

Kennedy's *The Owl Answers* (1965): Toward Black Existential Feminism

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Abstract

This article analyzes Adrienne Kennedy's play *The Owl Answers* (1965) from a Black Existential-feminist perspective. It dissects the black female protagonist's identity as a trapped identity. In addition, the article unravels the detrimental impacts of oppression and racism on the African-American female protagonist in the play in her attempt to construct a clear concept of her identity. Consequently, one of the significant issues that this article responds to is how Kennedy's protagonists question the concept of Blackness established by radical black male thinkers. I argue that *The Owl Answers* presents an existential crisis of achieving one's authentic identity and a true self. Clara, the female protagonist, strives to achieve an identity of her choice. As a female character and as a black individual, we see her entangled in racist situations from which she finds no exit.

Keywords

Adrienne
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Owl Answers*;
Black
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Black feminism

I. Introduction and Literature Review

Black existential feminism, in general, has been neglected and has not yet received the due attention it deserves. In addition, black feminism and black feminists are attacked by some black self-righteous and conservative thinkers and considered to be drifting away from the general cause of black people. James (1997) explains the entrapment of black feminism. She argues that black feminisms "[s]uspended midway between Eurocentric or postmodern feminism and afrocentric masculinism, . . . are institutionally relegated to the state of oblivion and neglect" (p. 216). James specifies three main reasons for others to attack black feminism. First, it is considered antiradicalist as it supposedly excludes resistance to state oppression. She states that some black

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feminists have not molded their theories into the general frame of the history of black struggle. James adds that some black feminists have elided black women's associations with such organizations as the Communist Party and Black Panther Party, and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. Second, it has failed to address the economic situation of blacks.

This critique addresses the idea that black feminists have not enough addressed and analyzed the problem of class, educational elitism, liberalism, and nationalism. In addition, it has neglected the state violence and, therefore, it is not black enough. Other feminists accused black feminists of not being feminist enough because they have attached themselves to the black community, which supposedly privileges males (James, 1997, pp. 216-17). What one can discern here is the fact that black feminism is a category of identity that has not received adequate attention from the black theorists and likely does not fit well their categories.

Perhaps the crux of this negligence lies in presuming Blackness by African American thinkers to be masculine. As a result of such appropriation, feminist issues have been neglected, if not entirely excluded from such terms as "authentic Blackness." Although black women are often neglected and forgotten by black men, they assert themselves in writing in the realm of struggling toward asserting their identity and confirming their existence. To a certain extent, this is the case with Adrienne Kennedy, one of the fascinating, controversial playwrights of our time, both as a female writer and as a woman of color. Therefore, she had "to break through barriers" (Kennedy & Lehman, 1977, p. 108).

The controversy over Kennedy's plays is due to the nature of her plays and the difficulty of situating them within their period's cultural and political movements; the very idea that troubled black radicals and conservatives. Although Kennedy's early plays were written during the 1960s, her plays were attacked by African American thinkers as not being in congruence with

the Black Power Movement of the 1960s, which refused the blacks' assimilation in the American culture and society, and the Black Arts Movement whose purpose was, as Williams (1985) puts it, to “[B]uild a stronger and more militant psychology to offset a defeatist psychology conditioned by a history of forced servitude, discrimination, and racial denigration” (p. 6). Moreover, Kennedy's plays were attacked by radical, activist thinkers as they did not fit well the leftist agenda and purposes that aimed at agitating the audience in order to achieve certain political ends like, for example, what Du Bois and Baraka did. Her plays show bi-racial characters who are afflicted with their racial identity and often end in death. In addition, some claimed that her plays distorted their African American characters. Boucher (2006) points out that Kennedy's plays “were seen as lacking positive portrayals of African-American subjects” (p. 87).

Importantly, some of the reasons behind the attacks by black radicals have to do with the fact that her plays present middle-class characters who are characterized as “inauthentic” black characters. On the other hand, she was also criticized because of presenting black people as schizophrenic and desiring assimilation into white society. As opposed to African American naturalistic drama, which does not complicate the theatrical frame of presenting Blackness by presenting linear scenes and is generally propagandistic in nature, there are those critics who have tried to connect Kennedy's plays with postmodernism. They considered her plays as innovative, experimental, and ahead of their time, associating her plays with such postmodern movements as Expressionism. Boucher (2006) argues, “Kennedy faced the difficulty of being a feminist in a period of masculinist Black nationalism as well as a postmodern experimentalist in a period of realist political drama” (p. 90).

