

Treachery In Suzan Lori Parks' *Venus*

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Abstract

This paper critically explores various challenges faced by oppressed and depressed African American women in the western society. In *Venus*, Suzan- Lori Parks portrays African American women facing the turbulence of racism, and inequality in the western societies. She confidently reveals various challenges to keep back the progress and life of the African American women through the protagonist of her play. The paper says about the history of Venus, and the cruelty of the European people's mentality and racial discrimination against the black women. It also points out the rights of African women and shows new ways for them to show their identities.

Keywords: Discrimination, Racism, Victimization, Sexual harassment, Suzan Lori Parks and Venus

Feminism is a school of thought stating that sexism, class oppression, gender identity and racism are inextricably bound together. The efforts of women authors and activists shifted Feminism which had been mainly based on elitist white women's experiences and gender inequality, from being a monolithic concept to plural Feminism. This transition, which can be considered a link between Feminism, creates the ground for Feminists to question the white women's domination and unilaterality of Feminism as another type of Metanarrative. As Hooks writes, much feminist theory emerges from privileged women who live at the center whose perspectives on reality rarely include knowledge and awareness of the lives of women and men who live in the Margin. She concludes that Feminism lack the broad analysis that could encompass a variety of human experiences. Thus Feminist attempt to highlight the issue of race, gender and class inequalities that inhabit the multiplicity of women's mini narratives and experience.

Suzan – Lori Parks' pseudo – historical play *Venus* appeared in America in 1995. It is a story of Saartjie Baartman called Venus Hottentot, a south African girl of the khoikhoi tribe, who was lured to London by false Promises of Prosperity, sold in to slavery during 1810s first in England and then in France. Venus has been liked by many critics It has earned good name from many critics for its contribution to evaluate the dominant Feminist analyses of black Females and as well as the object of white men's desire. Anderson has analyzed it as a commentary on the Femininity and sexuality of woman of African descent. Venus the black lady is betrayed throughout the play, by Mother showman. Venus is treated in an unhealthy way. She is placed in a cage of 360 degrees in order to be visible to all visitors from all sides. When Venus tries to claim her share of the profit from the shows, her share is denied. As Osha writes in Venus and white desire "It is as if at the moment of sexual isolation or sexual arousal the Venus is humanized, though neither before nor after that moment.... Thus the

spirals of white desire determine both the humanity and the animality of the black subject” (82).

The Baron Docteur betrayed Venus he only spends time and sleeps with her. But he refuses to go out with her in Public. He feels it would shame him and his career. From Mother – showman’s words, it is said that a white male can turn in to man and attain higher position in the Great chain of Being only after they gain possession of land and their people. Venus was in a critical situation when he learns that Venus is pregnant, Baron Docteur decides to save his honour, career and reputation and ordered her to abort the baby. The Baron Docteur wants to wipe out all signs of his relationship with Venus, white masters have tried to erase the traces of oppression and violence they used against the black slaves in history.

Parks first shows that Venus has nobody to speak for her in the court and then represents the court verdict, ironically showing how their verdict is far from reality.

It appears to the court
That the person on whose behalf this suit was brought
Lives under no restraint
Her exhibition sounds indecent
But look at her now, she’s nicely dressed. (V38)

Venus is homeless both in her own home and in her adopted home Europe. Venus dreams of becoming rich have been deferred, she has undergone mental agony and physical suffering to prove her talent. She has not achieved her goals. Rather, she and her body have been abused. In order to justify black racial inferiority and to protect the system of oppression. Venus knows that her choices are limited. In another instance, after she is impregnated. The Baron Docteur asks her opinion about abortion even though he has already made up his mind, thinking that it is the only way to keep his honour or it would ruin his life. Venus hypersexual

behaviour can be analyzed from two views: one from the stereotypes of black femininity and the other one the portrayal of Venus hyper sexuality – manifest in her words.

Black feminism is sometimes referred to as womanism because both are concerned with struggles against sexism and racism by Black women who are themselves part of the Black community's effort to achieve equality and liberty. Venus was forced to promise delivery of the body for the autopsy. At last Venus accepted it. Venus brain is the first organ which is removed from her body in the operation. The removal of her memories and identities, which makes it possible for the Baron Docteur to take possession of her mind and to attain control over her body. Thus Venus is treated like an animal. And she follows the instructions of the Baron Docteur who demands her :

Sweet heart, stand here where the light is perfect on you

Just relax.

Only doctors here.

That's beautiful. (V 113).

Venus addresses the audience and invites them to visit the Museum to see her body. Venus has been examined by a number of scholars, including Lisa Ander Son who analyzed it as a commentary on the femininity and sexuality of women of African descent. The audience is informed that Venus Hottentots is dead. However in viewing her body on the stage the audience has to reconcile the idea that it is witnessing a woman who is at once both alive and dead.

However, the Baron Docteur has plans to study her steatopygia after her death. When she contracts gonorrhea from the Baron Docteur, he conspires with his Grade – school chum to have her jailed until her death. After her untimely death in the jail cell in paris, a plaster cast of her body along with her skeleton is displayed at the Museum.

As a conclusion, the play has a link between colonial Europe and the Present world. Venus was brought to England and France to be displayed for the profit of a group of people, and crowds travelled miles and miles and paid to attend her shows for their own pleasure. In today's world, the treasures and cultural heritage of some countries have been illegally taken and are exhibited in the museums of some other countries to attract tourists from all over the world and gain profit. As M. Anderson highlights the dramatic and political premises of black feminist drama and investigates the intersection of race, class and gender in twenty – first century dramas.

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