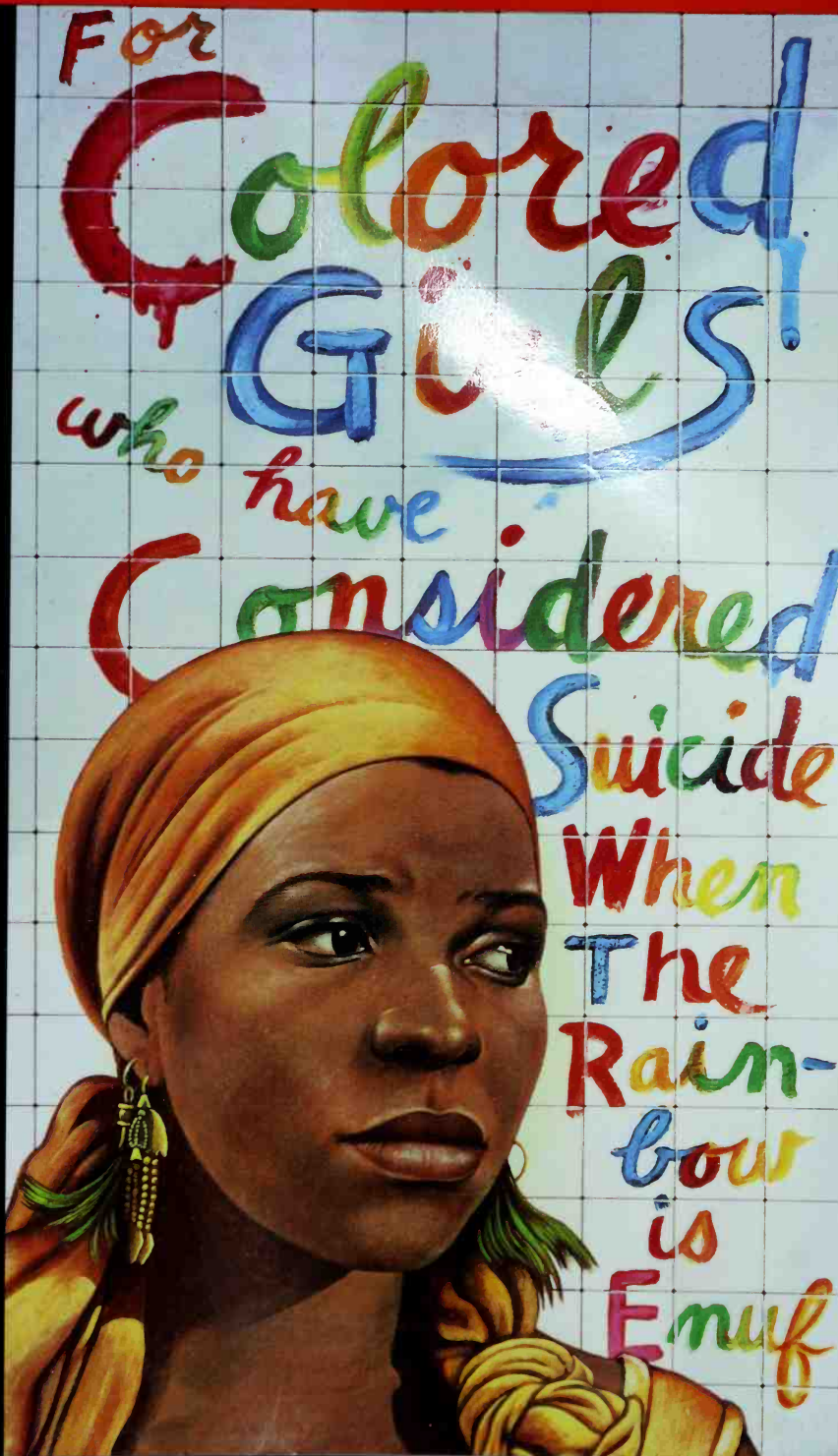


"Extraordinary and wonderful . . . Ntozake Shange writes with such exquisite care and beauty that anyone can relate to her message." —*The New York Times*

A Choreopoem by Ntozake Shange





2

**The critics applaud Ntozake Shange's**  
*for colored girls who have considered suicide/  
when the rainbow is enuf*

**"Overwhelming. . . . It's joyous and alive, affirmative in the face of despair."**

—Douglas Watt, *New York Daily News*

**"Passionate and lyrical. . . . In poetry and prose Shange describes what it means to be a black woman in a world of mean streets, deceitful men and aching loss."**

—Allan Wallach, *Newsday*

**"These poems and prose selections are . . . rich with the author's special voice: by turns bitter, funny, ironic, and savage; fiercely honest and personal."**

—Martin Gottfried, *New York Post*

**"Ntozake Shange's extraordinary 'choreopoem' . . . is a dramatic elegy for black women with an undercurrent message for everyone. Its theme is not sorrow . . . but courage. Its strength is its passion and its reality. . . . An unforgettable collage of one woman's view of the women of her race, facing everything from rape to unrequited love. . . . Wisdom and naivete go hand in hand. Wounds and dreams intermingle; strong passions melt into simple courage."**

—William A. Raidy, *L.I. Press/Newhouse Newspapers*

**"Remember when poetry used to give you chills, make you tremble? Ntozake Shange writes that kind of rousing poetry. It has the power to move a body to tears, to rage, and to an ultimate rush of love."**

—Marilyn Stasio, *Cue magazine*

**"Ntozake Shange's poetry approaches the force of a whirlwind."**

—*Encore American & Worldwide News*

THE HISTORY OF THE  
REPUBLIC OF THE UNITED STATES  
OF AMERICA

... the first step was to ...  
of the ...

... the second step was to ...  
of the ...

... the third step was to ...  
of the ...

... the fourth step was to ...  
of the ...

... the fifth step was to ...  
of the ...

... the sixth step was to ...  
of the ...





colored girls who

have considered suicide/

when the rainbow is enuf

a choreopoem/

ntozake shange

Author's poetry

also by ntozake shange

*theater*

three pieces

spell #7

a photograph: lovers in motion

boogie woogie landscapes

*poetry*

nappy edges

a daughter's geography

ridin' the moon in texas

the love space demands

*fiction*

sassafrass, cypress & indigo

betsey brown

liliane

for colored girls who  
have considered suicide/  
when the rainbow is enuf

a choreopoem/  
ntozake shange

scribner poetry

*for the spirits of my grandma*  
viola benzena murray owens  
*and my great aunt*  
effie owens josey



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now i love somebody more than 11  
no assistance 13  
i'm a poet who 14  
latent rapists' 17  
abortion cycle #1 22  
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somebody almost walked off wid alla my stuff 49  
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a laying on of hands 60



*for colored girls who have considered suicide/ when the rainbow is enuf* was first presented at the Bacchanal, a woman's bar just outside Berkeley, California. With Paula Moss & Elvia Marta who worked with me in Raymond Sawyer's Afro-American Dance Company & Halifu's The Spirit of Dance; Nashira Ntosh, a guitarist & program coordinator at KPOO-FM (one of the few Bay Area stations focusing on women's programming); Jessica Hagedorn, a poet & reading tour companion; & Joanna Griffin, co-founder of the Bacchanal, publisher of Effie's Press, & a poet. We just did it. Working in bars was a circumstantial aesthetic of poetry in San Francisco from Spec's, an old beat hangout, to 'new' Malvina's, Minnie's Can-Do Club, the Coffee Gallery, & the Rippletad. With as much space as a small studio on the Lower East Side, the five of us, five women, proceeded to dance, make poems, make music, make a woman's theater for about twenty patrons. This was December of 1974. We were a little raw, self-conscious, & eager. Whatever we were discovering in ourselves that nite had been in process among us for almost two years.

I first met Jessica & Nashira thru Third World Communications (The Woman's Collective) when the first anthology of Third World women writers in the U.S.A. was published. With Janice Mirikitani, Avotcja, Carol Lee Sanchez, Janet Campbell Hale, Kitty Tsui, Janic Cobb, Thulani, and a score more, San Francisco was inundated with women poets, women's readings, & a multi-lingual woman presence, new to all of us & desperately appreciated. The force of these readings on all our lives was to

become evident as we directed our energies toward clarifying our lives—and the lives of our mothers, daughters, & grandmothers—as women. During the same period, Shameless Hussy Press & The Oakland Women's Press Collective were also reading anywhere & everywhere they could. In a single season, Susan Griffin, Judy Grahn, Barbara Gravelle, & Alta, were promoting the poetry & presence of women in a legendary male-poet's environment. This is the energy & part of the style that nurtured *for colored girls* . . .

More stable as a source of inspiration & historical continuity was the Women's Studies Program at Sonoma State College, where I worked with J. J. Wilson, Joanna Griffin, & Wopo Holup over a three year span. Courses designed to make women's lives & dynamics familiar to us, such as: Woman as Artist; Woman as Poet; Androgynous Myths in Literature; Women's Biography I & II; Third World Women Writers, are inextricably bound to the development of my sense of the world, myself, & women's language. Studying the mythology of women from antiquity to the present day led directly to the piece *Sechita* in which a dance hall girl is perceived as deity, as slut, as innocent & knowing. Unearthing the mislaid, forgotten, &/or misunderstood women writers, painters, mothers, cowgirls, & union leaders of our pasts proved to be both a supportive experience & a challenge not to let them down, not to do less than—at all costs not be less woman than—our mothers, from Isis to Marie Laurencin, Zora Neale Hurston to Kathe Kollwitz, Anna May Wong to Calamity Jane.



