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VIVACITY: DISCOVERING ZORA THROUGH HER WORDS

by

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B.A. University of Central Florida, 2008

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts
in the Department of Theatre
in the College of Arts and Humanities
at University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

Spring Term
2012

Major Professor: Earl Weaver

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ABSTRACT

In its simplest form, storytelling is the passing of information from one person to the next. When storytelling illuminates time, place and purpose, it is then able to entertain, comfort and transport any listener. As the keeper of the imagination, the storyteller has inspired me as a performer. After reading Zora Neale Hurston's *Every Tongue Got to Confess*, I found my single-defining connection to the art of storytelling.

Halimuhfack ultimately became my thesis performance piece inspired by the folk tales from *Every Tongue Got To Confess*. The new theatre piece shares Hurston's folk tale the way it may have once been told; in its natural dialect, with the same active physical involvement as if sharing stories with friends. Together, the research of the folk tale, Hurston's anthropological studies, folk songs and narrative from her autobiography aided in the development of the performance piece. In developing this work, I discovered that Hurston's tales were extremely action-oriented and were ideally suited to use in my making of *Halimuhfack*.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

I was first introduced to Zora Neale Hurston in UCF's production of *Sun to Sun* directed by Elizabeth Van Dyke. I was featured in the show as a Preacher's Wife, a bar hussy and a sprightly island girl. The reason I was able to take on so many varied roles was because *Sun to Sun* was a folktale musical of sorts. It was a collection of stories and songs that related to a very specific group of people. Working on *Sun to Sun* taught me many things, one of which was that Hurston was onto something.

I'd been deliberating for some time over my thesis topic and I was flirting with the idea of using Hurston, in some capacity, as the subject of my thesis. I consulted my director, Van Dyke, to get her input. It was like a scene from a movie, I approached her nervous, anxious and fatigued as so many grad students are, and amidst my rambling she stopped me with her words, "You don't choose Zora. Zora chooses you." Frightened that I was having some sort of spiritual, "*Beloved*" experience, I didn't really respond, and if I did, I didn't say anything worth remembering. It probably ended with me nodding and staring blankly. Speechless.

After a long and tinsel-filled Christmas, I began researching more of Hurston's work. Her short-stories, *Spunk* and *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, led me to ask more questions about the life that was so connected to these tales. Lucy Anne Hurston, Hurston's niece, compiled a book dedicated to Hurston's life that included memorabilia and an audio companion that allowed me to hear Hurston singing and explaining how she went about collecting the folksongs. *Dust Track on a Road*, Hurston's autobiography, began answering the questions of her life and proved to be an amazing resource for the one-woman show that was the end result of my thesis project.

Though I was sure of my topic, Hurston and her folklore, I wasn't decided on how the performance aspect would come together. "Love," a chapter in her autobiography, continued to haunt me. It was completely unexpected. Hurston was known for her candor, her charm, her wit and bravery, but a lover? Her story wasn't just a love story; it was hopeless. Torn between the two loves of her life, Hurston knew she could not be faithful to both and one day she would have to choose. This consumed me, and I decided this story would be the backdrop of my show, *Halimufack*. The one-woman show came together slowly. First by folktales from Hurston's collection of Southern folktales, *Every Tongue Got to Confess*, then the inclusion of memorable quotes from Hurston's autobiography and finally folk songs from Hurston's excursions.

A labor of love, my thesis show was successful. I performed *Halimuhfack* as a part of my apprenticeship at the Tony Award winning, Actor's Theatre of Louisville, a joy all its own. I was able to pay tribute to a great woman and her two loves, something she tried to do throughout her life but was unsuccessful.

CHAPTER TWO: BIOGRAPHY OF ZORA

Early life

Zora Neale Hurston was born January 7, 1891, in Notasulga, Alabama to Reverend John Hurston and Lucy Anne Potts. Zora's father, John Hurston, was born the child of plantation sharecroppers. Though he was fair-skinned, a social distinction that qualified him above the darker-skinned blacks, to Potts' parents, especially her mother, he was a less-than-desirable candidate for their daughter. John Hurston's life was spent working hard, and he did not expect anything less from his children. In the Hurston household, "book learning" was encouraged just as much as real-life experiences. One of four, Zora described herself as the runt of the litter. Soon after her birth, the Hurston family moved further south to an all-black settlement in Eatonville, Florida. John Hurston didn't take long to establish himself in the small black town. By 1912, he had donned himself Reverend and had become the town Mayor. John Hurston served three terms, writing the laws that governed the town and building its first jail. John was an outgoing leader in the public eye, but at home Lucy, Zora's mother, often matched wits with him and had the upper hand (Speak 9).

