**For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enough**

**By Ntozake Shange**

Structurally, for colored girls is a series of 20 poems, collectively called a "choreopoem." Shange's poetry expresses many struggles and obstacles that African-American women may face throughout their lives and is a representation of sisterhood and coming of age as an African-American woman. The poems are choreographed to music that weaves together interconnected stories. The choreopoem is performed by a cast of seven nameless women only identified by the colors they are assigned. They are the lady in red, lady in orange, lady in yellow, lady in green, lady in blue, lady in brown, and lady in purple. Subjects from rape, abandonment, abortion, and domestic violence are tackled.[1] By the end of the play them women come together in a circle, symbolizing the unity they have found sharing their stories.

"dark phrases" – Lady in Brown with Ladies in Red, Blue, Orange, Green, Yellow and Purple

The prologue of the choreopoem "dark phrases" begins with the lady in brown describing the "dark phrases of womanhood".[6] All she hears are screams and promises. Each woman states where she is from, by stating they are outside their respective cities. The lady in brown proclaims that this piece is all for "colored girls who have considered suicide / but moved to the ends of their own rainbows".[7] The women then begin to sing children's nursery rhymes, "mama's little baby likes shortnin, shortnin".[7] Then all the ladies start to dance to the song "Dancing in the Streets".

"graduation nite" – Lady in Yellow with Ladies in Blue, Green and Red

The lady in yellow says it was graduation night and she was the only virgin. She was out driving around with her male friends who she has known since the seventh grade in a black Buick, laughing about graduation. After a fight breaks out, the lady in yellow and Bobby leave and end up having sex in the back of the Buick. The other ladies start talking about their sexual preferences.

"now i love somebody more than" – Lady in Blue with Ladies in Yellow, Blue, and Green

The lady in blue talks about how she used to participate in dance marathons frequently. One night she refused to dance with anyone that only spoke English. Throughout the monologue she intertwines English and Spanish. During this time she discovered blues clubs. She says she became possessed by the music. She ends her monologue by calling it her poem "thank-you for music," to which she states, "I love you more than poem".[8] She repeats "te amo mas que," and the other women join her, softly chanting.

"no assistance" – Lady in Red

The lady in red addresses an ambiguous "you" throughout the monologue. She has loved this "you" strongly and passionately "for 8 months, 2 wks, & a day" without any encouragement.[8] She decides to end this affair and leaves a note attached to a plant that she has watered every day since she met this person.

"i'm a poet who" – Lady in Orange with Ladies in Red, Yellow, Green, Blue, Purple and Brown

The lady in orange begins by saying she does not want to write in neither English nor Spanish, but she only wants to dance. She forgets all about words when she starts to dance. She says "we gotta dance to keep form cryin and dyin" and the other ladies repeat her words.[9] The lady in orange then claims that she is a poet "who writes in english / come to share the worlds witchu".[10]

"latent rapists'" – Ladies in Red, Blue, Purple

The lady in blue talks about how hard it is to press charges against a friend. The other women begin to ponder and ask questions. They say that maybe it was a misunderstanding, or the woman caused it, and they ask her if she was drinking. The lady in red states that society only believes someone is a rapist if they are a perverted stranger. The women talk about male friends of theirs who have nice smiles and buy them dinner but end up taking advantage of women. The women all share the experience of having been violated by a man they knew while being on the lookout for “the stranger we always thot it wd be”[11] The lady in red states that the "nature of rape has changed." The lights change, the women react to an imaginary slap.

"abortion cycle #1" – Lady in Blue

The lady in blue sets the scene with tubes, tables, white washed windows, and her legs spread open. She couldn't bear to have people looking at her while she got an abortion so she is all alone.

"sechita" – Lady in Purple with Lady in Green

The lady in purple describes Sechita's life in the bayou, while lady in green dances out Sechita's life. She is dressed up for the Creole carnival celebration. She embodies the spirit of her namesake, Sechita, the Egyptian goddess of creativity, love, beauty and filth from the 2nd millennium.

