American subject (Boucher 93). In *Funnyhouse*, Sarah embodies identities of both black and white which fracture her self-perception. She experiences a sense of entrapment within racial differences designated by skin color (94) and she has to internalise the colonial discourse that becomes externalised upon her body (96). Thus, Sarah's identity allows dialogue between temporal present and historical past which is presented by the figures of imperialism, literature, and religion. Her figure is ever-evolving as she constructs her sense of self and this fluidity allows for an agency that problematises the fixed hierarchy of self and other in racist ideology (100).

Yet in another article, the fragmentary self of Sarah is studied from a feminine symbolic angle. Rosemary Curb suggests that Sarah's other selves are not the historical persons, but fragments of Sarah's mind so real as to seem separate persons. For example, the character Queen Victoria is Sarah's internal vision and emotional experience of Victorianism. Sarah's female selves resemble her mother in appearance and obsessions (Curb 182). The woman-centered *Funnyhouse* is a dramatization of Sarah's mental state. All action and dialogue up to the final scene offer no progression in time and space; but they create poetic unity through images and symbols. Major themes in *Funnyhouse* are revealed through the symbolic imagery (188). The female images in the play progressively increase in significance with repetitions, additions, and accumulating associations. For example, the hair/baldness image is introduced in the prologue and as the play develops, other characters exhibit their obsession with hair and defects of the head.

Nevertheless, the images and symbols never manifest their full meaning. 'Rather the poet-playwright uses repetitions with variations to probe the layers of an idea whose core seems unfathomable' (189). Curb rightly points out that Kennedy's female protagonists 'exhibit painful negative qualities (confinement, impotence, and desire for death) rather than freedom and independence, autonomous power and strength, life and vitality' (189). They are imprisoned in the female body. Death is a powerful symbol in the play. All of Sarah's other selves are dead and from the start of the play, she is a deathly figure condemned to death.

Sarah's desire not to be, according to another article by Claudia Barnett, seems at odds with the projections through the four historical figures. Yet, she strips their identities and their pasts. From the expressionless white faces of the Duchess and Queen to satin nightgown of her mother, she associates whiteness with death. The imagery of the play is white and black, and even the lighting in the Queen's chamber ('Prison' 379). The statue of Queen Victoria is also white. Both black and white are signs of death. Like Rosemary Curb, Barnett also believes that the rooms of Sarah's mind are filled with death and visually, they offer no possibility of life. She feels no connection to the world and her existence is not concrete because she feels no link to other people and everything happens in her mind. Her rooms are closed to the world and the physical world is closed to her. She does not recognise the location she lives in and of course the very spaces suffocate her. For Barnett, Sarah's rejection by her mother and her subsequent social sufferings aligns her with the characters of Samuel Beckett: her urge to get unborn. Unlike Georgie Boucher who proposes that Sarah's condition leads to a self-in-process, Barnett says that Sarah's denial of herself conflicts with her creation of her selves (381). The ensuing fragmentation of and the processes of splitting are peculiar aspects of modernism. The self-destructive processes within Sarah correlate with modern and postmodern concerns about reproduction. Barnett concludes that Kennedy's writing is ultimately original, and although it incorporates absurdist elements, 'it lacks the humor and the sense of the ludicrous which characterise the absurd; her characters' ... world is not fundamentally without meaning, but such meaning is deliberately withheld' (382). Another important difference to note is that part of the absurd is 'the sense of being cut off from the roots, ... Kennedy's characters, to the contrary, feel very much attached to their roots – roots which shackle and suffocate them' (382).

