

**NTOZAKE SHANGE'S *FOR COLORED GIRLS: BLACK MEN AND THE COOL POSE***

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**RESUMO**

O presente trabalho objetiva analisar a obra *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf* (1975) da Ntozake Shange à luz da construção do termo *cool pose* proposto por bell hooks. A genesis da *cool pose* é adotada por Marjors e Gordon, que estabelecem ser a mesma um mecanismo de defesa incorporada por homens negros para sobreviverem às sanções sociais e econômicas impostas pela sociedade dominante. A *cool pose* foi apropriada pela sociedade patriarcal que restringe as masculinidades do homem negro, criando uma barreira entre mulheres e homens negros, uma vez que apóia a tradicional divisão sexista de gêneros. Através dos poemas, “sorry”, “somebody almost walked off wid alla my stuff”, “Toussaint”, and “a nite with beau willie brown” da obra *For Colored Girls* de Ntozake Shange’s, argumenta-se que a *cool pose* confina as masculinidades dos homens negros em estereótipos preestabelecidos criando diversas conseqüências negativas.

**Palavras-chave: Teatro Afro-Americano, Homens Negros, Masculinidade, *Cool Pose*.**

Although major focus has been given to black women in Ntozake Shange's *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf* (1975) this paper depicts black male masculinity. The analysis consists of four poems from Shange's play: "sorry", "somebody almost walked off wid alla my stuff", "Toussaint", and "a nite with beau willie brown". Most critics study Shange's drama through a Black feminist or a feminist approach, however, I propose to discuss her work through bell hook's (2004) notion of the cool pose, with reference to Clenora Huddson-Weems's (2004) premises of Africana Womanism. This reading is relevant because it establishes an alternative reading of Shange's (1997) work as it focuses on black male masculinity and its implications.

Ntozake Shange's *For Colored Girls* has been considered to be a feminist play that focuses on issues of black women in detriment of black men. Peter Erskine (1978) considers that Shange's portrayal of black men, especially Beau Willie, was destructive to the image of black males because it portrayed him as a brute. Other authors such as Barbara Waxman (1994, p. 99), whose focuses are strictly on issues of womanhood, run the risk of categorizing black males as guilty: "This travail usually involves the woman's search for identity, mistreatment by a man, the problems of poverty, or racial prejudice... The Lady in yellow attempts to resolve her metaphysical dilemma... by refusing to endure men's abuse [her] love". In this case black men are classified together with other problems that afflict the lives of black women. This paper proposes that Shange's play does not blame nor condemn black males, but rather criticizes the external factors that cause black men to have unexpected attitudes, sometimes turning to violence or isolation, which creates a gap between black women and men. Shange's *For Colored Girls* does not represent an imaginary reality but the struggles and emotions of

the everyday lives of black women and men. Sandra Flowers (1981, p. 51) states that: “Shange demonstrates a compassionate vision of black men-compassionate because though the work is not without anger, it has certain integrity”. It is suggested that bonds among black women and men, although complex, is of great importance in liberating black individuals from dominant culture’s paradigms, as proposed by Africana Womanism. The alliance between black women and men can help to critique the confining limitations that the hype of the cool pose imposes on black males.

The genesis of the term cool pose comes from Richard Majors’s and Jacob Gordon’s (1994) *The American Black Male: His Present Status and His Future*. Cool behavior has been historically important in many different African tribes, where coolness was expressed through black male’s positive incorporation of his tribe’s origins and cultural beliefs. In the United States the dominant white culture has imposed political and economic limitations on black people, and the cool pose became “a coping mechanism for the ‘invisibility’, frustration, discrimination, and educational and employment inequities faced by Black males” (MAJORS, 1994, p. 246). Majors views the cool pose as being a

dynamic concept, constantly changing, and acquiring new forms, as Black males incorporate different ‘performance-oriented behaviors’ such as speech, clothing, and hairstyles, to show the dominant white society that despite their lower status they are able to survive (MAJORS, 1994, p. 247-8).

