

Call for Papers

“sing a black girl’s song ... sing a song of her life”: Ntozake Shange

Special Issue Guest Editor: Trimiko Melancon

In her 1975 seminal choreopoem, *for colored girls who have considered suicide when the rainbow is enuf*, Ntozake Shange writes,

somebody/anybody
sing a black girl’s song
bring her out [...]
sing a song of life

Exquisite, brilliant, and arresting in their poeticism as much as in their centering of black women, these words, these poetic intonations, reflect the essence of Shange’s work. In a similar fashion, they also embody the precise intention of this special issue of the *CLA Journal* as it foregrounds, elevates, and pays homage—in ways that “sing a song of life”—to the epic work, artistic genius, creative visions, feminist and racial politics, formidable accomplishments, and indelible legacy of the incomparable Ntozake Shange.

Shange, born Paulette Williams, joined the ancestors in October 2018, nearly two years before the 45th anniversary of her benchmark choreopoem, *for colored girls*. The time is both right and long past due, then, to celebrate this seminal figure, her legacy and work: a masterful mixed arts enterprise that changed not only how the world saw black women, but that also simultaneously altered arts and letters, the creative and intellectual, while impacting platforms ranging from the stage to the classroom. In the process, Shange and her work have, for over four decades, influenced generations. Creatives from Ava DuVernay, Suzan-Lori Parks, Terry McMillan and dream hampton to Lynn Nottage, Thulani Davis, and Imani Perry are just a few among a host of other influential filmmakers, playwrights, journalists, artists, writers, and intellectuals who have reflected on Shange’s mark on both their individual lives and the world.

“The word that best describes Shange’s works, which are not plays in the traditional sense,” as one writer eloquently notes, “is *power*.” No one category or genre encapsulates Shange’s impressive, masterful body of work. An acclaimed poet, playwright, novelist, educator, performer, director, dancer and creative visionary, Shange’s expansive artwork ranges from earlier materials in photography and visual culture, dance, and performance to commemorative and novelistic works, as a few of her titles attest: *A Photograph: A Study of Cruelty* (1977), *Boogie Woogie Landscapes* (1977) *Nappy Edges* (1978), *Spell No. 7* (1979) and her first full-length novel *Sassafras, Cypress, and Indigo* (1982) to *Betsey Brown* (1985), *Liliane: Resurrection of the Daughter* (1995), *If I Can Cook You Know God Can* (1999), as well as her more recent 2017 poetry collection, *Wild Beauty: New and Selected Poems*, among many others.

This commemorative and groundbreaking special issue welcomes scholarly articles, personal reflections, critical think pieces, poems, as well as mixed media projects reflective of the totality of Ntozake Shange’s work. How, for instance, has Shange’s works served as precursors and shaped interdisciplinary fields—visual culture, performance, race studies and Black and African diaspora studies, women’s and gender studies, sexuality and (Black)

queer studies, photography, and Black feminist studies, among others? In what ways have her social activism and location at the intersections of various movements—including but not limited to civil rights, the anti-war movement, women’s rights, sexual liberation, and the gay and lesbian movement, along with her efforts to advance Black and Puerto Rican artists—transformed culture and changed narratives and paradigms? How has Ntozake Shange’s work, a rich tapestry of race consciousness, performance, dance, poeticism/lyricism, and social justice, contributed to and influenced Black Arts and black feminist traditions as well as paved a way for the work of contemporary artists, such as Beyoncé’s Coachella performance or Childish Gambino’s “This Is America”? What is the relationship between Shange’s centering Black women’s lives, injustices, and narratives to that of present day calls to #SayHerName or #MeToo (founded by Tarana Burke) and #BlackLivesMatter or the Movement for Black Lives?

This special issue seeks a wide range of contributions on the rich, vibrant, and complex nature of Ntozake Shange’s work in relation but not limited to the following:

Drama
Poetry
Dance
Feminism
Black Feminism and Intersectionality
Sexuality and Politics of the Intimate
Rape and Sexualized Violence
Mental Health, Suicide and/or Trauma
Interdisciplinarity
Black Arts Movement
Black Performance and Embodiment
Theater, Film, and Stage Adaptations
Photography and Visual Culture
Literary studies
Black Studies/Ethnic Studies/African Diaspora Studies
Women’s, Gender, Sexuality and Black Queer Studies
Mixed Arts
Black Lives Matter
Freedom and Liberatory Politics
History and Commemoration
Womanist Theology, Religion, and/or Spirituality

While essays that engage any of those topics are solicited, other considerations of Shange’s work and exponential impact are welcome, as are email inquiries to the guest editor.

Please send abstracts of 250-300 words, along with a CV or full list of credentials, to shangespecialissue@gmail.com by March 18, 2019. The guest editor will invite contributors to submit completed essays of 4000-7500 words, which will be due by June 15, 2019. Review of materials and requests for revisions will proceed in a timely and efficient fashion.