The critic, Gabriella Tóth argues that Georgie Boucher, Rosemary K. Curb and Claudia Barnett's articles on Kennedy conclude that the dramatic figures in her works are characterised by split

personality disorder. They tend to represent the mad woman in the closet (Tóth 271). Tóth focuses on the subverting aspects of Kennedy's plays. The form of Kennedy's plays is subversive in that her plays resist the traditional hierarchical structure of Western, male-dominated theatre. Such theatre forms are male (272). Another element in this play that is subversive is that the conflict is not external and social-based, but internal and psyche-based (275). The play represents pluralism in the mode of staging Sarah's story. We learn about her family from the characters but our knowledge of her family is through 'the surrealistic imagery of a split mind. Randomness and discontinuity are the chief ingredients of plot organization, because the order of the scenes could be changed or exchanged' (276). Representational reality is eliminated in the play. Moreover, the notion of character is deconstructed throughout the play. Sarah projects her selves and acts out four roles but her role playing is imperfect. She cannot be either a queen or a duchess. 'Sarah acts two female and two male roles. At the same time, ... these characters act out Sarah. Either way, the harmony between actor/role/character is questioned. Thus, the play theatricalises the role-playing nature of the search for an identity' (277). The way Sarah acts goes beyond the narrativised gender, race or class, and women construct themselves into new subjects.

Discussion

Although a critic like Herbert Blau thinks that *Funnyhouse* is about a colonial mindset (*Peculiar* 174) because it exhibits Sarah's yearning for whiteness, this idea is refuted by the fact that Kennedy has attempted to deconstruct the tale-telling in the Western tradition about black people and black past. A genre that has been traditionally accepted to be an all-white movement, like other schools of European origin, is surrealism. Kennedy's *Funnyhouse* is one of her surrealistic plays. She is only one of the individuals of African descent who have participated actively in surrealism from the early 1930s on. One of the reasons that surrealism seems so appealing to black writers can be detected in surrealist painter André Masson's definition of it as 'the collective experience of individualism' (*Black, Brown, & Beige* 2), or as 'a community of ethical views' (3) in the words of Czech surrealist painter Toyen in the early 1950s. What is common in the words of these two painters is the spirit of solidarity in surrealism's essence. Surrealist groups have always embraced diversity and open-endedness or as the poet Jayne Cortez remarked in a 2005 talk at Loyola university in Chicago, 'surrealists, even those who haven't met before, always tend to recognise each other' (3). Unlike the movements that preceded them, namely futurism, cubism,

fauvism, and dada, which were Eurocentric, surrealists were emphatically anti-Eurocentric. They rejected all forms of domination and ideologies and tried to create a truly free society and to realise Lautréamont's watchword, 'Poetry must be made by all!' (4). This inclusiveness is why surrealism has endured for eighty-plus years, unlike other avant-garde movements which faded away in less than a decade. Now surrealism is a worldwide movement. Surrealism's anti-Eurocentrism also involves an opposition to all masculinist ideology. Not only women have been active in surrealism from the beginning, but their activity has increased over the years.

Among different literary genres, poetry has been a fertile ground to practice a way of life, and it has been a force that directly engages in revolutionary position. For example, the nineteenth century poet Arthur Rimbaud, who influenced the surrealists greatly, openly scorned European values and defied the hypocrisy of white society by his bold cry, 'Je suis nègre!' (I am a Negro!) (7). The favorable attitude that surrealists had towards black individuals was a key factor that black artists welcomed surrealism and further, they had strong impact on it. Breton and his friends hailed the primitive art of African and American surrealists and deemed their work subversive, liberating beauty, free of all aesthetic inhibitions. Surrealists were strongly pro-African and against European and U.S. imperialist politics, and they supported colonial insurrections and championed the Socialist and Communist parties, in France and elsewhere but were at odds with them regarding the leftists' prioritization of class over race. A key element that brought surrealism in close proximity to leftist parties was their abiding interest in social issues and collective action. But unlike most Marxists and anarchists, 'surrealists were also passionately concerned with the individual, the inner self, the life of the mind, the world of dreams, and chance encounters' (12). Despite the leftist collectivism and the absolutism which resulted from it, a figure like André Breton would always defend the cause of the left. In the early 1930s, when black surrealism was beginning to flourish, black people's condition was just tragic. Among other teachings from Breton, the young black surrealists learned that 'a *man's* existence must be understood the way he is willing to accept the unacceptable human condition' (qtd. in *Black Surrealists* 14). As Jean-Claude Michel remarks, in black denunciation of injustice and bigotry, the quest for a new identity and for authentic values, surrealism only crystalised those concepts previously formulated in the work of many Negro-African authors (14).