Such joy & excitement I knew in Sonoma, then I would commute back the sixty miles to San Francisco to study dance with Raymond Sawyer, Ed Mock, & Halifu. Knowing a woman's mind & spirit had been allowed me, with dance I discovered my body more intimately than I had imagined possible. With the acceptance of the ethnicity of my thighs & backside, came a clearer understanding of my voice as a woman & as a poet. The freedom to move in space, to demand of my own sweat a perfection that could continually be approached, though never known, waz poem to me, my body & mind ellipsing, probably for the first time in my life. Just as Women's Studies had rooted me to an articulated female heritage & imperative, so dance as explicated by Raymond Sawyer & Ed Mock insisted that everything African, everything halfway colloquial, a grimace, a strut, an arched back over a yawn, waz mine. I moved what waz my unconscious knowledge of being in a colored woman's body to my known everydayness. The depth of my past waz made tangible to me in Sawyer's *Ananse*, a dance exploring the Diaspora to contemporary Senegalese music, pulling ancient trampled spirits out of present tense Afro-American Dance. Watching Ed Mock re-create the Step Brothers' or Bert Williams' routines in class or on stage, in black face mimicking Eddie Cantor or Gloria Swanson, being the rush of irony & control that are the foundation of jazz dance, was as startling as humbling. With Raymond Sawyer & Ed Mock, Paula Moss & I learned the wealth of our bodies, if we worked, if we opened up, if we made the dance our own.

The first experience of women's theater for me as a performer

waz the months I spent with Halifu Osumare's *The Spirit of Dance*, a troupe of five to six black women who depicted the history of Black dance from its origins in Western Africa thru to the popular dances seen on our streets. Without a premeditated or conscious desire to create a female piece, that's what, in fact, Halifu did. Working in San Francisco & Berkeley public schools as an adjunct to Ethnic Studies, I learned the mechanics of self-production & absorbed some of Halifu's confidence in her work, the legitimacy of our visions. After some 73 performances with *The Spirit of Dance*, I left the company to begin production of *for colored girls* . . .

In the summer of 1974 I had begun a series of seven poems, modeled on Judy Grahn's *The Common Woman*, which were to explore the realities of seven different kinds of women. They were numbered pieces: the women were to be nameless & assume hegemony as dictated by the fullness of their lives. The first of the series is the poem, 'one' (orange butterflies & aqua sequins), which prompted the title & *this is for colored girls who have considered suicide/ when the rainbow is enuf*. I waz smitten by my own language, & called all the performances I waz to give from then on by that title. In other words, all the readings & choreopoetry that Paula Moss & I developed after that summer waz *for colored girls*. . . . We started at the Bacchanal & worked through the winter at Ed Mock's Dance Studio with the assistance of West Coast Dance Works, setting pieces & cleaning up poems. I found two bands, The Sound Clinic (a horn trio) & Jean Desarmes & His Raggae Blues Band, who agreed to work with

us if I found space. & I did. The space we used was the space I knew: Women's Studies Departments, bars, cafes, & poetry centers. With the selection of poems changing, dependent upon our audience & our mood, & the dance growing to take space of its own, so that Paula inspired my words to fall from me with her body, & The Sound Clinic working with new arrangements of Ornette Coleman compositions & their own, The Raggaie Blues Band giving Caribbean renditions of Jimi Hendrix & Redding, we set dates for Minnie's Can-Do Club in Haight-Ashbury. The poets showed up for us, the dancers showed up for us, the women's community showed up, & we were listed as a 'must see' in *The Bay Guardian*. Eight days after our last weekend at Minnie's, Paula & I left to drive cross country to New York to do 'the show,' as we called it, at the Studio Rivbea in New York.

Our work in San Francisco was over. With the courage of children, we staged the same sort of informal & improvised choreopoems at Rivbea during the Summer Music Festival. Instead of the Standing-Room-Only crowds we were accustomed to in San Francisco, my family & a few friends came to see our great project. One of these friends, Oz Scott, & my sister, Ifa Iyaun, who were instrumental in the development of *for colored girls* . . . saw the show that night. Oz offered to help me with the staging of the work for a New York audience, since Paula & I obviously didn't understand some things. We moved from the Rivbea to the Old Reliable on East 3rd Street to work through some of the ideas Oz had & the new things Paula & I were developing.

Gylan Kain of the Original Last Poets was working there every Monday night. We worked with him & any other poets & dancers who showed up. Several members of the original New York show came to us just this haphazardly. Aku Kadogo & I both had scholarships at Diane McIntyre's Sounds-in-Motion Dance Studio. I asked her if she felt like improvising on the Lower East Side, she agreed & has been with the show ever since. Laurie Carlos stopped by one evening. She stayed. Somehow word got out & people started coming to the back room of this neighborhood bar. We were moved to a new bar down the street, DeMonte's, after eleven weeks of no-pay hard-work three sets a night—maybe a shot of cognac on the house.

The show at DeMonte's was prophetic. By this time, December of 1975, we had weaned the piece of extraneous theatricality, enlisted Trazana Beverley, Laurie Carlos, Laurie Hayes, Aku Kadogo, & of course, Paula & I were right there. The most prescient change in the concept of the work was that I gave up directorial powers to Oz Scott. By doing this, I acknowledged that the poems & the dance worked on their own to do & be what they were. As opposed to viewing the pieces as poems, I came to understand these twenty-odd poems as a single statement, a choreopoem.

We finally hit at DeMonte's. Those institutions I had shunned as a poet—producers, theaters, actresses, & sets—now were essential to us. *for colored girls who have considered suicide/ when the rainbow is enuf* was a theater piece. Woody King



picked up our option to produce us as a Workshop under Equity's Showcase Code at Henry Street. With the assistance of the New York Shakespeare Festival & Joe Papp, we received space & a set, lights & a mailing list, things Paula & I had done without for two years. We opened at Henry Street with two new actress-dancers, Thea Martinez & Judy Dearing. Lines of folks & talk all over the Black & Latin community propelled us to the Public Theater in June. Then to the Booth Theater on Broadway in September of 1976.

Every move we've made since the first showing of *for colored girls* . . . in California has demanded changes of text, personnel, & staging. The final production at the Booth is as close to distilled as any of us in all our art forms can make it. With two new actresses, Janet League & Rise Collins, & with the help of Seret Scott, Michelle Shay, & Roxanne Reese, the rest of the cast is enveloping almost 6,000 people a week in the words of a young black girl's growing up, her triumphs & errors, our struggle to become all that is forbidden by our environment, all that is forfeited by our gender, all that we have forgotten.

I had never imagined not doing *for colored girls*. . . . It waz just my poems, any poems I happened to have. Now I have left the show on Broadway, to write poems, stories, plays, my dreams. *for colored girls* . . . is either too big for my off-off Broadway taste, or too little for my exaggerated sense of freedom, held over from seven years of improvised poetry readings. Or, perhaps, the series has actually finished itself. Poems come on their own

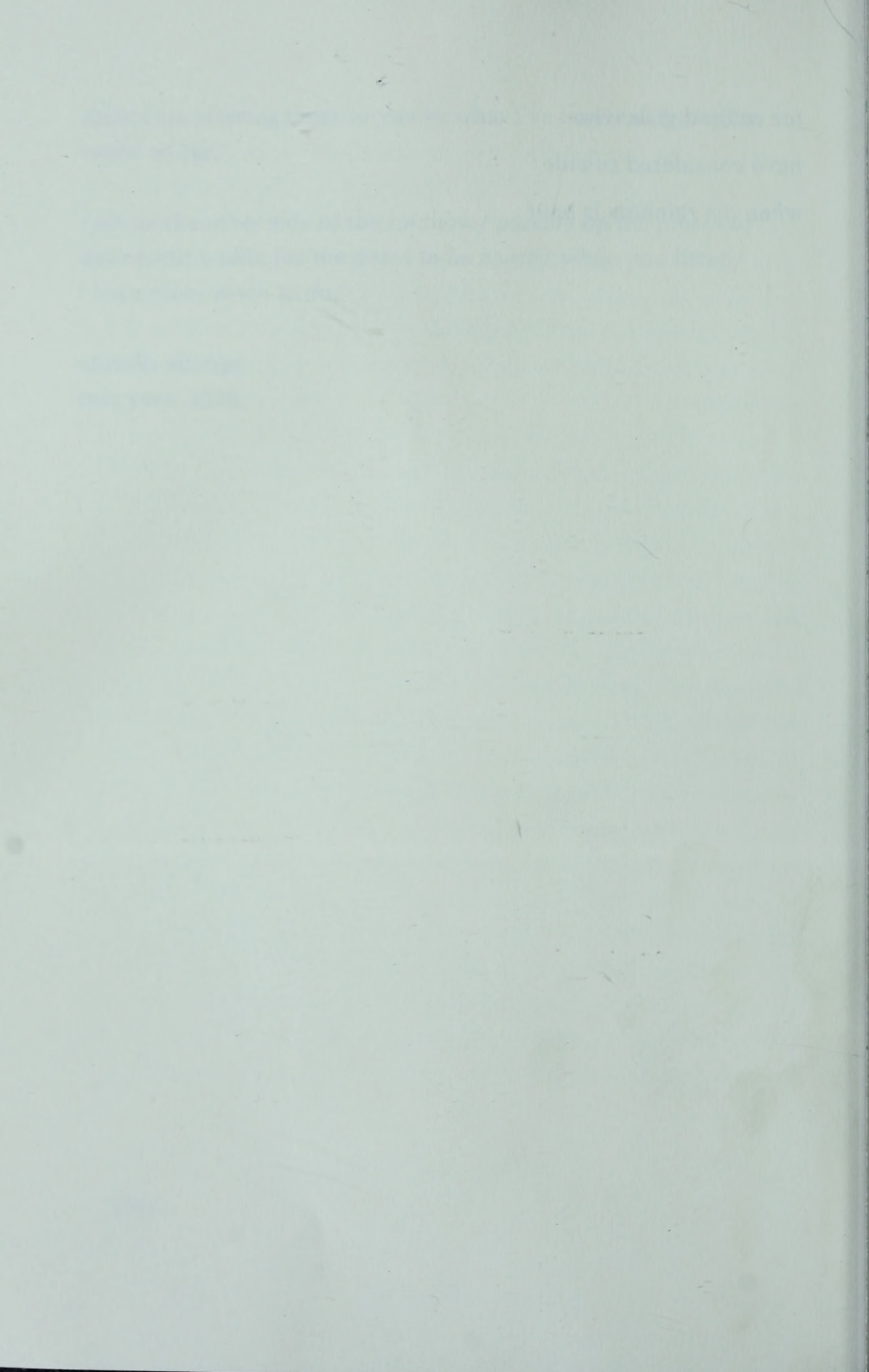
time: i am offering these to you as what i've received from this  
world so far.