As hooks (2004, p. 147) further argues, the cool pose can have a positive function as it helps black males to “withstand the heat and remain centered” and to confront reality. However, when black males adopt Eurocentric values of patriarchy the cool pose transforms into a negative behavior as a “compulsive masculinity alternative [that]

is a dysfunctional cultural adaptation” (MAJORS, 1994, p. 249) as black males try to compensate for their inability to perform traditional gender roles. The hype of the cool pose is addressed by bell hooks in her book: *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity* and brings to the floor many arguments that enlighten the discussion of black masculinity along this paper. This problematic cool pose is permeated with violent behaviors, sexual promiscuity, social problems, politics of blaming, and “feeding on fantasy” (HOOKS, 2004, p. 147) which keeps black males at the margins of society. hooks (2004, p. 14) explains that dominant culture’s standards “practically destroyed beyond recognition the representation of an alternative black man seeking freedom for self and loved ones, a rebel black man eager to create and make his own destiny”. Dominant culture’s presumptions does not provide the opportunity for black men to embrace their diverse masculinity, such as fatherhood, sexually hyper, partner, athlete, poet, revolutionary, etc., but instead only allows black men to incorporate roles such as a helpless victim, sexually promiscuous or careless outlaw.

In addition, the distortion of the original meaning of the cool pose shows the importance of critically analyzing terms incorporated by the hype, and the power of words, its definitions and implications. The cool pose’s inefficiency to define black male masculinity is due to the fact that it is dictated by the dominant culture. Hudson-Weems (2004, p. 21) explains that “the dominant culture has held the position of identifying who we are and how we fit into the scheme of things... the dominant culture obtrudes itself upon Africana people”. Shange’s choreopoem challenges the white patriarchal society by “protesting and subverting the hegemonic discourse” (VALENTE, 2009, p. 1) to create alternative perspectives to address black males’ masculinities. Hudson-Weems (2004, p. 20) emphasizes that: “proper self-naming and

self-defining, as a means of establishing clarity, will at the same time offer the first steps towards of correcting confusion and misconception regarding one's true identity". hooks (2004, p. 14) explains that the cool pose neglects "individual black males daring to self-define rather than be defined by others". As the hype of the cool pose reflects white patriarchal assumptions, such as the embrace of capitalism, sexism, and conservative view of gender roles, black males who align themselves with such paradigms constrain their masculinities to confining roles, as they do not define and depict their realities in their own terms.

Although in the poem "sorry" the Lady in blue does not mention who she is speaking to, the pronoun 'you' is very much present: "i was so important to you...if you called//to say yr sorry" (SHANGE, 1997, p. 53). Through her descriptions and remarks, it becomes clear that the "you" refers to her black male lover. The Lady in blue complains: "you were always inconsistent/doin something & then bein sorry/ beatin my heart to death/talkin bout you sorry" (SHANGE, 1997, p. 53). He is performing the cool pose described by hooks (2004, p. 147), as he assumes a "'poor me' victim identity" and continues with the same behavior that distances himself from the reality of his actions and its consequences. The Lady in blue questions his adoption of the cool pose, showing how it is useless: "i cant use another sorry" (SHANGE, 1997, p. 54). Instead of abandoning him, the Lady in blue wants to expose him to the truth: "& tell all yr secrets bout yrself to yr face" (SHANGE, 1997, p. 54) to make him perceive the consequences of his actions "next time/ you should admit/you're mean/low-down/trifling/&no count straight out/ staeda bein sorry alla the time/enjoy being yrself" (SHANGE, 1997, p. 54). In this sense the Lady in blue tries to help her black man overcome his vision of himself as helpless bystander and assume control over his actions to revolutionize his

masculinity. The Lady in blue perceives the harmful aspects of the cool pose adopted by her black man and she tries to help him to ignore this hype. hooks (2004, p. 155) discusses the importance of creating a new path for young black men and that it requires “self-acceptance, assuming accountability, letting go the politics of blame, telling truth, and being positive”. The Lady in blue wants her black man to abandon the victim stereotype and embrace his “real self,” to become proud of whoever he is while acknowledging his importance in the lives of black women and the repercussion of his actions.