Thematically, what sets Kennedy as different is her challenge both to the radical patriarchal, masculine Blackness and white conceptions of the black woman. In the realm of

existential authentic Blackness, Kennedy's plays need to be analyzed as the work of an unconventional playwright who presents Blackness through the tragedy of her black characters in an experimental way. They are challenging their temporality by associating themselves with a society that rejects them. They strive to assert their humanity, their identity through following their will and their choice.

There have been many attempts to link Kennedy's plays with her own life and attempt to provide a kind of an autobiographical reading of her plays, analyzing her plays based on her life's incidents. Perhaps such readings are based on Kennedy's comment, in one of her interviews, that she is interested in autobiographical writings and this what she feels her works express. In addition, such autobiographical elements and readings can be also traced in her autobiographical book *People Who Led to My Plays* (1987). This is very clear in her interview with Lisa Lehman in 1977, as she explained, "Autobiographical work is the only thing that interests me, apparently because that I do best" (p. 42). Kolin (2005), one of Kennedy's critics, agrees, "Kennedy has written plays that can be understood in terms of her family and cultural background, her politics, and even her dreams" (p. xii). On the other hand, what complicates the issue is her rejection of the idea of confusing her, as a person, with her female protagonists. Kennedy emphasizes this objection in an interview with Elin Diamond in 1989. She replies to one of the interviewer's questions, "My plays are the product of imagination, but there are people who literally want to make me Sarah; they think she has my background" (Diamond, p. 156). Although some critics consider such readings valid, in fact, such readings neglect the philosophical and the artistic dimensions of theater in general and the Black stage in particular.

In this vein, I will be providing a reading of the play under discussion through Black existential philosophy merged with feminist aesthetics, showing how the female character keeps

suspended and trapped between visibility and invisibility, and between Blackness and whiteness and how Blackness is constructed through Black existential feminism. I argue that this negligence is part of the dimensions that Black Existentialism (should) address. To exclude black women's issues is to fall into contradiction since Black existential philosophy strives to achieve a collective liberation theory that encompasses all the oppressed people and all kind of oppression. Furthermore, black women have participated in the important work of making the invisible visible. Such plays show multiple existential dimensions that can be added to the totality of Black Existentialism and to the conception of Blackness. The complexity of the situation that this play present helps us understand the tragic tension between the need for a freedom that transcends the oppressive categories of identity and, at the same time, shows us the tragic confrontation with the racist, oppressive reality that deprives this tragic female character of her freedom.

2. Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This article adopts Black Existentialism as it is theoretical trajectory as established by such existentialists as Jean-Paul Sartre, Lewis R. Gordon, and Frantz Fanon merged with feminist aesthetics.

In fact, Black Existentialism was developed as a consequence to European Existentialism, particularly the philosophy of the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, who played a key role in the development of Black Existentialism. In addition, the existential status of the black woman is addressed by the French feminist existential philosopher Simone de Beauvoir in her attempt to demonstrate a comprehensive conceptualization of the female oppression. De Beauvoir (1949) details the status of woman in general as being compelled to be *other* by the patriarchal society. Therefore, the woman, as being essentially free like her male partner, finds her identity and freedom trapped due to the several restrictions imposed on her (p. 27). Such restrictions and

obstacles include sexism and racism. De Beauvoir (1947) links the existential situation of the African American woman with the general conditions of slavery on the one hand, and with the situation of women in the Third World countries, on the other hand. She believes that all these Black women share the same existential status, which she calls an “infantile” situation. She argues, like children, these oppressed human beings can practice their freedom just within the limits of the world that others have created for them. As the slaves in plantations were used to submitting to the laws that the white oppressor set for them, these women have submitted to the laws that have been set for them by their society and the patriarchal world (p. 38).

However, de Beauvoir is criticized for failing to scrutinize the meticulous distinctions between Negro’s, woman’s, and man’s subjectivities and how these distinctions pertain to the identity question (Glass, 2010, p. 227). Glass argues that, despite the shortcomings of de Beauvoir’s argument, it opens up a possibility for multi-dimensional study that argues against racism and sexism within the postmodern frame that defies the idea of essentialism (p. 228). Indeed, de Beauvoir’s argument is part of the universal Blackness that tend to bring all the oppressed together in their struggle against all kinds of oppression. De Beauvoir (1947) reiterates,

It is fitting that the negro fight for the negro, the Jew for the Jew, the proletarian for the proletarian, and the Spaniard in Spain. But the assertion of these particular solidarities must not contradict the will for universal solidarity and each finite undertaking must also be open on the totality of men. (p. 144)