In addition to men who were active in several black art movements, there were also active women who had their own dreams to follow. Black women have never been a primary subject of

the American left, always falling somewhere in the cracks between the Negro Question and the Woman Question. Women were excluded from having freedom dreams because the black community, in general, was too often conceived as an undifferentiated group with common interests. 'This ostensibly gender-neutral conception of the black community (nothing is really gender neutral), presumes that freedom for black people as a whole will result in freedom for black women' (*Freedom Dreams* 137). But black women challenged the ideas of white feminists and male abolitionists to acknowledge the oppression and potential of black women, and argued that freedom for black women would result in freedom for black people as a whole. For black feminists, freedom means freedom for everyone, and this affiliates them to surrealism. We can see this in Chicago Surrealist Group's definition of surrealism:

Surrealism is the exaltation of freedom, revolt, imagination and love . . . [It] is above all a revolutionary movement. Its basic aim is to lessen and eventually to completely resolve the contradiction between everyday life and our wildest dreams. By definition subversive, surrealist thought and action are intended not only to discredit and destroy the forces of repression, but also to emancipate desire and supply it with new poetic weapons . . . Beginning with the abolition of imaginative slavery, it advances to the creation of a free society in which everyone will be a poet—a society in which everyone will be able to develop his or her potentialities fully and freely. (158)

As its definition suggests, surrealism is not merely an artistic movement like cubism or impressionism. Making a new and just society is what surrealism is about, and it offers a vision of freedom far deeper and more expansive than any other movements. Surrealists are uninterested in the middle class, the success stories which only flash for a second and then disappear. Instead, they focus on the tragic, the dark side that captivates black surrealists who understand that knowing the psyche and black existential reality is the beginning of emancipation. Kennedy's plays focus on the physical and psychological violence of racism and colonialism and its repercussions for the psyche. Surrealist imagery dominates her work. In her book, *People Who Led to My Plays*, she pictures the figures who were deeply influential in her plays: zombies, ghosts, vampires, monsters, werewolves. The Wolf Man's metamorphosis and change of identity later becomes a theme that dominates her writing. These characters insert themselves in her unconscious through dreamlike, hallucinatory flights of terror. Not only fictional characters, but also real

characters and paintings pervaded her mind. One of them is Picasso and his painting *Guernica* about which Kennedy says, 'After I saw *Guernica* at the Museum of Modern Art, the concept of placing my characters in a dream domain seemed more and more real to me' (Kennedy 100). The characters in her plays are depicted surrealistically – the negro children who are half-human, half-rat in *A Rat's Mass* is an example. Hallucinatory conversations and monologues of Sarah in *Funnyhouse* are another example. Kennedy wants to bring something of the realm of dreams into material reality. For her, following the surrealists, dreams are not unknowable to consciousness, rather they are in exchange with reality.