Before Zora discovered the joys of writing, she described herself as simultaneously outgoing and social, yet contemplative and moody (Speak 5). Her vivid imagination and love of adventure led her to behavior that most young girls in Eatonville would never have attempted. Hurston preferred the outdoors and its never-ending adventure to the finite toys other children played with. Soon Zora discovered that having to tote dolls around proved bothersome and that she would rather enjoy pleasant conversation with her favorite tree instead. Hurston also enjoyed

sneaking around Joe Clark's storefront porch where stories of the day were retold, embellished and met with "one ups" until it was time for the storytellers to head home. Hurston's parents didn't allow her to hang around Joe Clark's because they knew the porch and its stories were no place for a young girl's ears. Hurston didn't listen to her parent's warning and didn't mind the bad language. The impression made at Joe Clark's would be of great importance in her life. The style, richness and quick wit Zora learned there would heavily influence her writing style and provide it with a level of authenticity and detail that would set her apart from her competitors.

When Zora was a teen, she was greatly disturbed by her mother's passing. Her father re-married shortly thereafter, and his new wife's closeness in age to Zora proved troublesome for the peace in the Hurston home. After a physical battle between the two women, Zora's father disregarded his daughter's threats to leave. John Hurston's re-marriage strained his relationship with all his children, leaving Zora alone and practically orphaned. This fulfilled one of twelve visions Zora experienced as a young child, each to manifest in her life. She described them as stereopticon slides. Some revealing houses, one shoddy, broken down and full of torture; the other held two women. Unlike the first, it was large and would bring peace and love to Zora. Other visions were more abstract and full of symbolic signs, "I would stand beside a dark pool of water and see a huge fish move slowly away at a time when I would be somehow in the depth of despair"(Dust 42). Zora became miserable as she floated between the houses of relatives trying to find solace while longing for new experiences and artistic expression.

At this point in her life, Zora wrote very little, and what she wrote in later years concerning this time leaves much to be desired. Clues may be found in her fictional writing about what exactly happened to her during this time, but nothing has been proven. What is clear is that simply marrying and becoming a teacher, as her mother had done, was not enough for the

woman without limits. To Zora, her path was clear, even if it meant enduring the trials of poverty; a hard decision, but one she made happily.

Working proved difficult for Zora. Her youthful looks and small frame deterred employers from taking her seriously. When she was finally hired, she was often fired for reading on the job. It wasn't until she landed a gig with the Gilbert and Sullivan traveling troupe that her love of reading no longer presented a problem. Hurston found work with the troupe by serving as a lady's maid to a singer only referred to as Miss M—. Although Hurston never reveals Miss M—'s real name in her autobiography, it's clear from the stories she shares of their eighteen months together that the two were very close. Miss M— and the other conservatory graduates that made up the cast exposed Hurston to European music and provided her with books to foster her love of knowledge. When Miss M— left the tour to take another singing engagement, Hurston went with her and continued working for her until Miss M— became engaged to be married. It was then that Miss M— encouraged Hurston to stop serving as a maid and continue her education.

Education and Fiction

Zora spent two years at Morgan State University caring for the wife of one of the University's trustees. Hurston used her personality to charm friends and professors into giving her money, clothes and work in exchange for her humor and stories. While at Morgan, she befriended the niece of the Howard University president, leading to her application and acceptance to the institution. While in Washington D.C., Zora worked as a manicurist in a black-owned but white-exclusive clientele barbershop. It was here she began to have an interest in

national affairs. Each day she was in the company of journalists and major political figures discussing national affairs as well as providing information concerning congressional matters.

Zora had much success at Howard writing for the *Stylus*, where she met Alain Locke and wrote *John Redding Goes to Sea*. Unfortunately, it took her from 1919 to 1924 to complete one-and-a-half years of course work. When she could no longer pay tuition, she was forced to leave Howard University without finishing. Zora decided to head to New York and pursue writing fiction full time. At this point, Zora had written *Spunk*, her third published short story, and had been published in the two most influential African American magazines at the time. Not only was Zora making headway among other black publications but also now her writings were crossing over into mainstream, white-dominated publication by gaining white readers, something her peers had not been as successful at accomplishing.

Zora's most influential relationships began in 1927. She married long-time boyfriend, Herbert Sheene, and became very close with Langston Hughes. Zora and Hughes shared a love for collecting southern folklore as well as the interest of Mrs. R. Osgood Mason, to whom they lovingly referred as Godmother. Mason was a huge benefactor of African and Native American artistic and scholarly pursuits.