Consequently, there has been an attempt by black feminists to extend the scope of black feminism to include other oppressed women beyond the boundaries of racism. Such an attempt theorizes the inclusion of the white woman and veiled Muslim woman in different parts of the world. West (2010) points out,

I want to consider what it means, methodologically, for a black feminist approach to conceptualize a notion of sisterhood that extends to women whose social status is distinctively other than that of African American women, such as sexually objectified white women and veiled Muslim women in a foreign Nation. (p. 157)

By doing so, these black feminists tend to move black feminism toward broader Black feminist philosophy that addresses several issues other than color-based oppression. This approach allows a close scrutiny of the Black stage as a universal representation of different kinds of oppression and a medium of struggle toward a collective liberation. Such a liberating philosophy encompasses multipronged discourse that engages religious, racist, and political contexts of women of color and the Third World woman. All of these dimensions contain among their folds the existential analysis of the female subdued subjectivity and, therefore, advocate for the liberation of this subjectivity.

3. Critical Analysis and Discussion

Kennedy's *The Owl Answers* builds on the conception of Blackness addressed in Kennedy's *Funnyhuse of a Negro* (1964) through presenting a mixed-race female character. The play analyzes another side of the trapped identity as being a mixed-race person in a racist society through scrutinizing the existential situation of a female character whose father is white and her mother is black. The female protagonist keeps struggling both against her being identified by her skin color and against her white racist ancestry who rejects her. This rejection is based on the purity hypothesis.

This hypothesis dictates that “a single drop of Black ‘blood’ is so terrible or all-persuasive that the holder must be labeled ‘black’” (Lawrence, 1995, p. 27). This purity hypothesis also concerns those who have black and white ancestry. Of course, based on the one-drop hypothesis

a person of mixed race is eligible to be called black. This repressive classification forces the mixed-race person to disavow either part of her identity. The persona who undertakes such repudiation must face corrosive effects and pernicious consequences. This means that the person has either to pass for white or to embrace her Blackness. That requires dissociations of one's wholeness as it dictates the suppression of one constituent of one's *Being*.

Indeed, in an anti-black atmosphere and a racist society, the mixed-race person would not play it safe with either choice. Lawrence (1995) points out that the pure Black person faces the dilemma of challenging racism and to fight against the idea that her ancestors were slaves. On the other hand, the mixed-race person has to fight against both racism and against self-hatred and self-denigration. The double fight that the person with a mixed race has to wage is due to the notion that, in addition to being categorized as black, she is taught that her birth is the result of rape. Therefore, she is taught to hate her rapist ancestry and to undervalue this part of herself (p. 27). This doubled, confusing status of the mixed-race person puts her in a trapped identity and in a state of double existential burden and anxiety.

The notion of being tied in a trapped identity, in an inauthentic mode of existence, and being torn between two opposing poles—black and white—is expressed clearly in Kennedy's *The Owl Answers* (1965). The protagonist of the play, Clara, is also a mixed-race character; she is a thirty-four school teacher in Savannah. She has a rapist ancestry; she was born to a rich white man and his black slave woman who worked as his cook. After the death of her biological parents, Clara is adopted by Mr. and Mrs. Passmore. Clara's white father is dead and she is refused to attend his funeral in St. Paul's Cathedral by her white ancestors represented by Shakespeare, Chaucer, William the Conqueror, and Anne Boleyn. They imprison her and do not allow her to leave for the funeral until she kills herself by the end of the play.

The play explores the trapped identity of an interracial female woman whose problem is to get acknowledgement for her parentage and her white ancestry. Throughout the performance, the existential confusion over her identity and her existence in the white world is achieved through many theatrical techniques and props. We see that the characters always change their identities and their costumes, accordingly. Their identities always multiply and oftentimes change all of a sudden. Kolin (2005) argues, “Perhaps no other play better illustrates Kennedy’s fascination with transformation of self than does *The Owl Answers*” (p. 51). The protagonist of the play identifies herself as SHE who is Clara Passmore, who is the Virgin Mary, who is the Bastard, who is the Owl. Clara’s mother is the Bastard’s mother, who is the Reverend’s wife, who is Anne Boleyn. Her father’s identity also keeps changing over the course of the play: he is Goddam Father, who is the richest white man in the town, who is the Dead father, who is Reverend Passmore.