*i am on the other side of the rainbow/ picking up the pieces of  
days spent waitin for the poem to be heard/ while you listen/  
i have other work to do/*

ntozake shange

new york, 1976

for colored girls who  
have considered suicide/  
when the rainbow is enuf





Unhappy

The stage is in darkness. Harsh music is heard as dim blue lights come up. One after another, seven women run onto the stage from each of the exits. They all freeze in postures of distress. The follow spot picks up the lady in brown. She comes to life and looks around at the other ladies. All of the others are still. She walks over to the lady in red and calls to her. The lady in red makes no response.

lady in brown  
dark phrases of womanhood  
of never havin been a girl  
half-notes scattered  
without rhythm/ no tune  
distraught laughter fallin  
over a black girl's shoulder  
[it's funny/ it's hysterical]  
the melody-less-ness of her dance  
don't tell nobody don't tell a soul  
she's dancin on beer cans & shingles

Woman

Missing-ness

Hiding

Emptiness  
Absence of culture  
no sound  
comfort

this must be the spook house  
another song with no singers  
lyrics/ no voices

& interrupted solos  
unseen performances

are we ghouls?  
children of horror?  
the joke?

don't tell nobody don't tell a soul  
are we animals? have we gone crazy?

i can't hear anythin  
but maddening screams  
& the soft strains of death  
& you promised me  
you promised me ...  
somebody/ anybody  
sing a black girl's song  
bring her out  
to know herself  
to know you  
but sing her rhythms  
carin/ struggle/ hard times  
sing her song of life  
she's been dead so long  
closed in silence so long  
she doesn't know the sound  
of her own voice  
her infinite beauty

Who are you performing for  
Alone/understand  
yourself - lies

Can your performance have  
an effect if no one is  
listening

Culture

Who  
Joy/silence

lack of Joy

Not in touch

Sound

celebrate her

she's half-notes scattered  
without rhythm/ no tune  
sing her sighs  
sing the song of her possibilities  
sing a righteous gospel — Culture  
let her be born  
let her be born  
& handled warmly.

what create  
the ability  
to be open?

lady in brown  
i'm outside chicago

lady in yellow  
i'm outside detroit

lady in purple  
i'm outside houston

lady in red  
i'm outside baltimore

lady in green SF  
i'm outside san francisco

lady in blue  
i'm outside manhattan

lady in orange  
i'm outside st. louis

Short - location

similar

Same situation  
different location

*lady in brown*

& this is for colored girls who have considered suicide  
but moved to the ends of their own rainbows.

*everyone*

mama's little baby likes shortnin, shortnin, *All singing*

mama's little baby likes shortnin bread

mama's little baby likes shortnin, shortnin,

mama's little baby likes shortnin bread

*no voices/singing*

little sally walker, sittin in a saucer

rise, sally, rise, wipe your weepin eyes

an put your hands on your hips

an let your backbone slip

o, shake it to the east

o, shake it to the west

shake it to the one

that you like the best

*lady in purple*

you're it

*As the lady in brown tags each of  
the other ladies they freeze. When  
each one has been tagged the lady  
in brown freezes. Immediately  
"Dancing in the Streets" by Martha  
and the Vandellas is heard. All*



of the ladies start to dance. The  
lady in green, the lady in blue, and  
the lady in yellow do the pony,  
the big boss line, the swim, and  
the nose dive. The other ladies  
dance in place.

Growing up  
lady in yellow

young

it was graduation nite & i waz the only virgin in the crowd  
bobby mills martin jerome & sammy yates eddie jones & randi  
all cousins  
all the prettiest niggers in this factory town  
carried me out wit em  
in a deep black buick  
smellin of thunderbird & ladies in heat  
we rambled from camden to mount holly  
laughin at the afternoon's speeches  
& danglin our tassles from the rear view mirror  
climbin different sorta project stairs  
movin toward snappin beer cans &  
GET IT GET IT THAT'S THE WAY TO DO IT MAMA  
all mercer county graduated the same nite  
cosmetology secretarial pre-college autoshop & business  
all us movin from mama to what ever waz out there

that nite we raced a big ol truck from the barbeque stand  
trying to tell him bout the party at jacqui's  
where folks graduated last year waz waitin to hit it wid us



i got drunk & cdnt figure out  
whose hand waz on my thigh/ but it didn't matter  
cuz these cousins martin eddie sammy jerome & bobby  
waz my sweethearts alternately since the seventh grade  
& everybody knew i always started cryin if somebody actually  
tried to take advantage of me

at jacqui's

ulinda mason was stickin her mouth all out  
while we tumbled out the buick  
eddie jones waz her lickin stick  
but i knew how to dance

it got soo hot

vincent ramos puked all in the punch  
& harly jumped all in tico's face  
cuz he was leavin for the navy in the mornin  
hadda kick ass so we'd all remember how bad he waz

seems like sheila & marguerite waz fraid  
to get their hair turnin back  
so they laid up against the wall

lookin almost sexy  
didnt wanna sweat  
but me & my fellas

*dependency on  
USA men*

*Performance*

we waz dancin

since 1963 i'd won all kinda contests  
wid the cousins at the POLICE ATHLETIC LEAGUE DANCES  
all mercer county knew  
any kin to martin yates cd turn somersaults  
fore smokey robinson cd get a woman excited

Pride of dancing

The Dells singing "Stay" is heard

we danced      doin nasty ol tricks

Why don't they  
support each  
other.

The lady in yellow sings along  
with the Dells for a moment. The  
lady in orange and the lady in blue  
jump up and parody the lady in  
yellow and the Dells. The lady in  
yellow stares at them. They sit down.

doin nasty ol tricks i'd been thinkin since may  
cuz graduation nite had to be hot  
& i waz the only virgin  
so i hadda make like my hips waz inta some business  
that way everybody that whoever was gettin it  
was a older man cdnt run the streets wit youngsters  
martin slipped his leg round my thigh  
the dells bumped "stay"  
up & down—up & down the new carver homes

WE WAZ GROWN

WE WAZ FINALLY GROWN

ulinda alla sudden went crazy  
went over to eddie cursin & carryin on  
tearin his skin wid her nails  
the cousins tried to talk sense to her  
tried to hold her arms  
lissin bitch sammy went on

bobby whispered i shd go wit him  
fore they go ta cuttin  
fore the police arrived  
we teetered silently thru the parkin lot  
no un uhuh  
we didn't know nothin bout no party  
bobby started lookin at me  
yeah  
he started looking at me real strange  
like i waz a woman or somethin/  
started talkin real soft  
in the backseat of that ol buick  
WOW  
by daybreak  
i just cdnt stop grinnin.

She likes being a woman

*The Dells singing "Stay" comes in  
and all of the ladies except the lady  
in blue join in and sing along.*

*lady in blue*  
you gave it up in a buick?

*lady in yellow*  
yeh, and honey, it was wonderful.

*lady in green*  
we used to do it all up in the dark  
in the corners . . .

*lady in blue*

some niggah sweating all over you.

*lady in red*

it was good!

*lady in blue*

i never did like to grind.

*lady in yellow*

what other kind of dances are there?

*lady in blue*

mambo, bomba, merengue

when i waz sixteen i ran off to the south bronx  
cuz i waz gonna meet up wit willie colon  
& dance all the time

mamba bomba merengue

*lady in yellow*

do you speak spanish?

*lady in blue*

olà

my papa that he was puerto rican & we wda been  
cept we waz just reglar niggahs wit hints of spanish  
so off i made it to this 36 hour marathon dance  
con salsa con ricardo  
'sugggggggggar' ray on southern blvd

Identity

next door to this fotografi place  
jammed wit burial weddin & communion relics  
next door to la real ideal genuine spanish barber  
                  up up up up stairs & stairs & lotsa hallway  
wit my colored new jersey self  
didn't know what anybody waz saying  
cept if dancin waz proof of origin  
                  i was jibarita herself that nite  
& the next day  
i kept smilin & right on steppin  
if he cd lead i waz ready to dance  
if he cdnt lead  
i caught this attitude  
                  i'd seen rosa do  
& wd not be bothered  
i waz twirlin hippin givin much quik feet  
& bein a mute cute colored puerto rican  
til saturday afternoon when the disc-jockey say  
'SORRY FOLKS WILLIE COLON AINT GONNA MAKE IT TODAY'  
& alla my niggah temper came outta control  
& i wdnt dance wit nobody  
& i talked english loud  
& i love you more than i waz mad  
uh huh uh huh  
more than more than  
when i discovered archie shepp & subtle blues  
doncha know i wore out the magic of juju  
heroically resistin being possessed

Music

I love you more than...