In the Author's Note of the *Funnyhouse*, the stage director is advised to perform the play in Sarah's room in the center of the stage. Kennedy emphasises the centrality of Sarah, that is when Sarah and her belongings are in the center, then the director is free to let the rest of the play happen around her (*In One Act* 1-2). The free play that Kennedy allows for the action in the play is reminiscent of the concepts of free association and automatism which here is to be meant that the play can be staged without the need to calculation of the plot. Although automatism as an artistic technique was looked upon with ambivalence and suspicion, it would make sense in directing a play like *Funnyhouse* which works mostly with dream-like conversations and hallucinations. For Kennedy, dream does not mean allegory or fantasy, and she does not see the dream as distinct from waking life. For a surrealist like Breton, dream has redemptive capacity, and the revelation of dynamics of dream and illusion amounts to a rethinking of the social order. It is not a coincidence that surrealists have found cinema an incomparable field of surrealist activity. The filmic form opened up new possibilities for mapping the symbolic logic of the dream. The logic of the dream is experienced in a concrete form rather than merely illustrated as part of a narrative. The surrealist cinema utilises 'montage to create interior psychological states' (Lusty 96). The cinematic special effects to depict surrealist dreams and hallucinations also proves to be effective in the theater. The arbitrary play of scenes that Kennedy allows on stage becomes possible when scenes are arranged and then juxtaposed in fragments and montage-like assemblage in a manner very similar to cinematic technique and far from a linear, cause-and-effect relationship. Sarah is at the center of the stage and what happens around her is in fact happening in her mind. The audience watches the stream of thoughts, memories, and vague images being played erratically in Sarah's head. This idea is less seeking to develop an aesthetic of surrealism for the theater than abducting a literary genre for surrealism's own purposes. The

surrealist texts are more often than not difficult to read, but it becomes more challenging on the stage in the absence of a unified plot or program. By converting the surrealist text into theatrical performance, the writers find the means to give definite form to the characters' dreams and hallucinations. Although the text obtains a concrete form on the stage, it becomes very much different from the word on the page. In this sense, as the word goes beyond the limits of the page and reaches the stage, so the notion of the surrealist drama becomes distinct from the surrealist theater.

The notion of the surrealist theater might seem to be a failure since it does not adhere to Aristotelian theory and its basic qualitative components of plot, character, thought, diction, and spectacle. Moreover, since this kind of theater is surrealistic and goes beyond realism and profoundly defies the mimetic nature of drama and the theater. However, the anti-mimetic strategies of surrealist theater put it in line with the contemporary postmodern stage in general. Accordingly, Vassiliki Rapti, who has been active and studied the surrealist theater, calls it *methectic*, as opposed to mimetic. By methexis she indicates the participatory and ritualistic nature of such theater. She writes that,

surrealist drama does not *represent* but rather *re-presents*, in the sense that an event or a series of events is not shown figuratively on stage but is actually reproduced in the action ... Through such a process, both the actors and the audience engage in a game as a lived experience, and thus overcome the obstacle of the stage's inherently mimetic nature and the notion of a world divided between the stage and the auditorium. This kind of theatre ... brings to the fore notions that are common in the postmodern stage: the play of dreams, sexuality, drives, or phantasms; intertextuality; intermediality, i.e. the integration of aesthetic concepts from different media (particularly from the cinema) into a new context. (6)

The word that she puts much emphasis on is *game* which she uses in elaborating on the *ludic theory*. She suggests that each surrealist play is a game and a gesture that both defies reality and rational thinking, and opens up new perspectives of perception and experience. This theory also allows room for nonsense in surrealist theater and a new concept of dialogue which is not mere communication. Instead, it involves imagination and the accumulation of surrealist images that is more like a dialogue-game—an innovation which, as Rapti says, is one of the major contributions of surrealism to the stage (175). In *Funnyhouse* Kennedy uses such dialogue-games throughout

the play to depict the play of dreams in Sarah's mind. The exuberant scene design and lighting that change with every shift of the scene beside the lush makeup and outfits add to the playfulness of the dialogues. The stage, then, is not a place of representation but is redefined as an active play-ground. In other words, a series of games freely convene reality, dream, and imagination to materialise the surreality of multiple selves of Sarah in Kennedy's play.