Through many transformational processes and the use of masks and costumes, Kennedy exposes her female protagonist’s problem of finding a sense of belonging and her problem of associating herself with an identity of her choice. In this play, Kennedy shows that racial identity, with its problems, has a socio-racial construction. This doomed mixed-race character becomes a scapegoat of racism and her multiracial ancestry. She is condemned by being born. The whole performance dramatizes her suffering through being a prisoner of white prejudice against blacks and, particularly, against mixed-race people. This idea can be traced through the idea of miscegenation in the United States. Yoshikawa (2008) argues, “[T]he body of a mulatto is testimony that interracial sex did occur once, and that it therefore could again” (p. 67).

Kennedy presents the character of SHE as entangled with her existential racial identity that haunts her. Like Sarah of *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, SHE's past metaphorically comes to her in a form of her dead father,

The DEAD FATHER appears dead. He is dead. Yet as SHE watches, he moves and comes to life. The DEAD FATHER removes his hair, takes off his white face, from the chair he takes a white church robe and puts it on. Beneath his white hair is dark Negro hair. He is now REVEREND PASSMORE. After he dresses he looks about as if something is missing. SUBWAY STOPS, doors open. FATHER exits and returns with a gold bird cage that hangs near the chair and a white battered Bible. (p. 5)

The past re-occurs to emphasize the idea that history is always there and it is always repeated and endlessly enacted (McDonough, 2006, p. 391). Kennedy creatively uses such transformational processes to negotiate Clara's identity across boundaries. This negotiation takes place between fiction and reality. In the above quoted lines, Clara's father changes from whiteness to Blackness. This change also happens to Clara's mother. All of these changes reflect Clara's entrapment and perplexity over her identity as a multiracial character. Her father and mother have the opportunity to change their identities and to oscillate between Blackness and whiteness several times, but the performance never grants Clara such an opportunity. These characters "leave some costumes from their previous selves to remind us of the nature of She" (Kennedy, 1965, p. 29).

The transformational process from whiteness to Blackness and from Blackness to whiteness reveals the inauthenticity of appearance. The very idea that speaks to the difference between identity and identification. At this moment, skin color, as a racial sign is questioned. Blackness and whiteness become a state of confusion of identity. Diamond (1997) argues that

Kennedy's theater is "a theater not of identity but of identification, and as such it interrogates the fixities of racism precisely by avoiding positivities of form or ideation" (p. 117). The white characters keep Clara imprisoned in her Blackness and do not allow her to transgress the fictional lines between Blackness and whiteness. The spectators see that the Tower gates in which Clara is imprisoned are painted Black (p. 30). Getting out of these "black" gates means getting out of Blackness and passing for whiteness. While Kennedy's female protagonist challenges the idea of essentialism of the racist construction of identity, she is confronted with her oppressive reality that keeps her imprisoned inside her skin color.

Close attention to the ontological structure of the scenes reveals that Clara's father and mother have no graspable ontology as an indication of Clara's own lack of fixed identity. The father and the mother oscillate between Blackness and whiteness. On the other hand, the white characters, who imprison Clara, never change their identity over the performance. That is to say, they are pure white and, therefore, they have a stable identity and a graspable ontology through their whiteness. Unlike the purity of whiteness, Clara is stained by her birth and, therefore, she has no graspable ontology. The ever-changing identity of the father and the mother dwells in the memory of the spectators through observing the changes in the scenes, costumes, masks and lights. From beneath each white mask, a black wild kinky hair is revealed. All of which reminds the audience of the ungraspable ontology of our mulatta protagonist. In addition, the performance projects a sharp way of criticizing appearance as opposed to reality. Kennedy always seems to remind her audience of how close and related appearance and reality are; and, in turn, identification and identity. Through this technique Kennedy is able to diagnose the real situation of the mixed-race character both onstage and offstage. This idea reveals the power of Kennedy's stage as it analyzes and exposes reality in an unconventional philosophical manner.

Kennedy is able to change her own aunt's life story into a fictional dramatization of identity crisis. Kennedy explicates her aunt's situation,

Clara was much like my aunt's life. She was this girl who grew up in a small Georgia town. She was brilliant. Her father was white. She came to live with us when I was in high school. They wanted her to go to school in Cleveland because they figured she was so smart . . . what struck me as a young person was how she used to talk, how she didn't belong anywhere. She's very much the basis for that girl in *The Owl Answers*. (Kennedy and Lehman, 1977, p. 45)

Furthermore, the fluidity of places which are presented through the scenes does not grant Clara the fluidity of identity and, consequently, she is still trapped in her identity problem. She travels to London to claim her ancestry, but she is imprisoned in the Tower of London.