Zora's marriage was over in seven months, but her relationship with Mason blossomed. The two discovered they were psychically connected, and though Zora became one of her most beloved godchildren, Mason never missed an opportunity to candidly speak her mind concerning Zora's research. One way Mason did this was by sending Zora letters warning, "You have broken the law... You are dissipating your powers in things that have no real meaning"(Dust Tracks 144). Despite her harsh tone, these letters were usually accompanied by \$200 to help Zora with her research. While still working with Mason, Zora traveled and even began a side

project with Hughes. The two shared a passion for folktales and collaborated to create an anthology of folktales and songs. Despite their love for story telling, the two could not mend their friendship after Hughes demanded to have an equal credit in the work. Unmoved, Zora claimed to have conceived the idea without Hughes and only wanted his hand in carrying out the project. This disagreement would later sever their friendship.

In 1931, her contract with Mason ended, and Zora's focus shifted to fiction. She wrote "The Gilded Six Bits," a short-story that impressed Hurston's publisher so much, they asked her to write a novel. *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, a story based on her parent's relationship was published a year later. John Hurston was always a source of inspiration for Zora. On one hand she was greatly inspired and proud of her father's ability to rise from extremely humble beginnings. As a boy John was raised an illiterate son of a sharecropper and managed to rise to the position of Southern Baptist Convention Moderator. At other times, Zora viewed her father as a stranger, someone who never truly understood her boundless spirit. In addition to Zora's love/hate relationship with her father, she was fascinated with the dynamic of her parents relationship. For instance, how they came to be a couple, her father's philandering, her mother's quiet yet careful eye.

"On another occasion Papa got the idea of escorting the wife of one of his best friends, and having the friend escort Mama. But Mama seemed to enjoy it more than Papa thought she ought to – and it ended up with Papa leaving his friends' wife at the reception and following Mama and his friend home, and marching her in the house with the muzzle of his Winchester rifle in her back" (Dust Tracks 10).

After *Mules n' Men* was published in 1936, Hurston continued to branch out and attempted to write her first theatrical piece, *The Great Day*. The folk musical was first produced

in New York and when she returned to the South, it became *Sun to Sun*. Hearing of Hurston's theatrical attempts, Mary McCloud Bethune invited her to initiate a school of the performing arts at Bethune Cookman University but before the project could get going Hurston realized she didn't have the resources to see it through.

Zora searched for deeper and more meaningful truths that transcended the boundaries of color. Part of her search led her to Jamaica, where she studied the tradition of Maroons, a group of slave descendants who escaped by fleeing to the hills. In Jamaica, Hurston realized that despite drastically different cultures, the human race was more alike than different. Most of all, she noticed that despite class and color, women were still considered inferior. This discovery shaped her philosophy on the black agenda and race relations in America, which ultimately led to her being blackballed by her peers, such as Richard Wright, the author of the novel Native Son and one of her biggest critics. Zora remained adamant that her writing would focus on what unites people rather than what segregates them. To affiliate with a specific race and its views was to have Race Pride, a concept of no interest to Zora. In her opinion, it was useless to take pride in an attribute she had no part in choosing. Her pride was in one race -- the human race.

Critical Reception

Though Zora's career was filled with praise and recognition, it was not entirely blissful. She was hailed for being a "fresh voice" of the Negro because her writing was free of the racial messages writers such as Richard Wright were so famous for. This was not entirely intentional on Zora's part, though she took the brunt of the backlash. Blacks criticized her for not using her platform to further the Negro agenda, and public figures like Richard Wright felt nothing for her use of "stylistic and accurate" reporting. Wright felt Zora's "style" was embarrassing and not a

departure from the normal minstrelsy that whites were so eager to see from the Negro author. Wright used his platform, *New Masses* to openly reject and criticize Hurston, admitting she was a talented writer but calling her style less than desirable.”.

“Miss Hurston can write, but her prose is cloaked in that facile sensuality that has dogged Negro expression since the days of Phillis Wheatley. The sensory sweep of her novel carries no theme, no message, no thought. In the main, her novel is not addressed to the Negro, but to a white audience whose chauvinistic tastes she knows how to satisfy. She exploits that phase of Negro life which is "quaint," the phase which evokes a piteous smile on the lips of the "superior" race” (Wright).