Looking at Sarah's multiple selves from a feminist angle is telling as we can notice that feminism has gained much from postmodernism; the decentered Sarah implies that the self has been dismantled. The multiple selves of Sarah suggest that the story is not about her despite the fact that it happens in her mind. The title is also suggestive in that the negro Sarah's mind is the house where other people live. This means that Sarah is deprived of being an agent and having a political voice. But it is not without merits. It provides a space for the author to transgress traditional Western notions about how to write on a serious matter. Kennedy privileges emotion over logic, and throughout the play the dialogues, monologues, and scene descriptions all attest to an insistence upon the emotional flow of the word-image. The play is not political in the way that the masculine logic of Western metaphysical tradition demand. Thus, the emotional flow in the play and its irrationality may be considered a feminine quality. The obvious mark of the feminine quality is that there is no single signature over Sarah's psyche. No one or no single incident is picked out as the author of her mind and emotions. In this light, surrealism is feminine because the idea of automatic writing that it champions is claimed to work in the unconscious and is against the Western traditional rationality and logical thinking. Like surrealist writing, Sarah herself becomes an automatic woman who is being written by the forces which are outside her control through her multiple selves. To be automatic and excessively emotional is another way to describe a hysterical woman. Catharine Conley's statement in her book on the representation of women in surrealism is that the surrealists dubbed hysteria a poetic liberation that has a subversive edge and is to rebel against the social standards reviled by the surrealists themselves. Hélène Cixous's challenge for women is 'to claim a certain kind of expression that demands attention ... the valorization of multiplicity over singular, "original" identity, a valorization legitimised by the difference in the configuration of women's bodies' (140). Sarah's multiple selves can be interpreted in this respect because her mind is not dominated by a singular identity. But Conley spots a difference in the way Breton and Cixous confirm the hysteria in women. The former 'relegates women to the lesser role of object of adulation' while the latter attributes

agency to female hysteria. As such women depart from and reverse the mind-body hierarchy characteristic of Western philosophical and phallogocentric discourse, they 'redirect the writing process through the body as related to the thinking and writing process in a way Breton tended to overlook.' Breton 'privileged mind over body in automatic writing' but for Cixous body writes itself (141). In spite of their difference in mind/body hierarchy, Breton's surrealism and Cixous's feminism give prominence to the female unconscious resources in order to subvert the bourgeois morality.

For male surrealists, the writer automatises himself to stir the feminine, mysterious, glamorous, sexy, and lost half of himself as it is hidden in the unconscious and aims to liberate the erotic imagination. According to Conley, this is 'the surrealists' muse, their Automatic Woman' that works as a symbol and 'serves as a corporeal metaphor for the automatic text itself' (144). However, for female surrealists, the woman is not an archetype but a real woman with real pain and power. For female surrealists, as opposed to their male counterparts, woman is not constructed to be passive and the man's other. Kennedy's Sarah, as a young black woman, examines and explores her identity through historical figures, and her memories and fantasies of her parents. But the reality for her is infiltrated by unconscious fears and desires. Thus, she tells the story of her life through the voices of her alternate selves beside her own voice. Using other voices is meant to act as a fortress against self-recognition and as Carla McDonough argues, Sarah's 'self-examination is paradoxically framed by the desire to escape self' (175). Sarah's death at the end of the play is the result of the historical power relations against black people and also the return of the uncanny, that is the repressed memories of her parents. Sarah's resolution to find a way to the real is ultimately barred by her imagination—an imagination that is a house of historical and psychological forces written not only in her but likewise in the black community as a whole to make her experience a collective one.

Conclusion

In the final analysis, Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro* follows the surrealist tradition of storytelling that rejects the forms which were common before its inauguration. Multiple black emancipation movements not only were influenced by surrealism but also strongly influenced it. The key factor that brought the surrealists and black artists close together is that their movements was a reaction against European bourgeois values. This means that social issues and collective