In the poem “somebody almost walked off wid alla my stuff” the Lady in green talks about how she barely managed to keep her stuff, her essence. The Lady in green explains that she overcame the odds against a race segregated patriarchal state by grasping hold of her feelings, experiences, and her sense of self. Her anguish parallels that of black women during slavery who were robbed of their languages, loved ones, and the rights to their own body. In the first part of the poem the pronoun ‘you’ can be a reference to the white capitalist patriarchal society as exemplified through the verses: “now why don’t you put me back & let me hang out in my own self//did you getta dime for my things; hey man/ where are you goin wid alla my stuff// this is mine/ this aint yr stuff” (SHANGE, 1997, p. 49), as she constantly reaffirms her ownership. The poem is not abstractly sentimental; instead, she puts a face on the problem, referring to a “kleptomaniac working hard & forgetting while stealin” (SHANGE, 1997, p. 49) that since slavery has been trying to steal her sense of self. The tone is severe and ironic, but also glorious: “somebody almost run off wit alla my stuff/ & i didn’t bring anythin but the kick & sway of it/ the perfect ass for my man & none of it is theirs/ this is mine”

(SHANGE, 1997, p. 50) because she managed to survived and maintain her cultural heritage.

In the second part of the poem, after the Lady in green makes reference to “niggah/wif the curls in yr hair/mr. lousiana hot link” (SHANGE, 1997, p. 50) the pronoun ‘you’ refers to black men and the tone although sharp and severe is sympathetic and caring. The Lady in green tries to clarify the “notion that black women emasculated black males by being matriarchs” (HOOKS, 2004, p. 12) as she says: “this is not your prerogative/i gotta have me in my//pocket/ to get around like a good woman shd” (SHANGE, 1997, p. 51). The Lady in green explains that although she desires her individuality “you cant have me less I give me away” (SHANGE, 1997, p. 50) she does not obscure nor rob the black man of anything. The Lady in green explains that “stealin my shit from me/don’t make it yrs/ makes it stolen” (SHANGE, 1997, p. 50) showing that black women as much as black men need their own space and encourages him to find his own self: “why don’t ya find yr own things/ & leave this package/ of me for my destiny” (SHANGE, 1997, p. 51). This scene highlights Sandra Richard’s (1983, p. 73) proposal that: “liberation for women necessitates a concomitant liberation or redefinition of the position of men” as the Lady in green tries to redefine herself together with her male counterpart. Towards the end of the poem the Lady in green encourages black men to move away from the empty discourse and behavior of the cool pose. The pronoun ‘you’ becomes ‘ya’ which symbolizes greater closeness and affection between the Lady in green and her black man as she says: “& let me talk ya//outta/ throwin my shit in the sewear// if ya really want it” (SHANGE, 1997, p. 51). In light of Huddson-Weems (2004) notion of Africana Womanism, the poem encourages awareness to the fact that to overcome stereotypical labels black women and

men need to understand each other's struggle and fight together for empowerment: "what ya got to get from me// i'll give it to ya/ yeah/ i'll give it to ya// it it's really my stuff// ya gotta give it to me// i'm the only one/ can handle it" (SHANGE, 1997, p. 51). hooks (2004, p. 158) emphasizes that: "black men who stand against sexism, who choose to be feminist in their thinking and action model, a healing masculinity for all black men". Black men that challenge patriarchy also find the proper tools to question misleading assumptions of black male's masculinity and move away from the hype of the cool pose.

In the poem "toussaint" although the Lady in brown is only eight years old, she challenges the dominant culture's stipulations through her actions. At the library, she first comes across children's books: "cajun katie/ pippi longstockin// christopher robin/ eddie heyward & a pooh bear// only pioneer girls & magic rabbits// & big city white boys" (SHANGE, 1997, p. 25-6), but she cannot relate to these fantasies that differ so much from her reality as a young black girl. The Lady in brown tries to find alternative readings: "i knew i waznt sposedta//but I ran into the ADULT READING ROOM" (SHANGE, 1997, p. 26) as she is searching for books she can identify with. That is when she discovers Toussaint L'Overture, who to her "waz a blk man a negro like my mama say" (SHANGE, 1997, p. 26). The Lady in brown immediately falls in love with him because he represents a black man who refused to succumb to the confining paradigms imposed on blacks by the dominant culture. Toussaint L'Overture "refused to be a slave// & he spoke French// & didn't low no white man to tell him nothing// not napoleon// not maximillien// not reberspierre" (SHANGE, 1997, p. 26). Maurice Jackson (2008, p. 102) points out that Toussaint L'Overture represents a model of black manhood and determination for African Americans and became a memory passed



down through generations. The Lady in brown, admired him, as he was a revolutionary who embodied her fantasy of black men as “he don’t take no stuff from no white folks// & they gotta country all they own//& there aint no slaves” (SHANGE, 1997, p. 30).