When she goes to London, despite the advice of many people not to go there, she is shocked as she appears alien to people there: everybody stares at her. Her journey there seems to suggest her attempt to move from Blackness to whiteness. This moment in the performance is very suggestive and expressive. Clara describes the scene:

I left the taxi and passed down a grey walk through a dark gate and into a garden where there were black ravens on the grass when I broke down. I broke down and started to cry, oh the Tower, winters in Queen's House, right in front of everybody. People came and stared. I was the only Negro there. The Guard came and stared, the ravens flew and finally a man with a black hat on helped me out through the gate into the street. I am never going back, Anne. Anne, I am never going back. I will not go. (p. 38)

In this scene, Clara's trapped identity is very obvious as she narrates her experience when she visited London. As soon as she got out of the taxi, she was confronted with her Blackness since

she was the only black person there. She is reminded of her Blackness by the “black taxi” that gave her ride to London, “a dark gate,” and the “black ravens.” The feeling of estrangement of *self* that she felt, startled her while she was on the taxi: “My cold hands were colder than ever. Then it happened” (p. 38). She is surrounded by white people who keep gazing at her. Their gaze has turned Clara into a racial object. She is objectified through her skin color and, as a result, she is left in a dizzying situation; she is dazzled and loses control over her body. Therefore, she collapses due to her whirling sensation. She is imprisoned inside her black body that she cannot deny to possess. Furthermore, the sense of estrangement that Clara faces takes place because of the sudden detachment that has occurred between her body and her conception of her *self*. She has been trying to confirm her whiteness saying, “I am almost white, am I not?” (p. 31). The answer that Clara gets after this journey into the *self* is that she is not white and will never be. Kolin (2005) reiterates, “She illustrates how society has stripped Clara Passmore of a legal, stable, and comforting identity altogether. She is a victim of identity theft in a white racist society” (p. 56).

Barnett (1996) reiterates, “Clara is thus isolated by her birth, left striving for a union she may never achieve with her father and his ancestry” (p. 144). Although she chooses to identify with her white father and with the white part of her identity, Clara is rejected by white society. On the other hand, she had a chance to be black due to her family’s acceptance of her, but we see that she does not attempt to adopt her black part of her racial identity.

Tener (1975) argues, “[N]o matter how pale the face, the body (the entire figure) must read black in a racist culture” (p. 3). In fact, this fits very well in the context of existential thought as Kennedy wants her characters to have a chance to choose and look at other possibilities in life. The sense of belonging that the protagonist develops throughout the performance is based

on her choice that is defied by the socio-racial construction of race and identity. Throughout the performance, Clara keeps seeking approval for her identity from her white father in order to confirm her true belonging. As a result of being rejected, isolated, and abandoned, she is trapped in her identity and she chooses death to annihilate her inauthentic mode of existence; of having no identity. The idea of mixed-race becomes a trope used by Kennedy to discuss the existential possibilities of this tragic protagonist. The way out of Clara's existential dilemma is to be raceless and to be dealt with on the individual basis as a human being rather than an inferior creature.

In *The Owl Answers*, the locked spaces that Clara is imprisoned in become a metaphor for her psychological imprisonment and her racial confinement. Such a confinement is tantamount to the existential notion of *no exit*. "SHE" is imprisoned and confined within closed spaces, which are simultaneously revealed to be a subway in New York, the Tower of London, and a Harlem Hotel and St Peter's. In order to present the metaphorical dimension of this confinement, the characters keep changing their places on the stage back and forth and from one side to another. Clara's prisoners are Shakespeare, Anne Boleyn, William the Conqueror, and Chaucer. Since all of them are white, her presence among them seems alien. These historical white characters refuse to acknowledge her Whiteness and also refuse to free her. She is denied the request to attend her white father's funeral. They call her bastard, "*(They start at a distance, eventually crowding her. Their lines are spoken coldly. SHE WHO IS is only a prisoner to them.)* You are not his ancestor" (p. 3). She is not only rejected by these white captors, but also by her white father:

If you are my ancestor why are you a Negro, Bastard? What is a Negro doing at the Tower of London, staying at the Queen's House? Clara, I am your Goddam Father who was the Richest White Man in the Town and you are a schoolteacher in Savannah who

spends her summers in Teachers College. You are not my ancestor. You are my bastard.