Meds  
Misc



oooooooooooooh the sounds  
& sneakin in under age to slug's  
to stare ata real 'artiste'  
& every word outta imamu's mouth waz gospel  
& if jesus cdnt play a horn like shepp  
waznt no need for colored folks to bear no cross at all

Music

& poem is my thank-you for music  
& i love you more than poem  
more than aureliano buendia loved macondo  
more than hector lavoe loved himself  
more than the lady loved gardenias Billie Holiday  
more than celia loves cuba or graciela loves el son  
more than the flamingoes shoo-do-n-doo-wah love bein pretty

oyè négro  
te amo mas que            te amo mas que  
when you play  
yr flute

everyone (very softly)  
te amo mas que            te amo mas que

*lady in red*  
without any assistance or guidance from you  
i have loved you assiduously for 8 months 2 wks & a day  
i have been stood up four times  
i've left 7 packages on yr doorstep

forty poems 2 plants & 3 handmade notecards i left  
town so i cd send to you have been no help to me  
on my job  
you call at 3:00 in the mornin on weekdays  
so i cd drive 27½ miles cross the bay before i go to work  
charmin charmin  
but you are of no assistance

i want you to know  
this waz an experiment  
to see how selfish i cd be  
if i wd really carry on to snare a possible lover  
if i waz capable of debasin my self for the love of another  
if i cd stand not being wanted  
when i wanted to be wanted  
& i cannot  
so  
with no further assistance & no guidance from you  
i am endin this affair

this note is attached to a plant  
i've been waterin since the day i met you  
you may water it  
yr damn self

*lady in orange*  
i dont wanna write  
in english or spanish  
i wanna sing      make you dance  
like the bata      dance      scream

what does it take  
to move away  
Man

Widly empowering

What does it take to be strong.

twitch hips wit me cuz  
i done forgot all abt words  
aint got no definitions  
i wanna whirl|  
|with you

*Dancing as language*

Music starts, "Che Che Cole" by  
Willie Colon.

Everyone starts to dance.

our whole body  
wrapped like a ripe mango  
ramblin whippin thru space  
on the corner in the park  
where the rug useta be  
let willie colon take you out  
swing your head  
push your leg to the moon with me

i'm on the lower east side  
in new york city  
and i can't i can't  
talk witchu no more

*lady in yellow*  
we gotta dance to keep from cryin

*lady in brown*  
we gotta dance to keep from dyin

*lady in red*  
so come on

*lady in brown*  
come on

*lady in purple*  
come on

*lady in orange*  
hold yr head like it was ruby sapphire  
i'm a poet  
who writes in english  
come to share the worlds witchu

everyone  
come to share our worlds witchu  
we come here to be dancin  
    to be dancin  
    to be dancin  
baya

There is a sudden light change, all of the ladies react as if they had been struck in the face. The lady in green and the lady in yellow run out up left, the lady in orange runs out the left volm, the lady in brown runs out up right.



*lady in blue*  
a friend is hard to press charges against

*lady in red*  
if you know him  
you must have wanted it

*lady in purple*  
a misunderstanding

*lady in red*  
you know  
these things happen

*lady in blue*  
are you sure  
you didnt suggest

*lady in purple*  
had you been drinkin

*lady in red*  
a rapist is always to be a stranger  
to be legitimate  
someone you never saw  
a man wit obvious problems

*lady in purple*  
pin-ups attached to the insides of his lapels

Violence / Rape?  
Isolation - inability to express one's needs



*lady in blue*  
ticket stubs from porno flicks in his pocket

*lady in purple*  
a lil dick

*lady in red*  
or a strong mother

*lady in blue*  
or just a brutal virgin

*lady in red*  
but if you've been seen in public wit him  
danced one dance  
kissed him good-bye lightly

*lady in purple*  
wit closed mouth

*lady in blue*  
pressin charges will be as hard  
as keepin yr legs closed  
while five fools try to run a train on you

*lady in red*  
these men friends of ours  
who smile nice

stay employed  
and take us out to dinner

*lady in purple*  
lock the door behind you

*lady in blue*  
wit fist in face  
to fuck

*lady in red*  
who make elaborate mediterranean dinners  
& let the art ensemble carry all ethical burdens  
while they invite a coupla friends over to have you  
are sufferin from latent rapist bravado  
& we are left wit the scars

*lady in blue*  
bein betrayed by men who know us

*lady in purple*  
& expect  
like the stranger  
we always that waz comin

*lady in blue*  
that we will submit

*lady in purple*  
we must have known

*lady in red*  
women relinquish all personal rights  
in the presence of a man  
who apparently cd be considered a rapist

*lady in purple*  
especially if he has been considered a friend

*lady in blue*  
& is no less worthy of bein beat witin an inch of his life  
bein publicly ridiculed  
havin two fists shoved up his ass

*lady in red*  
than the stranger  
we always thot it wd be

*lady in blue*  
who never showed up

*lady in red*  
cuz it turns out the nature of rape has changed how?

*lady in blue*  
we can now meet them in circles we frequent for companionship



lady in purple  
we see them at the coffeehouse

What does it say  
about trust to together

lady in blue  
wit someone else we know

lady in red  
we cd even have em over for dinner  
& get raped in our own houses  
by invitation  
a friend

The lights change, and the ladies  
are all hit by an imaginary slap, the  
lady in red runs off up left.

lady in blue  
eyes

lady in purple  
mice  
Small  
minors  
Verbs why nice

lady in blue  
womb

lady in blue & lady in purple  
nobody

Foreshadawing  
~~that~~  
each feels the  
pain  
knowing beforehand  
support → lack of  
support

The lady in purple exits up right.

# Blue - Abortion

lady in blue

tubes tables white washed windows

grime from age wiped over once

legs spread

anxious

eyes crawling up on me

eyes rollin in my thighs

metal horses gnawin my womb

dead mice fall from my mouth

i really didnt mean to

i really didnt think i cd

just one day off . . .

get offa me alla this blood

bones shattered like soft ice-cream cones

i cdnt have people

lookin at me

pregnant

i cdnt have my friends see this

dyin danglin tween my legs

& i didnt say a thing

not a sigh

or a fast scream

to get

those eyes offa me

get them steel rods outta me

this hurts

this hurts me

Fore shadows  
- why?

rod is metal  
horse

eyes watching  
feeling alone

Pain  
eyes  
who is watching  
shame is watching



Purple - Exotic dancer

& nobody came  
cuz nobody knew  
once i waz pregnant & shamed of myself.

abortion

no buyer - hidden in the past  
Secrets  
pres = shame

The lady in blue exits stage left  
volm.

Soft deep music is heard, voices  
calling "Sechita" come from the  
wings and volms. The lady in  
purple enters from up right.

*lady in purple*

once there were quadron balls/ elegance in st. louis/ laced  
mulattoes/ gamblin down the mississippi/ to memphis/ new  
orleans n okra crepes near the bayou/ where the poor white trash  
wd sing/ moanin/ strange/ liquid tones/ thru the swamps/

why physical  
representation

The lady in green enters from the  
right volm; she is Sechita and for  
the rest of the poem dances out  
Sechita's life.

sechita had heard these things/ she moved  
as if she'd known them/ the silver n high-toned laughin/  
the violins n marble floors/ sechita pushed the clingin  
delta dust wit painted toes/ the patch-work tent waz  
poka-dotted/ stale lights snatched at the shadows/ creole

Purple - Dancing Queen

carnival waz playin natchez in ten minutes/ her splendid  
red garters/ gin-stained n itchy on her thigh/ blk-diamond  
stockings darned wit yellow threads/ an ol starched taffeta  
can-can fell abundantly orange/ from her waist round the  
splinterin chair/ sechita/ egyptian/ goddess of creativity/  
2nd millennium/ threw her heavy hair in a coil over her neck/  
sechita/ goddess/ the recordin of history/ spread crimson oil  
on her cheeks/ waxed her eyebrows/ n unconsciously slugged  
the last hard whiskey in the glass/ the broken mirror she  
used to decorate her face/ made her forehead tilt backwards/  
her cheeks appear sunken/ her sassy chin only large enuf/  
to keep her full lower lip/ from growin into her neck/ sechita/  
had learned to make allowances for the distortions/  
but the heavy dust of the delta/ left a tinge of grit n  
darkness/ on every one of her dresses/ on her arms & her  
shoulders/ sechita/ waz anxious to get back to st. louis/  
the dirt there didnt crawl from the earth into yr soul/  
at least/ in st. louis/ the grime waz store bought  
second-hand/ here in natchez/ god seemed to be wipin his  
feet in her face/

one of the wrestlers had finally won  
tonite/ the mulatto/ raul/ was sposed to hold the boomin  
half-caste/ searin eagle/ in a bear hug/ 8 counts/ get  
thrown unawares/ fall out the ring/ n then do searin eagle  
in for good/ sechita/ cd hear redneck whoops n slappin on  
the back/ she gathered her sparsely sequined skirts/ tugged  
the waist cincher from under her greysin slips/ n made her face

What  
Pride  
of  
being black?