The Lady in brown accepts Toussaint L’Overture’s proposal: “Toussaint said ‘lets go to haiti’// i said ‘awright’” and they “walked all down thru north st. loius” (SHANGE, 1997, p. 28). On their journey, the Lady in brown is surprised “when dis ol young boy jumped out at me” (SHANGE, 1997, p. 28). At first, their interaction is wrathful, because as he tells her what to do: ‘HEY GIRL YA BETTAH COME OVAH HEAH N TALK TO ME’, she replies “‘ya silly ol boy// ya bettah leave me alone” (SHANGE, 1997, p. 28) confronting him. The Lady in brown was not happy: “i waz disgusted// &wanted to get on to haiti// widout some tacky ol boy botherin me” (SHANGE, 1997, p. 29) and she is suspicious because he is interrupting her journey with her dreamy ideal of Toussaint L’Overture. Eventually, the Lady in brown decides to open up to the young boy and asks: “WELL WHO ARE YOU?” and he answers: “MY NAME IS TOUSSAINT JONES” (SHANGE, 1997, p. 29). The Lady in brown looks at him and sees nothing like her L’Overture: “i looked right at fim// those skidded out corduroy pants// a striped teashirt wid holes in both elbows// a new scab over his left eye” (SHANGE, 1997, p. 29). However, as she closely observes Toussaint Jones, she starts to think that he might not be so different from the hero she desired: “til i realized//Toussaint Jones waznt too different//from Toussaint L’Overture//cept the ol one waz in Haiti//&this one wid me speaking english & eatin apples” (SHANGE, 1997, p. 30). In a sense, Toussaint Jones is performing the cool pose in its origins, as discussed by Majors (1994, p. 249) which had a “positive function of enhancing self-esteem”. His performance of the cool pose is liberating because Toussaint Jones does

not imprison his feelings, act superior to his companion or plays himself as the victim. He incorporates what bell hooks refers to as the original meaning of cool which was defined by

the ways in which black men confronted the hardships of life without allowing their spirits to be ravaged... Black male cool was defined by the ability to withstand the heat and remain centered... by black male willingness to confront reality (hooks, 2004, p. 147).

Toussaint Jones positively constructs his cool pose in order to impress the Lady in brown, as he acknowledges the importance of her presence, and shows her and himself that he is steady: “i am TOUSSAINT JONES// & i’m right heah looking at ya// & i don’t take no stuff from no white folks// & he sorta pushed out his chest” (SHANGE, 1997, p. 30).

The Lady in brown and Toussaint Jones are both young, untainted by the constructions of patriarchal masculinity, so they speak the same language, understand each other. The Lady in brown trusts him and accepts Toussaint Jones’s offer: “come on lets go on down to the docks// & look at the boats” (SHANGE, 1997, p. 30). The poem concludes with the Lady in brown sighing: “yeah.// toussaint jones waz awright wit me// no tellin what all spirits we cd move// down by the river// st. Louis 1955” (SHANGE, 1997, p. 30) which symbolizes Hudson-Weems (2004) arguments that an alliance between black men and women can create unlimited possibilities of growth and accomplishments for the plight of the African American race. As the Lady in brown and Toussaint Jones stay together, the ending suggests a “love that has stood and can stand the test of time and tribulation” (HOOKS, 2004, p. 162) between black women and men.

The Lady in red narrates the poem “a nite with beau willie brown.” From the very beginning, “there waz no air” (SHANGE, 1997, p. 55), the reader’s attention is called to

the confining situations that underline the poem. The Lady in red continues to represent the oppressive environment and starts to describe Beau Willie “the sweat that tucked the sheet// into his limbs like he waz an ol frozen bundle of chicken// he wished one of his friends who knew where he waz wd come by// with some blow or some shit/ there waz no air” (SHANGE, 1997, p. 55). Although at first the reader is unaware of what happened, it is clear that something happened to Beau Willie. Through flashbacks, the Lady in red depicts the situation, explaining that Beau said: “any niggah wanna kill Vietnamese children more n stay home// & raise his own is sicker than a rabid dog” (SHANGE, 1997, p. 55). Therefore, Beau Willie is acting strange because he went to war and came back traumatized, shell shocked: “he came home crazy as hell” (SHANGE, 1997, p. 55). As with Beau Willie, many blacks went to war, and hooks (2004, p. 13) comments that the United States “had no difficult taking men away from households and sending them far away from families to wage war, to sacrifice their lives from a country that was denying them full citizenship”. The Lady in red explains that “he tried to get veterans benefits// to go to school & they kept right on putting him in// remedial classes” (SHANGE, 1997, p. 56) which shows that Beau could not gain recognition from fighting in the Vietnamese war and veterans benefits were difficult to receive and postponed. Beau also tries to get an honest job: “& got himself// a gypsy cab to drive/ but his cab kept breakin// down/ & the cops was always messin wit him/ plus not// getting much bread” (SHANGE, 1997, p. 56) which portrays Beau’s difficult reality as he suffers from the harsh social and economic sanctions.