Keep her locked there, William. (p. 8)

Kennedy here seems to build an image of Whiteness. She presents these white intellectuals as tyrants and oppressors. These oppressors cause this female character to be locked in her life. Clara's absorption of whiteness is presented as the major factor that transforms the soul into a trapped status. Her life has become like blocked stations through which she always moves backward. There is no stability in her life. Kennedy conveys this idea through repeating some incidents, phrases, and stage directions. In *The Owl Answers*, Kennedy frequently refers to the image of the subway in which Clara is also locked. The door of the subway opens at each station Clara reaches, but Clara cannot exit. Her dead father recognizes her confused situation, therefore, he calls her to come and dwell in the world of the dead, "Mary, come in here for eternity. Are you confused? Yes, I can see you are confused" (p. 11).

When she loses trust in everyone around her, she tries to find any kind of belonging. She mouths her dilemma, "The people in the town all say Bastard, but I--I belong to God and the owls" (p. 12). She tries to find religious justification for her existence; therefore, she says that she belongs to God. This is an attempt to free herself from human labels such as White, Black, etc., and identify herself with gods. She tries to be race-less in searching for authentic existence. Zack (1993) argues that "If 'authenticity' is a definition of the self in the face of oppression, then the authenticity of a person of mixed race may rest on her resistance to biracial racial categories—the racial authenticity of mixed race could therefore be the racial position of anti-race" (p. 164). As Clara is rejected by the white society, she looks for any explanation for her existence. She does not feel her true belonging. This idea is also very clear in her conversation with the Negro Man,

NEGRO MAN. (*Touches her.*) And what exactly do you yearn for?

SHE. You know.

NEGRO MAN. No, what is it?

SHE. I want what I think everyone wants.

NEGRO MAN. And what is that?

SHE. I don't know. Love or something, I guess. (p. 36)

By the end of the play, Kennedy emphasizes the existential notion of no exit out of Clara's racial confinement. Even when the gate door is open, Clara cannot exit because she is bound to the black Everyman who is embodied in the character of Negro Man. She tries to escape her room, but she cannot because Negro Man is holding her. She tries to kill him, but she loses control over herself and kills herself instead. She falls on a burning bed and she is transformed into an owl at the end of the play. Therefore, Clara suffers from a double curse, white and black. White because the white society refuses to accept her and black because she is to be punished because she reminds the blacks of their sickening past; the past of slavery, inferiority, and rape. Giles (1995) explains,

The mulatto could be identified with and pitied as the victim of the miscegenation taboo while at the same time be feared as the despised other lurking within who had to be punished, either for trying to sneak into the white world as an imposter or for reminding the black world of the mark of the oppressor. (p. 64)

As Clara fails to achieve any authentic identity and as she is unable to reconcile with either part of her *self* (black and white), it is the owl that Clara identifies herself with as the last phase of her struggle and entrapment. Clara starts as a person of mixed race and ends as an owl as her mother tells her, "Clara, you were conceived by your Goddam Father who was the Richest White Man

in Town and somebody that cooked for him. That's why you're an owl" (32). Kolin (2005) argues, "Clara is destroyed for daring to cross the color line" (p. 51).

Kennedy's protagonists, both in *Funnyhose* and *The Owl Answers*, choose suicide as a means of rebellion against parasitic existence caused by their inability to confirm their identity in a racist society. Their suicide can be seen as the only exit and a way of searching for authenticity and confirming their identity and will. In addition, this suicide testifies against the racist ontological notion that blacks cannot commit suicide because they are subhumans and do not have a free will. Gordon (1997) explains, "Blacks, it was believed, were incapable of committing suicide supposedly like the rest of the animal kingdom, they lacked enough appreciation or intelligence to understand the ramifications of their situation" (p. 6). Kennedy presents a new way of representing the dilemma of the black female character in an unconventional way. At a certain desperate moment during the performance, Kennedy gives her black female protagonist moments to confirm her identity as black and other times as white, but in the racist environment she cannot be but a composite of two opposing identities. She tries to escape from her misery and trapped identity, but she runs into a NEGRO MAN and kills herself.

4. Conclusion

Kennedy's *The Owl Answers* presents a trapped identity of the black female protagonist due to being a mixed-race individual living in a racist environment. Clara tries to establish an identity based on her will and choice, but she is faced with rejection and denial. She always associates herself with a society that rejects her. Consequently, she lives an inauthentic mode of existence. She keeps oscillating between Blackness and whiteness and between visibility and invisibility. Kennedy wants her protagonist to have a chance to choose and look at other possibilities in

life. Therefore, Kennedy presents a new dimension of the meaning of Blackness, challenging the masculine radical conception.

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