Self  
image



Not necessarily a good thing

Prose

immobile/ she made her face like nefertiti/ approachin her-  
own tomb/ she suddenly threw/ her leg full-force/ thru the  
canvas curtain/ a deceptive glass stone/ sparkled/ malignant  
on her ankle/ her calf waz tauntin in the brazen carnie  
lights/ the full moon/ sechita/ goddess/ of love/ egypt/  
2nd millennium/ performin the rites/ the conjurin of men/  
conjurin the spirit/ in natchez/ the mississippi spewed  
a heavy fume of barely movin waters/ sechita's legs slashed  
furiously thru the cracker nite/ & gold pieces hittin the  
makeshift stage/ her thighs/ they were aimin coins tween her  
thighs/ sechita/ egypt/ goddess/ harmony/ kicked viciously  
thru the nite/ catchin stars tween her toes.

Dancing can  
Proove

Prooves it is  
A part of her

Some one else

Dancing - diff persons

The lady in green exits into the  
stage left volm, the lady in purple  
exits into up stage left.

The lady in brown enters from up  
stage right.

lady in brown

de library waz right down from de trolly tracks  
cross from de laundry-mat  
thru de big shinin floors & granite pillars  
ol st. louis is famous for  
i found toussaint  
but not til after months uv  
cajun katie/ pippi longstockin

christopher robin/ eddie heyward & a pooh bear  
in the children's room  
only pioneer girls & magic rabbits  
& big city white boys  
i knew i waznt sposedta  
but i ran into the ADULT READING ROOM  
& came across

growing  
up

TOUSSAINT

my first blk man  
(i never counted george washington carver  
cuz i didnt like peanuts)  
still

TOUSSAINT waz a blk man a negro like my mama say  
who refused to be a slave  
& he spoke french  
& didnt low no white man to tell him nothin  
not napolean  
not maximillien  
not robespierre

Bringin  
reality  
from  
fiction

TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE  
waz the beginnin uv reality for me  
in the summer contest for  
who colored child can read  
15 books in three weeks  
i won & raved abt TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE  
at the afternoon ceremony

waz disqualified

cuz Toussaint

belonged in the ADULT READING ROOM

& i cried

& carried dead Toussaint home in the book

he waz dead & livin to me

cuz TOUSSAINT & them

they held the citadel gainst the french

wid the spirits of ol dead africans from outta the ground

TOUSSAINT led they army of zombies

walkin cannon ball shootin spirits to free Haiti

& they waznt slaves no more

TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE

became my secret lover at the age of 8

i entertained him in my bedroom

widda flashlight under my covers

way into the night/ we discussed strategies

how to remove white girls from my hopscotch games

& etc.

TOUSSAINT

waz layin in bed wit me next to raggedy ann

the night i decided to run away from my

integrated home

integrated street

integrated school

1955 waz not a good year for lil blk girls

Toussaint said 'lets go to haiti'

*need an escape*

*Make figure  
head*



i said 'awright'  
& packed some very important things in a brown paper bag  
so i wdnt haveta come back  
then Toussaint & i took the hodiament streetcar  
to the river  
last stop  
only 15¢  
cuz there waznt nobody cd see Toussaint cept me  
& we walked all down thru north st. louis  
where the french settlers usedta live  
in tiny brick houses all huddled together  
wit barely missin windows & shingles uneven  
wit colored kids playin & women on low porches sippin beer

i cd talk to Toussaint down by the river  
like this waz where we waz gonna stow away  
on a boat for new orleans  
& catch a creole fishin-rig for port-au-prince  
then we waz just gonna read & talk all the time  
& eat fried bananas

we waz just walkin & skippin past ol drunk men  
when dis ol young boy jumped out at me sayin

'HEY GIRL YA BETTAH COME OVAH HEAH N TALK TO ME'  
well

i turned to TOUSSAINT (who waz furious)

& i shouted

'ya silly ol boy

ya bettah leave me alone

or TOUSSAINT'S gonna get yr ass'  
de silly ol boy came round de corner laughin all in my face  
'yellah gal  
ya sure must be somebody to know my name so quick'  
i waz disgusted  
& wanted to get on to haiti  
widout some tacky ol boy botherin me  
still he kept standin there  
kickin milk cartons & bits of brick  
tryin to get all in my business  
i mumbled to L'OUVERTURE 'what shd I do'

finally

i asked this silly ol boy  
'WELL WHO ARE YOU?'

he say

'MY NAME IS TOUSSAINT JONES'

well

i looked right at him

those skidded out cordoroy pants  
a striped teashirt wid holes in both elbows  
a new scab over his left eye  
& i said

'what's yr name again'

he say

'i'm toussaint jones'

'wow

i am on my way to see

TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE in HAITI

*Identity mix  
UP*

are ya any kin to him  
he dont take no stuff from no white folks  
& they gotta country all they own  
& there aint no slaves'  
that silly ol boy squinted his face all up  
'looka heah girl  
i am TOUSSAINT JONES  
& i'm right heah lookin at ya  
& i dont take no stuff from no white folks  
ya dont see none round heah do ya?'  
& he sorta pushed out his chest  
then he say  
'come on lets go on down to the docks  
& look at the boats'  
i waz real puzzled goin down to the docks  
wit my paper bag & my books  
i felt TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE sorta leave me  
& i waz sad  
til i realized  
TOUSSAINT JONES waznt too different  
from TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE  
cept the ol one waz in haiti  
& this one wid me speakin english & eatin apples  
yeah.  
toussaint jones waz awright wit me  
no tellin what all spirits we cd move  
down by the river  
st. louis 1955

Real  
Not Fantasy

Realist  
Theist

For Lu  
(Toussaint)  
non-chance

hey wait.

Wait  
Patrol

The lady in brown exits into the  
stage right volm.

The lady in red enters from the  
stage left volm.

*lady in red*

orange butterflies & aqua sequins  
ensconded tween slight bosoms  
silk roses dartin from behind her ears  
the passion flower of southwest los angeles  
meandered down hoover street  
past dark shuttered houses where  
women from louisiana shelled peas  
round 3:00 & sent their sons  
whistlin to the store for fatback & black-eyed peas  
she glittered in heat  
& seemed to be lookin for rides  
when she waznt & absolutely  
eyed every man who waznt lame white or noddin out  
she let her thigh slip from her skirt  
crossin the street  
she slowed to be examined  
& she never looked back to smile  
or acknowledge a sincere 'hey mama'  
or to meet the eyes of someone  
purposely findin sometin to do in

Looking pretty

not class

Fake roses  
desnt give them away

Writing and memory  
wound

her direction

she waz sullen  
& the rhinestones etchin the corners of her mouth  
suggested tears  
fresh kisses that had done no good

she always wore her stomach out  
lined with small iridescent feathers  
the hairs round her navel seemed to dance  
& she didnt let on  
she knew  
from behind her waist waz aching to be held  
the pastel ivy drawn on her shoulders  
to be brushed with lips & fingers  
smellin of honey & jack daniels

she waz hot  
a deliberate coquette where  
who never did without  
what she wanted

& she wanted to be unforgettable  
she wanted to be a memory  
a wound to every man memory  
arragant enough to want her

she waz the wrath  
of women in windows  
fingerin shades/ ol lace curtains  
camoflagin despair &  
stretch marks

so she glittered honestly putting on a huge  
display

(23)  
etotic  
smell



delighted she waz desired  
& allowed those especially  
schemin/ tactful suitors  
to experience her body & spirit  
tearin/ so easily blendin with theirs/  
& they were so happy  
& lay on her lime sheets full & wet  
from her tongue she kissed  
them reverently even ankles  
edges of beards . . .

lost w/ men

The stage goes to darkness except  
for a special on the lady in red,  
who lies motionless on the floor; as  
the lights slowly fade up the lady  
in red sits up.

at 4:30 AM  
~~she rose~~  
she rose

Ornamentation

movin the arms & legs that trapped her  
she sighed affirmin the sculptured man  
& made herself a bath  
of dark musk oil egyptian crystals  
& florida water to remove his smell  
to wash away the glitter  
to watch the butterflies melt into  
suds & the rhinestones fall beneath  
her buttocks like smooth pebbles

Cleaning

in a missouri creek  
layin in water  
she became herself  
ordinary  
brown braided woman  
with big legs & full lips  
reglar

who's  
regular?

seriously intendin to finish her  
night's work  
she quickly walked to her guest  
straddled on her pillows & began

'you'll have to go now/ i've  
a lot of work to do/ & i cant  
with a man around/ here are yr pants/  
there's coffee on the stove/ its been  
very nice/ but i cant see you again/  
you got what you came for/ didnt you'

& she smiled

he wd either mumble curses bout crazy bitches  
or sit dumbfounded  
while she repeated

'i cdnt possibly wake up/ with  
a strange man in my bed/ why  
dont you go home'

she cda been slapped upside the head  
or verbally challenged  
but she never waz  
& the ones who fell prey to the

dazzle of hips painted with  
orange blossoms & magnolia scented wrists  
had wanted no more  
than to lay between her sparklin thighs  
& had planned on leavin before dawn  
& she had been so divine  
devastatingly bizarre the way  
her mouth fit round  
& now she stood a  
reglar colored girl  
fulla the same malice  
livid indifference as a sistah  
worn from supportin a wd be hornplayer  
or waitin by the window

& they knew  
& left in a hurry

she wd gather her tinsel &  
jewels from the tub  
& laugh gayly or vengeful  
she stored her silk roses by her bed  
& when she finished writin  
the account of her exploit in a diary  
embroidered with lilies & moonstones  
she placed the rose behind her ear  
& cried herself to sleep.

does  
she  
have  
the  
same  
yes

# Blue - Six blocks

Why does she leave?  
What did she leave?