The Lady in red once again reframes the story: “& there waz no air” (SHANGE, 1997, p. 56) showing their social suffocation and their difficulties to understand each other. The Lady in red does not understand the changes in Beau Willie “how in the hell

did he get in this mess anyway” (SHANGE, 1997, p. 56) as he started “spending alla his money// on the bartending bitch down at the merry-go-round cafe” (SHANGE, 1997, p. 56). These events happen because Beau Willie adopts the cool pose “wearing the mask of ‘cool’ ... when deep down a hot rage corrupts ... [his] spirit” (HOOKS, 2004, p. 155). He becomes sexually promiscuous and acts careless, trying to escape from the unreal expectations imposed on him as a black man. Beau Willie has conflicting feelings and violence is how he allows his frustration to have a face “beau most beat// her to death when she tol him/ she still gotta scar” (SHANGE, 1997, p. 56). hooks (2004, p. 97) suggests that: “rage is perfect cover-up for depression. Black males who feel powerless, who feel as though they are not able to bring any level of meaningful purpose to their lives” often become angry.

Beau Willie feels he has to perform a patriarchal role by marrying Crystal under any circumstances, because he adopts the misleading assumptions of the cool pose. Although Crystal had wanted to marry Beau “she’d been in his ass to marry her// since she waz 14 years old” (SHANGE, 1997, p. 56) she changed her mind due to Beau’s destructive behavior by adopting the cool pose. As Beau is getting ready “he got dressed// all up in his ivory shirt & checkered pants to go see crystal” (SHANGE, 1997, p. 57) he looks more like a boy than a man, which shows how even though he has good naïve intentions, he is seduced by paradigms that sets him to the margins of society. Beau was certain that “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” (SHANGE, 1997, p. 57). hooks (2004, p. 14) explains that the cool pose reinforces: “the embrace of patriarchal masculinity meant that most black men measuring against the norm would also be less than a man, failures, unable to realize the ideal”. Beau becomes frustrated as he cannot

perform the traditional norms of the definition of a man imposed by the dominant society. Beau's performance of a patriarchal role through the cool pose leads to their separation because "black men and women have always had a diversity of gender roles" (HOOKS, 2004, p. 9) which are more hybrid than the traditional convention of gender roles.

When Beau arrives at Crystal's apartment, her anger turns into his anger: "just leave us// alone... ya fool/ get outta here... so beau broke the door down" (SHANGE, 1997, p. 58). But suddenly Beau starts to feel guilty: "beau willie jumped back all humble & apologetic/ i'm// sorry/ i don't wanna hurt em/ i just wanna hold em... i wanted to marry you & give ya things" (SHANGE, 1997, p. 58). Although Beau's intentions are honorable, his incorporation of the cool pose causes him to align himself with the patriarchal definition of man, enhancing his disappointed with himself. As Crystal was impressed with his behavior, Naomi, her daughter: "pushed away & ran to her daddy/ cryin/ daddy, daddy//'" (SHANGE, 1997, p. 59) and Crystal "let beau hol kwane" (SHANGE, 1997, p. 60). Beau Willie seems to be happy: "beau jumped up a laughin & a giggling" (60) but when he insists: "you gonna marry me// you gonna marry me" (SHANGE, 1997, p. 59) and as Crystal refuses, he revolts again, losing control: "he kicked the screen otta the window/ & held the kids// offa the sill/ you gonna marry me... he started sweating again... & he dropped em" (SHANGE, 1997, p. 59-60). This tragic episode shows that Beau Willie became disoriented by trying to perform the misleading role of the cool pose disseminated by the dominant society. He was so overwhelmed with negative emotions and could not control his actions. Regarding the external forces that shape Beau Willie's actions, Sandra Richards (1983, p. 77) mentions that "references to these social factors are indeed present" which is an attempt