"toussaint" – Lady in Brown

The lady in brown describes falling in love with Toussaint L'Ouverture finding Toussaint in the library near the train tracks. The lady in brown talks about entering a contest to see which "colored child" could read 15 books in three weeks and the lady in brown won, but she was disqualified because she went into the adult reading room and read about Toussaint instead of reading the children's books. The lady in brown became obsessed with Toussaint despite the fact that he was dead. He was her "secret lover at age 8".[12] The lady in brown wanted to run away to go to Haiti with Toussaint. On her journey the lady in brown meets a young boy whose name is Toussaint Jones. The lady in brown feels likes she's met her real life Toussaint and she leaves with him.

"one" – Lady in Red

The lady in red enters begins by describing a beautiful woman wearing orange butterflies, silk roses, and aqua sequins. This woman is deliberate in all her actions. Although she walked slowly to allow men to gaze at her, she never returned their interest with a smile or acknowledging their catcalls. She was "hot / a deliberate coquette".[13] Her goal was to be unforgettable. She takes "those especially schemin/ tactful suitors" to go home with her. In the morning, she becomes her ordinary self by washing off the glitter and the grime from the night before. She asks her lovers to leave. The men would leave in a hurry, and then she cleaned up and put her roses away. She would write about her exploits in her diary and then, cry herself to sleep.

"i usedta to live in the world" – Lady in Blue

The lady in blue begins her monologue by explaining that she used to live in the world but now only lives in Harlem, and her universe is only six blocks. She used to walk all over the world and now her world is small and dirty. The lady in blue says that when she used to live in the world where she was nice and sweet but now, now she cannot bring herself to be nice to anyone in this "six blocks of cruelty / piled up on itself".[14]

"pyramid" – Lady in Purple

The lady in purple joins the ladies in blue, yellow, and orange. She starts by describing them as three friends who shared every aspect of their lives. They remember a time when they all were attracted to the same man, but he only could choose one of them. The one who he chose loved him, but worried if her friends could hold out. One day she found the rose she left on his pillow on her friend's desk. The friend said she did not know what was going on, because the man said he was free. The three friends did not want to hurt one another but they know how wonderful this man could be. The friends hug and cry and go to confront the man, whom they find with another woman. The women cry and comfort each other like sisters.

"no more love poems #1" – Lady in Orange

The lady in orange discusses a relationship that left her heartbroken. She says that ever since she realized that someone would call a "colored girl an evil woman a bitch or a nag," (56) she has tried not to be that person. She tries and not only give joy, but receive it as well. She finds herself in what she believes to be a real and honest relationship. Yet, the guy keeps going back to his ex-lover. The lady in orange tried to move on by finding another lover, but she wasn't satisfied. She tried to avoid sadness, but she found herself heartbroken by this man. She could not stand being "sorry & colored at the same time / it’s so redundant in the modern world".[15]

"no more love poems #2" – Lady in Purple

The lady in purple speaks about her relationship to dance and men. She deliberately chooses to dance with men who don't speak English, pops pills, and uses dance as an escape from reality. Then she meets a man who she gave everything: dance, fear, hope and scars. She admits she was ready to die, but now is ready to be herself and accept love. She pleads, "lemme love you just like i am / a colored girl/ i'm finally bein real".[16]

"no more love poems #3" – Lady in Blue

The lady in blue proclaims that they all deal with too much emotion and that it might be easier to be white. That way they could make everything "dry & abstract wit no rhythm & no / reelin for sheer sensual pleasure".[16] The lady in blue states that they should try to control their feelings and she is going to take the first step by masturbating. However, she finds that this makes her feel lonely and doesn't know where to look to feel whole.