political action greatly inspired the surrealists in their work. Another key factor that the surrealist and the black artists and writers shared was that despite their political activism, feminism and woman question did not matter much in their work, and female writers tried their hands in this avant-garde art form. However, maybe paradoxically, the female writers did not engage in the woman question as well in their surrealist work. The lunatic characters in surrealists' works cannot properly have the agency for political action and they cannot be a stable subject around whom a nexus of correlated ideas develop. Furthermore, madness, if taken as a mental illness, cannot be a metaphor for liberatory potentials of an individual. Therefore, it is better to view the surrealist character as a site in which a plethora of thoughts, imaginations, and other characters dwell. Kennedy's Sarah is an exemplar of such decentered, destabilised characters upon whom race, sexuality, family, and history has been written without her being in control of the flow of her own thoughts. As with the typical portrayal of women in surrealist works as passive, irrational, and hysteric, Sarah the negro fails to use her initiative to be an independent self. Yet it is not without rewards since her mind can work as a mirror to all atrocities against the black lives in the history and also a reflection of communal experience in interaction with and resistance to the power relations.

Works Cited

- Allen, Carol. *Peculiar Passages: Black Women Playwrights, 1875 to 2000*. Austria, Peter Lang, 2005.
- Barnett, Claudia. "A Prison of Object Relations: Adrienne Kennedy's 'Funnyhouse of a Negro.'" *Modern Drama*, vol. 40 no. 3, 1997, pp. 374–384. *Project MUSE*, <https://doi.org/10.1353/mdr.1997.0054>.
- Barnett, Claudia. "'This Fundamental Challenge to Identity': Reproduction and Representation in the Drama of Adrienne Kennedy." *Theatre Journal*, vol. 48, no. 2, 1996, pp. 141–55. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3208864>.
- Boucher, Georgie. "Fractured Identity and Agency and the Plays of Adrienne Kennedy." *Feminist Review*, no. 84, 2006, pp. 84–103. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30232741>.
- Carpenter, Faedra Chatard. "Spectacles of Whiteness from Adrienne Kennedy to Suzan-Lori Parks." *The Cambridge Companion to African American Theatre*. Ed. Harvey Young. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012, pp. 174–95.

Conley, Katharine. *Automatic Woman: The Representation of Woman in Surrealism*. Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1996.

Curb, Rosemary K. "Fragmented Selves in Adrienne Kennedy's 'Funnyhouse of a Negro' and 'The Owl Answers.'" *Theatre Journal*, vol. 32, no. 2, 1980, pp. 180–95. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3207111>.

Kelley, Robin D. G. *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*. United States, Beacon Press, 2002.

Kennedy, Adrienne. *Adrienne Kennedy in One Act*. Italy, University of Minnesota Press, 1988.

Kennedy, Adrienne. *People Who Led to My Plays*. Italy, Theatre Communications Group, 1996.

Koppen, Randi. "Psychoanalytic Enactments: Adrienne Kennedy's Stagings of Memory." *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies (HJEAS)*, vol. 4, no. 1/2, 1998, pp. 121–34. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41273994>.

Lusty, Natalya. "Surrealism and Dreams." *Surrealism*. Ed. Natalya Lusty. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. 94–111.

McDonough, Carla J. "The Nightmare of History: Conceptions of Sexuality in Adrienne Kennedy's 'Funnyhouse of a Negro.'" *Black Women Playwrights: Visions on the American Stage*. Ed. Carol P. Marsh-Lockett. Routledge, 1999, pp. 173-192.

Michel, Jean-Claude. *The Black Surrealists*. Austria, P. Lang, 2000.

Rapti, Vassiliki. *Ludics in Surrealist Theatre and Beyond*. United Kingdom, Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2013.

Rosemont Franklin and Robin D. G. Kelley. *Black Brown & Beige: Surrealist Writings from Africa and the Diaspora*. 1st ed. University of Texas Press, 2009.

Tóth, Gabriella. "Metaphorical Mirrors and Subverting Selves in Adrienne Kennedy's One-Act Plays." *Gender Studies*, vol.11, no.1, 2013, pp. 270–285. <https://doi.org/10.2478/v10320-012-0045-2>.