to denounce the destructive power of the dominant culture's expectations. Although Beau Willie's acts are cruel, he is not demonized as "Shange's anger is in response to the circumstances and impulses which result in men brutalizing women" (FLOWERS, 1981, p. 53). Shange does not blame black men or women, but instead tries to illustrate the external factors that lead to such disastrous events. Beau Willie and Crystal are like many "black females and males who have suffered so long because of the myriad ways we are psychically 'dismembered' in a culture of domination" (hooks, 2004, p. 161) while trying to survive in a white patriarchal society.

The comparison of the poems "a nite with beau willie brown" and "toussaint" exposes the cruel realities that happen to so many black men as they are deprived of their childhood as "patriarchal socialization insists boys should not express emotions... is most viciously and ruthlessly implicated in the early childhood socialization of black boys... Soul murder is the psychological term that best describes this crushing of the male spirit" (HOOKS, 2004, p. 86). In this sense, Toussaint Jones is young and has not experienced the brutalities of a race segregated and patriarchal society, as he is untainted by its confining notions. Beau Willie, on the contrary, has experienced in different instances the destruction of his dreams and goals by external factors such as his denial of veteran's benefits, peace from the police as a taxi driver, and inability to earn money. Many black men, after experiencing a series of traumatic events, are seduced by the cool pose which is portrayed as "apex of 'cool'" but which is in fact "a death-dealing coolness, not one that is life-enhancing, for black males or the folks they associate with" (HOOKS, 2004, p. 155) giving a superficial notion of being in control. As when Beau Willie argued that: "there waznt nothing wrong with him/ there waznt noting wrong" (SHANGE, 1997, p. 55) by performing a numbing cool pose, he

pretended that he was not suffering, until he lost complete control of himself, showing the dangers of black men's adoption of the cool pose.

Although different critics condemn Ntozake Shange's *For Colored Girls* as a feminist play that negatively portrays black males, through the analysis of the poems "sorry", "somebody almost walked off wid alla my stuff", "Toussaint", and "a nite with beau willie brown" this paper shows that black males are represented as individuals seeking to survive in a society that imposes different social and economic sanctions in detriment of black people. As hooks (2004, p. 151) explains, the hype cool pose is seductive for black males because as it embodies the theme of "[b]lack men wanting to be 'in charge' - in charge of the war, in charge of the woman, in charge of the world" and naturally, many of the black men in Shange's choreopoem fall in this trap of the cool pose. These premises are delineated with patriarchal values that instead of helping black males to define their masculinity according to their own paradigms, reinforces traditional gender roles that confine black men and consequently black women. As the Ladies in the choreopoem attempt to find their own sense of self, they try to show black men how damaging the adoption of the cool pose can be as it tends to separate black women and men. As hooks (2004, p. xiv) suggests there is a "need for men to critique patriarchy and involve themselves in shaping feminist movement and addressing male liberation" in order to redefine black male masculinity, and thus show the importance of an alignment among black women and men as proposed by Huddon-Weems (2004) theory of Africana Womanism. Hooks (2004, p. 149) argues that a "serious politics of cool that is about... appreciation of the need to nurture the inner life of the spirit as a survival strategy". Showing the necessity for black males to move beyond the preordained stereotypes and labels imposed by the cool pose. Ntozake Shange's (1997)

*For Colored Girls* shows the hype of cool pose's distortions and failures to address as well as decipher the complex reality of black males' masculinities.

## **ABSTRACT**

The aim of this paper is to analyze Ntozake Shange's *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf* (1975) in light of bell hooks's constructions of the hype of the cool pose. The genesis of the term refers back to Majors and Gordon which recognized cool pose as coping mechanism that black males incorporated to survive against the dominant culture's social and economic sanctions. The cool pose has become appropriated by patriarchal society to embody notions that restrict black males' masculinities and creates a gap between black women and men as it supports traditional sexist gender roles. Through the poems "sorry," "somebody almost walked off wid alla my stuff," "Toussaint," and "a nite with beau willie brown" from Shange's *For Colored Girls*, it is argued that the hype of the cool pose confines black males' masculinities to preordained stereotypes and have different negative implications.

**Keywords: African American Theater, Black Men, Masculinity, Cool Pose.**

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