All the lights fade except for a special on the lady in red; the lady in red exits into the stage left volm.

The lady in blue enters from up right.

lady in blue

i usedta live in the world  
then i moved to HARLEM  
& my universe is now six blocks

Space

when i walked in the pacific - oceanic spring  
i imagined waters ancient from accra/ tunis  
cleansin me/ feedin me  
now my ankles are coated in grey filth  
from the puddle neath the hydrant

everything  
smaller - worse

(my oceans were life  
what waters i have here sit stagnant  
circlin ol men's bodies  
shit & broken lil whiskey bottles  
left to make me bleed

not going any where

i usedta live in the world  
now i live in harlem & my universe is six blocks  
a tunnel with a train  
i can ride anywhere  
remaining a stranger

smaller  
space  
less community

NO MAN YA CANT GO WIT ME/ I DONT EVEN  
KNOW YOU/ NO/ I DONT WANNA KISS YOU/  
YOU AINT BUT 12 YRS OLD/ NO MAN/ PLEASE  
PLEASE PLEASE LEAVE ME ALONE/ TOMORROW/ YEAH/  
NO/ PLEASE/ I CANT USE IT

i cd stay alone  
a woman in the world  
then i moved to

HARLEM

i come in at dusk  
stay close to the curb

*The lady in yellow enters, she's  
waiting for a bus.*

round midnite  
praying wont no young man  
think i'm pretty in a dark mornin

*uncertainty  
around men*

*The lady in purple enters, she's  
waiting for a bus.*

wdnt be good  
not good at all  
to meet a tall short black brown young man fulla his power  
in the dark  
in my universe of six blocks  
straight up brick walls  
women hangin outta windows

*Powerless at  
night*



Fear

like ol silk stockings  
cats cryin/ children gigglin/ a tavern wit red curtains  
bad smells/ kissin ladies smilin & dirt  
sidewalks spittin/ men cursing/ playin

The lady in orange enters, she is  
being followed by a man, the  
lady in blue becomes that man.

'I SPENT MORE MONEY YESTERDAY  
THAN THE DAY BEFORE & ALL THAT'S MORE N YOU  
NIGGAH EVER GOTTA HOLD TO  
COME OVER HERE BITCH  
CANT YA SEE THIS IS \$5'

nlp

never mind sister  
dont pay him no mind  
go go go go go go sister  
do yr thing  
never mind

Urgent

i usedta live in the world  
really be in the world  
free & sweet talkin  
good mornin & thank-you & nice day  
uh huh  
i cant now  
i cant be nice to nobody

Community don't feel good

# Purple - 3 women (man)

nice is such a rip-off  
reglar beauty & a smile in the street  
is just a set-up

i usedta be in the world  
a woman in the world  
i hadda right to the world  
then i moved to harlem  
for the set-up  
a universe  
six blocks of cruelty  
piled on itself  
a tunnel  
closin

Smallness

Small

The four ladies on stage freeze,  
count 4, then the ladies in  
blue, purple, yellow and orange  
move to their places for the next  
poem.

## lady in purple

three of us like a pyramid  
three friends  
one laugh  
one music  
one flowered shawl  
knotted on each neck



All

together contrast  
to previous  
poem

we all saw him at the same time  
& he saw us  
i felt a quick thump in each one of us  
didnt know what to do  
we all wanted what waz comin our way  
so we split  
but he found one  
& she loved him

*rift b/wn friends  
in hand  
+ waz*

the other two were tickled  
& spurned his advances  
when the one who loved him waz somewhere else  
he wd come to her saying  
yr friends love you very much  
i have tried  
& they keep askin where are you  
she smiled  
wonderin how long her friends  
wd hold out  
he waz what they were lookin for  
he bided his time  
he waited til romance waned  
the three of us made up stories  
bout usedta & cda been nice  
the season waz dry  
no men  
no quickies  
not one dance or eyes unrelentin

*Why  
doesn't she  
care about the man  
being out of 1/2e?*

one day after another  
cept for the one who loved him  
he appeared irregularly  
expectin graciousness no matter what  
she cut fresh strawberries  
her friends callt less frequently  
went on hunts for passin fancies  
she cdnt figure out what waz happenin  
then the rose  
she left by his pillow  
she found on her friends desk  
& there waz nothing to say  
she said

others don't  
love him? lol

Betrayal of  
trust

i wanna tell you  
he's been after me  
all the time  
says he's free & can explain  
what's happenin wit you  
is nothin to me

thru's about  
the woman not  
the man

& i dont wanna hurt you  
but you know i need someone now  
& you know  
how wonderful he is

her friend cdnt speak or cry  
they hugged & went to where he waz  
wit another woman  
he said good-bye to one

which one?

Women Show commiserate  
the wrong way

tol the other he wd call  
he smiled a lot

she held her head on her lap  
the lap of her sisters soakin up tears

Sadness

each understandin how much love stood between them  
how much love between them  
love between them  
love like sisters

LOVE

Sharp music is heard, each lady  
dances as if catching a disease from  
the lady next to her, suddenly  
they all freeze.

Colored girl  
goes to rest

lady in orange  
ever since i realized there waz someone callt  
a colored girl an evil woman a bitch or a nag  
i been tryin not to be that & leave bitterness  
in somebody else's cup/ come to somebody to love me  
without deep & nasty smellin scald from lye or bein  
left screamin in a street fulla lunatics/ whisperin  
slut bitch bitch niggah/ get outta here wit alla that/  
i didnt have any of that for you/ i brought you what joy  
i found & i found joy/ honest fingers round my face/ with  
dead musicians on 78's from cuba/ or live musicians on five  
dollar lp's from chicago/ where i have never been/ & i love  
willie colon & arsenio rodriguez/ especially cuz i can make



*dance takes over*

the music loud enuf/ so there is no me but dance/ & when  
i can dance like that/ there's nothin cd hurt me/ but  
i get tired & i haveta come offa the floor & then there's  
that woman who hurt you/ who you left/ three or four times/  
& just went back/ after you put my heart in the bottom of  
yr shoe/ you just walked back to where you hurt/ & i didnt  
have nothin/ so i went to where somebody had somethin for me/  
but he waznt you/ & i waz on the way back from her house  
in the bottom of yr shoe/ so this is not a love poem/ cuz there  
are only memorial albums available/ & even charlie mingus  
wanted desperately to be a pimp/ & i wont be able to see eddie  
palmieri for months/ so this is a requium for myself/ cuz i  
have died in a real way/ not wid aqua coffins & du-wop cadillacs/  
i used to joke abt when i waz messin round/ but a real dead  
lovin is here for you now/ cuz i dont know anymore/ how  
to avoid my own face wet wit my tears/ cuz i had convinced  
myself colored girls had no right to sorrow/ & i lived  
& loved that way & kept sorrow on the curb/ allegedly  
for you/ but i know i did it for myself/  
i cdnt stand it  
i cdnt stand bein sorry & colored at the same time  
it's so redundant in the modern world

*dancing  
makes  
her  
tired*

*doesn't  
want that*

*lady in purple*

i lived wit myths & music waz my ol man & i cd dance  
a dance outta time/ a dance wit no partners/ take my  
pills & keep right on steppin/ linger in non-english  
speakin arms so there waz no possibility of understandin

*No partners  
alone*

*Alone*

& you YOU

came sayin i am the niggah/ i am the baddest muthafuckah  
out there/

i said yes/ this is who i am waitin for  
& to come wit you/ i hadta bring everythin  
the dance & the terror

waiting  
for the biggest  
address

the dead musicians & the hope

& those scars i had hidden wit smiles & good fuckin  
lay open

honesty?

& i dont know i dont know any more tricks

i am really colored & really sad sometimes & you hurt me  
more than i ever danced outta/ into oblivion isnt far enuf  
to get outta this/ i am ready to die like a lily in the  
desert/ & i cdnt let you in on it cuz i didnt know/ here

is what i have/ poems/ big thighs/ lil tits/ &  
so much love/ will you take it from me this one time/  
please this is for you/ arsenio's tres cleared the way

She  
Accepts  
herself

& makes me pure again/ please please/ this is for you  
i want you to love me/ let me love you/ i dont wanna  
dance wit ghosts/ snuggle lovers i made up in my drunkenness/  
lemme love you just like i am/ a colored girl/ i'm finally bein  
real/ no longer symmetrical & impervious to pain

wants acceptance

lady in blue

we deal wit emotion too much

so why dont we go on ahead & be white then/

colored

& make everythin dry & abstract wit no rhythm & no  
reelin for sheer sensual pleasure/ yes let's go on

emo film

How  
culture  
Effect her love  
life

Love  
want love  
but pure no  
suffer w/ self interest

# Yellow - self Acceptance

& be white/ we're right in the middle of it/ no use  
holdin out/ holdin onto ourselves/ ~~lets think our~~  
way outta feelin/ lets abstract ourselves some families  
& maybe maybe tonite/ i'll find a way to make myself  
come witout you/ no fingers or other objects just that  
which isnt spiritual evolution cuz its empty & godliness  
is plenty is ripe & fertile/ thinkin wont do me a bit of  
good tonite/ i need to be loved/ & havent the audacity  
to say  
where are you/ & dont know who to say it to

celebratory  
color

gasm

Foot response

lady in yellow

i've lost it

touch wit reality/ i dont know who's doin it

i thot i waz but i waz so stupid i waz able to be hurt  
& that's not real/ not anymore/ i shd be immune/ if i'm  
still alive & that's what i waz discussin/ how i am still

alive & my dependency on other livin beins for love  
i survive on intimacy & tomorrow/ that's all i've got goin  
& the music waz like smack & you knew abt that

& still refused my dance waz not enuf/ & it waz all i had  
but bein alive & bein a woman & bein colored is a metaphysical  
dilemma/ i havent conquered yet/ do you see the point  
my spirit is too ancient to understand the separation of  
soul & gender/ my love is too delicate to have thrown  
back on my face

losing touch w/ reality

open up  
have  
to check  
yourself

need a hard shell

dancing

can't solve everything

Pride

Acceptance

The ladies in red, green, and brown enter quietly; in the background all of the ladies except the lady in yellow are frozen; the lady in yellow looks at them, walks by them, touches them; they do not move.

