



TENACIOUS VOYAGE OF BLACK WOMEN DEPICTED IN *LILIANE* BY NTOZAKE SHANGE

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African American Literature is the body of literature produced in the United States by writers of African descent. Before the high point of slave narratives, African-American literature was dominated by autobiographical spiritual narratives and it reached early high points with slave narratives of the Nineteenth century. Writers of this literature have been recognized by the highest awards, including the Nobel Prize.

Ntozake Shange is a renowned poet, playwright, novelist, and performance artist. Her groundbreaking work, based on the contemporary experience of black women, has cemented her reputation as a powerful American feminist and literary figure. She writes what she hears in her mind, revealing the 'music beneath the words'.

Ntozake Shange's *Liliane* discusses the problems of black women in contemporary America narrated through various characters from the novel. It also states how black women have suffered the troubles of white men and also tells about the act of attaining victory or success in the modern world of whites.

Liliane, the eponymous heroine of the novel, is a painter who finds her colors more often from her lovers and friends than in a paint box; her story contains much pain and suffering. Ku Klux Klansmen, vicious Southern crackers, and hypocritical Northern liberals make appearances in her life, take away the innocence of youth, and kill her friends and lovers. How people preserve not only sanity but also decency and dignity amid these givens is another of the book's triumphs. As Liliane reminds one of her friends, however, there's so much more to life than what white folks have to do with it.

Liliane is born into an upper-middle-class family, living in the shadow of Jim Crow and the Ku Klux Klan. The story starts with the conversation between the psychiatrist and Liliane. Then the narrator expresses the story about Liliane and her life happenings followed by various conversations between them simultaneously. Liliane says “When it’s really silent, I can’t feel anything. I mean, I start to lose where the floor is. Why a flower is different from a rug, you know to feel, or even that walls don’t curve under themselves like cats. I just know that I’ve gotta go to sleep right now or get outta here. I’ve gotta find somebody to talk to me.” (L 6)

Liliane is under treatment with the psychiatrist, indirectly she says that she doesn’t want to come for her treatment, because she can’t take the silence which is inside the room. She badly wants to talk to someone who knows her, and who loves her. It indicates that she is in quest of love. She continues to say “Oh. Don’t put on so....You know, the bastard tried to choke me right at Sheridan Square the night my show opened. He spit on the sidewalk, turned round, and wrapped his fingers bout my neck like I was a magnum of Perrier and Jouet.” (L 6-7)

Through these lines, she tells how she was treated badly by a white man even being a lover of her. She says that he choked her right in the street in an open square and he wrapped his fingers around her neck like she was some wine, he was about to kill her. These whites don’t even consider black women as a living, they do whatever they wish.

Roxie, Liliane’s childhood friend has a conversation where Liliane says “Roxie. The Civil War was before our time. There are Negroes dying and fighting right now. We were dying and fighting before Communists had a name for themselves, my dear.” (L 34) It indicates that during Civil War blacks were made to participate in the War unwilling for the sake of whites, where their decision or will be not in consideration.

Later she goes on to explain about Liliane’s mothers, “S. Bliss Lincoln, Roxie, is hardly a woman who’s thrown reason to the winds,” Liliane Explained casually. “Besides, she only tells special people like me and you what the ‘S’ stands for, says her name is what lets folks know she’s a colored woman.” (L 35) Due to the struggles of black women in the modern world, S. Bliss has to hide from the society that she was a slave colored woman, to escape from the troubles caused by the whites.