"no more love poems #4" – Lady in Yellow

The lady in yellow claims to have lost touch with reality because she used to think she was immune to emotional pain, but she realized she is not. She gave her dance, but her dance was not enough. She says "bein alive & bein a woman & bein colored is a metaphysical / dilemma / i haven't conquered yet".[17]

"my love is too" – Ladies in Yellow, Brown, Purple, Blue, Orange, Red, Green

The other women come each repeat, "my love is too...delicate/beautiful/sanctified/magic/saturday nite/complicated/music to have thrown back in my face."[18] The ladies begin dancing and chanting together.

"somebody almost walked off wid alla my stuff" – Lady in Green

The lady in green says that someone has taken all of her "stuff". She feels that she is the only one that knows and can appreciate the value of her stuff. She describes her stuff as the way she sits with her legs open sometimes, her chewed up fingernails, her rhythm, her voice, her talk, her "delicate leg and whimsical kiss".[19] The person who stole her stuff is a man. She made too much room for this man who has run off with her stuff, especially because he doesn't even know that he has it. By the end of the monologue she demands her stuff back from this man.

"sorry" – Ladies in Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Purple

The ladies start talking about all the apologies they've received from men. Some examples include: he is sorry because he does not know how she got your number, sorry because he was high, sorry because he is only human, and sorry because he thought she could handle it. The lady in blue then declares that she does not need any more apologies. She goes on to say that men should keep their apologies for themselves, because she does not need them to soothe her soul and she cannot use them. Rather than accepting apologies, she is going to do whatever she wants: yell, scream, and break things. And she will not apologize for any of it.

"positive" – Ladies in Red, Yellow, Purple, Brown

Lady in yellow, purple, brown, red participate in reciting the next poem about contracting HIV/AIDS; they share the lines and all speak to one woman's experience. The ladies argue about suspicions of cheating in the relationship. The lady in yellow tells her friends how happy she is in her relationship and her friend tells her, they've seen her lover outside the gay bars. The lady in yellow protests, but her friend tells her to get tested. The lady in yellow goes to get tested to put the whole issue to bed. Two weeks later, the doctor calls the lady in yellow with her patient number (#7QYG9) to inform her that she is HIV positive. The lady in yellow confronts her lover who furiously tells her he is not gay and accuses her of cheating on him. She tells him to get tested but he gets angrier and violent. He throws her to the ground and when she wakes up he is gone and she says, "& i was positive / & not positive at all".[20]

"a nite with beau willie brown" – Lady in Red, Orange

The lady in orange begins the story of Willie Brown by saying there is no air. Beau Willie is all tied up in the sheets, wishing a friend would come over and bring him some blow or any other kind of drug. The lady in red continues the story, saying that Beau Willie claims there is nothing wrong with him. Beau Willie tried to get veterans' benefits but he cannot read, so he starts driving a cab around the city but the cops always give him a hard time and he is not making any money. The lady in orange and red say that Crystal is pregnant again and Beau beats Crystal almost to death when he hears about her pregnancy. Beau Willie has wanted to marry Crystal since she was 14 but now, she laughs in his face saying she will never marry him. She has the baby and there are now two kids, Naomi and Kwame. Crystal ends up getting a court order to keep Beau away from her and the children. Beau Willie comes to the house despite the court order and while he is there he becomes apologetic saying he just wants to marry her and give her things. The two children run to their father as Crystal watches. Suddenly he grabs the kids and pushes the screen out of the window. Beau Willie tells Crystal she has to agree to marry him. Naomi and Kwame scream and Crystal, at the moment, can only whisper. Beau Willie drops the kids and they die.

"a laying on of hands" – Ladies in Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Purple, Brown

The ladies begin the last poem saying that they are missing something: a "layin on of hands".[21] The hands are strong, cool, movin, and make them whole and pure. The lady in blue says she feels the gods coming into her, laying her open to herself. She goes on to say that she knows about laying her body open for a man, but still she was missing something. Finally, all the ladies repeat the lines she says, "i found god in myself / & i loved her / I loved her fiercely".[22] They sing to each other and then the audience, and close into a tight circle with each other. The choreopoem ends with lady in brown modifying her earlier statement: "& this is for colored girls who have considered suicide/ but are movin to the ends of their own rainbows."