*lady in yellow*

my love is too delicate to have thrown back on my face

repeat

The lady in yellow starts to exit into the stage right volm. Just as she gets to the volm, the lady in brown comes to life.

*lady in brown*

my love is too beautiful to have thrown back on my face

*lady in purple*

my love is too sanctified to have thrown back on my face

*lady in blue*

my love is too magic to have thrown back on my face

*lady in orange*

my love is too saturday nite to have thrown back on my face

Love thrown back



*lady in red*

my love is too complicated to have thrown back on my face

*lady in green*

my love is too music to have thrown back on my face

everyone

music

music

*The lady in green then breaks into a dance, the other ladies follow her lead and soon they are all dancing and chanting together.*

*lady in green*

yank dankka dank dank

everyone

music

*Music holds together*

*lady in green*

yank dankka dank dank

everyone

music

*lady in green*

yank dankka dank dank



everyone (but started by the lady in yellow)

delicate

delicate

delicate

Celebration  
of Love

everyone (but started by the lady in brown)

and beautiful

and beautiful

and beautiful

everyone (but started by the lady in purple)

oh sanctified

oh sanctified

oh sanctified

everyone (but started by the lady in blue)

magic

magic

magic

everyone (but started by the lady in orange)

and saturday nite

and saturday nite

and saturday nite

everyone (but started by the lady in red)

and complicated

and complicated

and complicated  
and complicated  
and complicated  
and complicated  
and complicated  
and complicated

The dance reaches a climax and all  
of the ladies fall out tired, but full  
of life and togetherness.

*lady in green*

somebody almost walked off wid alla my stuff  
not my poems or a dance i gave up in the street  
but somebody almost walked off wid alla my stuff  
like a kleptomaniac workin hard & forgettin while stealin  
this is mine/ this aint yr stuff/  
now why dont you put me back & let me hang out in my own self  
somebody almost walked off wid alla my stuff  
& didnt care enuf to send a note home sayin  
i waz late for my solo conversation  
or two sizes too small for my own tacky skirts  
what can anybody do wit somethin of no value on  
a open market/ did you getta dime for my things/  
hey man/ where are you goin wid alla my stuff/  
this is a woman's trip & i need my stuff/  
to ohh & ahh abt/ daddy/ i gotta mainline number  
from my own shit/ now wontchu put me back/ & let

what  
stuff

stuff is important

me play this duet/ wit this silver ring in my nose/  
honest to god/ somebody almost run off wit alla my stuff/  
& i didnt bring anythin but the kick & sway of it  
the perfect ass for my man & none of it is theirs  
this is mine/ ntozake 'her own things'/ that's my name/  
now give me my stuff/ i see ya hidin my laugh/ & how i  
sit wif my legs open sometimes/ to give my crotch  
some sunlight/ & there goes my love my toes my chewed  
up finger nails/ niggah/ wif the curls in yr hair/  
mr. louisiana hot link/ i want my stuff back/  
my rhythms & my voice/ open my mouth/ & let me talk ya  
outta/ throwin my shit in the sewar/ this is some delicate  
leg & whimsical kiss/ i gotta have to give to my choice/  
without you runnin off wit alla my shit/  
now you cant have me less i give me away/ & i waz  
doin all that/ til ya run off on a good thing/  
who is this you left me wit/ some simple bitch  
widda bad attitude/ i wants my things/  
i want my arm wit the hot iron scar/ & my leg wit the  
flea bite/ i want my calloused feet & quik language back  
in my mouth/ fried plantains/ pineapple pear juice/  
sun-ra & joseph & jules/ i want my own things/ how i lived them/  
& give me my memories/ how i waz when i waz there/  
you cant have them or do nothin wit them/  
stealin my shit from me/ dont make it yrs/ makes it stolen/  
somebody almost run off wit alla my stuff/ & i waz standin  
there/ lookin at myself/ the whole time  
& it waznt a spirit took my stuff/ waz a man whose

Emotional  
stuff

Emotional  
stuff

ego walked round like Rodan's shadow/ waz a man faster  
n my innocence/ waz a lover/ i made too much  
room for/ almost run off wit alla my stuff/  
& i didnt know i'd give it up so quik/ & the one running wit it/  
dont know he got it/ & i'm shoutin this is mine/ & he dont  
know he got it/ my stuff is the anonymous ripped off treasure  
of the year/ did you know somebody almost got away with me/  
me in a plastic bag under their arm/ me  
danglin on a string of personal carelessness/ i'm spattered wit  
mud & city rain/ & no i didnt get a chance to take a douche/  
hey man/ this is not your prerogative/ i gotta have me in my  
pocket/ to get round like a good woman shd/ & make the poem  
in the pot or the chicken in the dance/ what i got to do/  
i gotta have my stuff to do it to/  
why dont ya find yr own things/ & leave this package  
of me for my destiny/ what ya got to get from me/  
i'll give it to ya/ yeh/ i'll give it to ya/  
round 5:00 in the winter/ when the sky is blue-red/  
& Dew City is gettin pressed/ if it's really my stuff/  
ya gotta give it to me/ if ya really want it/ i'm  
the only one/ can handle it

Emotional  
baggage

Need Love  
have betrayed  
Wants her  
Own self  
Identity

*lady in blue*

that niggah will be back tomorrow, sayin 'i'm sorry'

*lady in yellow*

get this, last week my ol man came in sayin, 'i don't know  
how she got yr number baby, i'm sorry'

*lady in brown*

no this one is it, 'o baby, ya know i waz high, i'm sorry'

*lady in purple*

'i'm only human, and inadequacy is what makes us human, &  
if we was perfect we wdnt have nothin to strive for, so you  
might as well go on and forgive me pretty baby, cause i'm sorry'

*lady in green*

'shut up bitch, i told you i waz sorry'

*lady in orange*

no this one is it, 'i do ya like i do ya cause i thot  
ya could take it, now i'm sorry'

*lady in red*

'now i know that ya know i love ya, but i aint ever gonna  
love ya like ya want me to love ya, i'm sorry'

*lady in blue*

one thing i dont need  
is any more apologies  
i got sorry greetin me at my front door  
you can keep yrs  
i dont know what to do wit em  
they dont open doors  
or bring the sun back  
they dont make me happy



or get a mornin paper  
didnt nobody stop usin my tears to wash cars  
cuz a sorry

i am simply tired  
of collectin  
i didnt know  
i was so important toyou'  
i'm gonna haveta throw some away  
i cant get to the clothes in my closet  
for alla the sorries  
i'm gonna tack a sign to my door  
leave a message by the phone

'if you called  
to say yr sorry  
call somebody  
else

i dont use em anymore'  
i let sorry/ didnt meanta/ & how cd i know abt that  
take a walk down a dark & musty street in brooklyn  
i'm gonna do exactly what i want to  
& i wont be sorry for none of it  
letta sorry soothe yr soul/ i'm gonna soothe mine

you were always inconsistent  
doin somethin & then bein sorry  
beatin my heart to death  
talkin bout you sorry

well

i will not call

i'm not goin to be nice

i will raise my voice

& scream & holler

& break things & race the engine

& tell all yr secrets bout yrself to yr face

& i will list in detail everyone of my wonderful lovers

& their ways

i will play oliver lake

loud

& i wont be sorry for none of it

i loved you on purpose

i was open on purpose

i still crave vulnerability & close talk

& i'm not even sorry bout you bein sorry

you can carry all the guilt & grime ya wanna

just dont give it to me

i cant use another sorry

next time

you should admit

you're mean/ low-down/ triflin/ & no count straight out

steada bein sorry alla the time

enjoy bein yrself

*lady in red*

there waz no air/ the sheets made ripples under his  
body like crumpled paper napkins in a summer park/ & lil  
specks of somethin from tween his toes or the biscuits  
from the day before ran in the sweat that tucked the sheet  
into his limbs like he waz an ol frozen bundle of chicken/  
& he'd get up to make coffee, drink wine, drink water/ he  
wished one of his friends who knew where he waz wd come by  
with some blow or some shit/ anythin/ there waz no air/  
he'd see the spotlights in the alleyways downstairs movin  
in the air/ cross his wall over his face/ & get under the  
covers & wait for an all clear or til he cd hear traffic  
again/

there waznt nothin wrong with him/ there waznt nothin wrong  
with him/ he kept tellin crystal/  
any niggah wanna kill vietnamese children more n stay home  
& raise his own is sicker than a rabid dog/  
that's how their thing had been goin since he got back/  
crystal just got inta sayin whatta fool niggah beau waz  
& always had been/ didnt he go all over uptown sayin the  
child waznt his/ waz some no counts bastard/ & any ol city  
police cd come & get him if they wanted/ cuz as soon as  
the blood type & shit waz together/ everybody wd know that  
crystal waz a no good lyin whore/ and this after she'd been  
his girl since she waz thirteen/ when he caught her  
on the stairway/

he came home crazy as hell/ he tried to get veterans benefits

to go to school & they kept right on puttin him in remedial classes/ he cdnt read wortha damn/ so beau cused the teachers of holdin him back & got himself a gypsy cab to drive/ but his cab kept breakin down/ & the cops was always messin wit him/ plus not gettin much bread/