Roxie says: “Negro, Liliane, Negro. We don’t have to say colored anymore.” Sometimes for such a modern girl Liliane was caught in a mess of old-timey ways. “Negro is the word to use today, my papa

insists on it. Less you want to do some very tedious chores, don't say other appellation for our folks around here." (L 35)

When Liliane states that they are colored, Roxie corrects her and views that they are no longer called colored, but Negro. She says Negro is the word to use today, which her papa insists to use her. Liliane continues "Roxie, do you ever talk about anything besides 'the war' and the race? Do you? There's so much more to life than what white folks have to do with. We can't spend our whole life worrying ourselves about what they're going to do, what they think of us, or where they are hiding, for that matter. (L 36)

Roxie states what she feels that Liliane would have been imagined:

Liliane thought I was parochial. That's what she called my "race" talk, but I'd been talking to the black bones of dead slaves and freedmen since I was a child. Shucks, she probably thinks Tallulah is a child. I can't find a way yet to tell anyone that I'm not a girl interested in the way things are or used to be. I am dreaming of what we'll be that's different, that'll set us aside, a generation that confounds white folks. (L 36)

She asserts what Liliane thinks about her. These lines show that their ancestors were slaves to the whites till their last breath. She says her mama thinks her to be a child, which she denies. She doesn't want to be like other girls in her folks, she is not interested in the way things are or used to be. She is dreaming of what will be different, a generation that confounds white folks.

Roxie explains "I got a mama who is a Negro woman with stretch marks, so don't you tell me. I know what I'm talking about." We were quiet for a while, I guess. I never understood why white folks claimed the slaves stood the heat so well God must have meant for us to pick cotton. I couldn't stand the heat." (L 37) These lines state that Roxie's mama got stretch marks on her body which indicates that black woman has to work day and night for whites for which they are not even paid a penny. Also, they had to undergo many physical and mental traumas.

Liliane tells about her papa:

Papa hadn't known when to push and when be still, I imagine I would be another dead Negro girl gone up in flames one night, while the townsfolk milled about, mourning our recklessness in the face of crackers crazes with hate. Defending the daughters of the South, how many times had I heard that? I was a daughter of the South, I thought to myself. (L 38)

Her papa didn't know when to act, which would lead her life into trouble. She says she would be another dead Negro girl, while the townspeople milled about, mourning their recklessness in the face of crackers crazed with hate. "Pieces of young colored girls gathered today in a festival of death held from Mobile to Biloxi." "This ain't much of anything, child. Don't you know how much worse slavery times must have been?" "No, Mama. I don't know how much worse. I truly don't." (L 39) The narrator states that pieces of young colored girls have been gathered in the festival. Her mama tells Liliane that this situation is far better than the time of slavery.

The narrator expounds "Can you get to that? Cause you can't play radios on the trains, white folks believe we done lost our music. Ain't that s gas? Like what they can't hear just don't exist, man. But at night the Caribbean oozes out of the streets, negra, like how I'm gonna do you, right?"(L 65). Victor, Liliane's lover, and Liliane are traveling on a train, when he says to Liliane that they can't play radios on the trains, white people believe that they have lost their music. This states that blacks didn't have the freedom to play a song in a train, because they long remember the music that is they no longer have the talent of music in them.

One of my father's granddaddies had done well with the scalawags and carpetbaggers, who licensed general store to him when it got too bad for white radicals to be seen with Negroes. So that great-granddaddy built himself a swear-for-Jesus plantation house in a small grave by the Biloxi town limits. That way, since we were unincorporated, the white folks couldn't tax us to oblivion when the mood suited them. (L 42)

This shows how much blacks work hard to buy a store get license for it in order to escape the tax of whites. Roxie adds "Even the white men, all two of them, were patting their feet to that big drum beat: boom, boom, boom. Abe-Odun, the Simeons, and Liliane and I were mastering the high-life neath the Spanish moss, when there was a boom bigger that the drum. (L 46) This shows that some white people respected the blacks and joined them in their good times. Liliane says "Another black woman who has two children and a shop. She lives upstairs. The shop is draped with textiles, sculpture with the usual Navajo and West African motifs as well as straw, dirt, and stone pieces. There are some glowing arclike things in the shapes of headdresses form the Moulin

Rouge which I really want. (L 59) This expresses that black woman have grown successfully to the extent of having a store of their own.

Through these incidents from the novel it is evident that, whatever the white did to black women, they received it as an experience. The black woman resisted every obstacle of whites and considered it positively, to attain triumph, where they moved forward to make a place for them in their new society.

Works Cited

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