

∞ READING ROUND ∞

Inspiring Authors

Carol Leeming MBE

THE TWO VERY IMPORTANT, most significant writers that have inspired my own writing, are Ntozake Shange and the other is Sylvia Plath. It's interesting to note both writers are from the United States of America. However, their literary achievements, in poetry, choreopoetry, e.g. Shange, and both their novel writing were most formative on my own development as a writer, and specifically, many other women writers across the world.

A selection of these writers includes Bernardine Evaristo (Booker Prize winner), novelist, poet, playwright; Jackie Kay, poet, novelist, and playwright; Dorothea Smartt, poet, live artist; and debbie tucker green, playwright and screen writer. To name a few. There are many others globally.

Ntozake Shange, a Black feminist, in the 1980s, with her groundbreaking choreopoem play, *for coloured girls who considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf* is attributed to have innovated in literature by creating choreopoetry, a long- form, poetic-prose narrative written, for the page and for performance.

Shange's genius, fusing together live text with specially choreographed physical theatre to create compelling narrative, which interrogates, in a deep way, the lives of marginalised characters. In Shange's choreopoem, this is the intersectionality faced by Black women in a patriarchal, sexist, racist society. Shange also broke literary rules in her writing, forgoing the usual spellings, use of lower-case letters, punctuation, and writing the

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way her characters/people, actually speak, with creative use of dialect, slang and argots etc.

This was a revolutionary thing at the time, along with tackling societal taboo themes of rape, domestic abuse, including also affirmative themes for example of sisterhood. A major characteristic thus being to privilege Black women's voices, in this singular way, positively. It is this which has enabled me to write the narratives I do about marginalised characters, using dialects, in an authentic and engrossing way.

Shange's choreopoem characters had no names, they were given a specific colour instead. As they told their stories, they described experiences faced by any number of Black women, on both sides of the Atlantic. Shange's work remains powerfully prominent in theatre, literature and film today.

My encounter, in my late teens, with the poetry of Sylvia Plath, started with *Ariel: Collected Poems*, which made me want to write my own poetry. It was so impactful, so inspiring to me, to feel how Plath's words, on domesticity, marriage/relationships, depression, could move me in such a potent way. I began straight away to write poetry. I had always enjoyed reading poetry, but up until reading Plath, I had never felt compelled to actually write poetry. Such is the effect of Plath I am now a published poet.

Plath's brilliant inspiration for me continues, as today I seek in my writing of poetry to create strong imagery with compression, to utilise deep personal experiences, create themes of my own or others, to quote Plath, 'with control'. Importantly, to be able to consider personal experiences, that is, 'the personal is political', or as poet Audre Lorde said, 'to speak truth to power'. To gaze upon all facets, and the complexity, before rendering it into a poem.