& crystal went & got pregnant again/ beau most beat her to death when she tol him/ she still gotta scar under her right tit where he cut her up/ still crystal went right on & had the baby/ so now beau willie had two children/ a little girl/ naomi kenya & a boy/ kwame beau willie brown/ & there waz no air/

how in the hell did he get in this mess anyway/ somebody went & tol crystal that beau waz spendin alla his money on the bartendin bitch down at the merry-go-round cafe/ beau sat straight up in the bed/ wrapped up in the sheets lookin like john the baptist or a huge baby wit stubble & nuts/ now he hadta get alla that shit outta crystal's mind/ so she wd let him come home/ crystal had gone & got a court order saying beau willie brown had no access to his children/ if he showed his face he waz subject to arrest/ shit/ she'd been in his ass to marry her since she waz 14 years old & here when she 22/ she wanna throw him out cuz he say he'll marry her/ she burst out laughin/ hollerin whatchu wanna marry me for now/ so i can support yr

ass/ or come sit wit ya when they lock yr behind  
up/ cause they gonna come for ya/ ya goddamn lunatic/  
they gonna come/ & i'm not gonna have a thing to do  
wit it/ o no i wdnt marry yr pitiful black ass for  
nothin & she went on to bed/

the next day beau willie came in blasted & got ta swingin  
chairs at crystal/ who cdnt figure out what the hell  
he waz doin/ til he got ta shoutin bout how she waz gonna  
marry him/ & get some more veterans benefits/ & he cd  
stop drivin them crazy spics round/ while they tryin  
to kill him for \$15/ beau waz sweatin terrible/ beatin  
on crystal/ & he cdnt do no more with the table n chairs/  
so he went to get the high chair/ & lil kwame waz in it/  
& beau waz beatin crystal with the high chair & her son/  
& some notion got into him to stop/ and he run out/ ]

crystal most died/ that's why the police wdnt low  
beau near where she lived/ & she'd been tellin the kids  
their daddy tried to kill her & kwame/ & he just wanted  
to marry her/ that's what/ he wanted to marry her/ &  
have a family/ but the bitch waz crazy/ beau willie  
waz sittin in this hotel in his drawers drinkin  
coffee & wine in the heat of the day spillin shit all  
over hissself/ laughin/ bout how he waz gonna get crystal  
to take him back/ & let him be a man in the house/ & she  
wdnt even have to go to work no more/ he got dressed  
all up in his ivory shirt & checkered pants to go see



crystal & get this mess all cleared up/  
he knocked on the door to crystal's rooms/ & she  
didnt answer/ he beat on the door & crystal & naomi  
started cryin/ beau gotta shoutin again how he wanted  
to marry her/ & waz she always gonna be a whore/ or  
did she wanna husband/ & crystal just kept on  
screamin for him to leave us alone/ just leave us  
alone/ so beau broke the door down/ crystal held  
the children in fronta her/ she picked kwame off the  
floor/ in her arms/ & she held naomi by her shoulders/  
& kept on sayin/ beau willie brown/ get outta here/  
the police is gonna come for ya/ ya fool/ get outta here/  
do you want the children to see you act the fool again/  
you want kwame to brain damage from you throwin him  
round/ niggah/ get outta here/ get out & dont show yr  
ass again or i'll kill ya/ i swear i'll kill ya/  
he reached for naomi/ crystal grabbed the lil girl &  
stared at beau willie like he waz a leper or somethin/  
dont you touch my children/ muthafucker/ or i'll kill  
you/

beau willie jumped back all humble & apologetic/ i'm  
sorry/ i dont wanna hurt em/ i just wanna hold em &  
get on my way/ i dont wanna cuz you no more trouble/  
i wanted to marry you & give ya things  
what you gonna give/ a broken jaw/ niggah get outta here/  
he ignored crystal's outburst & sat down motionin for  
naomi to come to him/ she smiled back at her daddy/

crystal felt naomi givin in & held her tighter/  
naomi/ pushed away & ran to her daddy/ cryin/ daddy, daddy  
come back daddy/ come back/ but be nice to mommy/  
cause mommy loves you/ and ya gotta be nice/  
he sat her on his knee/ & played with her ribbons &  
they counted fingers & toes/ every so often he  
looked over to crystal holdin kwame/ like a statue/  
& he'd say/ see crystal/ i can be a good father/  
now let me see my son/ & she didnt move/ &  
he coaxed her & he coaxed her/ tol her she waz  
still a hot lil ol thing & pretty & strong/ didnt  
she get right up after that lil ol fight they had  
& go back to work/ beau willie oozed kindness &  
crystal who had known so lil/ let beau hold kwame/

as soon as crystal let the baby outta her arms/ beau  
jumped up a laughin & a gigglin/ a hootin & a hollerin/  
awright bitch/ awright bitch/ you gonna marry me/  
you gonna marry me . . .

i aint gonna marry ya/ i aint ever gonna marry ya/  
for nothin/ you gonna be in the jail/ you gonna be  
under the jail for this/ now gimme my kids/ ya give  
me back my kids/

he kicked the screen outta the window/ & held the kids  
offa the sill/ you gonna marry me/ yeh, i'll marry ya/  
anything/ but bring the children back in the house/  
he looked from where the kids were hangin from the

fifth story/ at alla the people screamin at him/ &  
he started sweatin again/ say to alla the neighbors/  
you gonna marry me/

i stood by beau in the window/ with naomi reachin  
for me/ & kwame screamin mommy mommy from the fifth  
story/ but i cd only whisper/ & he dropped em

WTF SO WARY

*lady in red*

i waz missin somethin

*lady in purple*

somethin so important

*lady in orange*

somethin promised

*lady in blue*

a layin on of hands

*lady in green*

fingers near my forehead

*lady in yellow*

strong

*lady in green*

cool

*lady in orange*

movin

*lady in purple*

makin me whole

*lady in orange*

sense

*lady in green*

pure

*lady in blue*

all the gods comin into me

layin me open to myself

*lady in red*

i waz missin somethin

*lady in green*

somethin promised

*lady in orange*  
somethin free

*lady in purple*  
a layin on of hands

*lady in blue*  
i know bout/ layin on bodies/ layin outta man  
bringin him alla my fleshy self & some of my pleasure  
bein taken full eager wet like i get sometimes  
i waz missin somethin

Missing

*lady in purple*  
a layin on of hands

*lady in blue*  
not a man

*lady in yellow*  
layin on

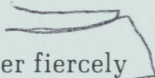
*lady in purple*  
not my mama/ holdin me tight/ sayin  
i'm always gonna be her girl  
not a layin on of bosom & womb  
a layin on of hands  
the holiness of myself released

Hold  
each other



*lady in red*

i sat up one nite walkin a boardin house  
screamin/ cryin/ the ghost of another woman  
who waz missin what i waz missin  
i wanted to jump up outta my bones  
& be done wit myself  
leave me alone  
& go on in the wind  
it waz too much  
i fell into a numbness  
til the only tree i cd see  
took me up in her branches  
held me in the breeze  
made me dawn dew  
that chill at daybreak  
the sun wrapped me up swingin rose light everywhere  
the sky laid over me like a million men  
i waz cold/ i waz burnin up/ a child  
& endlessly weavin garments for the moon  
wit my tears

i found god in myself   
& i loved her/ i loved her fiercely

*All of the ladies repeat to themselves softly the lines 'i found god in myself & i loved her.' It soon becomes a song of joy, started by*



the lady in blue. The ladies sing  
first to each other, then gradually  
to the audience. After the song  
peaks the ladies enter into a closed  
tight circle.

*lady in brown*

& this is for colored girls who have considered  
suicide/ but are movin to the ends of their own  
rainbows



"Celebrates the capacity to master pain and betrayals with wit, sister-sharing, reckless daring, and flight and forgetfulness if necessary. She celebrates most of all women's loyalties to women."

—TONI CADE BAMBARA, *MS. MAGAZINE*

**F**rom its inception in California in 1974 to its highly acclaimed critical success at Joseph Papp's Public Theater and on Broadway, the Obie Award-winning *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf* has excited, inspired, and transformed audiences all over the country. Passionate and fearless, Shange's words reveal what it is to be of color and female in the twentieth century. First published in 1975 when it was praised by *The New Yorker* for "encompassing . . . every feeling and experience a woman has ever had," *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf* will be read and performed for generations to come. Here is the complete text, with stage directions, of a groundbreaking dramatic prose poem written in vivid and powerful language that resonates with unusual beauty in its fierce message to the world.



**NTOZAKE SHANGE** is a renowned playwright, poet (*Nappy Edges* and *The Love Space Demands*), and novelist (*Sassafrass*, *Cypress & Indigo*, *Betsey Brown*, and *Liliane*). She lives in Philadelphia.

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