In addition to Zora’s own viewpoints on the race issue, publishers were sure to censor anything controversial she’d written in order to protect themselves. At the hands of her publisher, an entire chapter was taken out of her autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, because it addressed Christian and American hypocrisy. Perhaps it was her early life that made her feel the way she did about race and being a Negro. In Eatonville, the community shared a common thought was that being black was not a drawback, it was a requirement. This may have been why Zora’s response to an *Orlando Sentinel* story on Brown vs. Board of Education created uproar among black leaders by asking,

“How much satisfaction can I get from a court order for somebody to associate with me who does not wish me near them? The American Indian has never been spoken of as a minority and chiefly because there is no whine in the Indian. Certainly he fought, and valiantly for his lands, and rightfully so, but it is inconceivable of an Indian to seek forcible association with anyone. His well

known pride and self-respect would save him from that. I take the Indian position” (“Letter to Orlando Sentinel”).

Zora backed politicians who supported segregation and subsequently disassociated herself from the established group thought.

In the 1940s, Zora continued writing and was featured in the *Saturday Review*. It was around this time she found it increasingly more difficult to be published. She re-married for the third time and was living in middle-class Jacksonville, Florida when she quickly realized that publishers were not interested in middle-class blacks. Writing about the exceptional few and the over-exposed poor was easy money for some of her contemporaries, but this no longer appealed to Zora. Publishers, however, were interested in Zora. Writing the details of her own life wasn't intriguing, but she agreed on her own terms giving publishers just enough to satisfy their need. It is speculated that since she only wrote her autobiography to appease her publishers, it is written to stroke their ego. Critics insisted that Hurston only referred to whites as pleasant, interesting and beautiful people, whereas her African American comrades left much to be desired. In the eyes of some of her critics, Hurston wrote to feed many of the misconceptions about her race, writing of blacks as only whites would see them, full of wild stories and idiom filled language.

Unfortunately, many aspects of Zora's life remain a mystery, and perhaps intentionally. After concluding her work on *Seraph and the Swanne*, she moved to Harlem where she worked to take a trip to Honduras. In February of 1948, she was accused of molesting her landlady's ten-year old nephew. Fortunately, Zora had taken that trip to Honduras during the time of the alleged attack. The case was dropped, but not before the Baltimore paper could print the salacious story. Suicidal and extremely depressed, Zora left New York and moved close to home Miami, Florida where she lived in a friend's boathouse.

By 1950, all of Zora's works were out of print, and ghost writing generated the majority of her income. She did her best to stay out of the spotlight, even working as a maid for a wealthy family. She successfully remained under the radar until her employer saw her work in the paper, causing Zora to quit soon after.

Near the end, Zora's life took a series of unexpected turns, one of which was absolute poverty. Leading to her death, Zora suffered several strokes but refused to ask for help from her family. Instead, she depended on neighbors and co-workers to care for her. When Zora passed away on January 28, 1960, no one from her past, not a friend nor a family member, knew what condition she was living in.

CHAPTER THREE: HALIMUHFAK SCRIPT

:
A collection of quotes, stories and songs from Zora Neale Hurston
Adapted by Kerri J. Alexander

I have loved.

Oh yeah,

Yes.

And I did not just fall in love,

I made a parachute jump.

We were both the happiest people in the world and the most miserable.

He begged me to give up my career, marry him and I really wanted to do anything he wanted me to do but that one thing I could not do. It was that I had this thing clawing inside me, that must be said.

That unseen force from somewhere in space which commands you to write in the first place gives you no choice.

You take up the pen when you're told.

And write what is commanded.

There is no agony like bearing an untold story inside of you. A story that swells up in you like a spring. You know that feelin, when you found your first pubic hair, its greater than that.

There was one man and his wife who always lived lovin.

Love makes your soul crawl out of its hiding place.

They never had fussed since they had been married. Devil didn't like that so he decided to break them up.

Uncle Bud's a man,

A man like this

Can't get a woman

Gonna use his fist

Uncle Bud x5

O go in to town gonna hurry back

Uncle bud's got sumthin' I sure do like

Uncle Bud x5

He tried and tried, but he was about to give up one day when he stopped by a woman's house to get a drink of water. So she ast him why he looked so downhearted and he tole her he been trying to break up a couple for two years and they just wouldn't fuss.

*Weep like a willow
Morn just like a dove X2
Oh I been down so long,
Down don't worry me*

So she says, "If you will gimme a new pair of shoes, I betcher I kin git 'em to fussin' and quarrelin'." So he tole her he would. So she quit whut she was doin' and went over to de couple's house. De woman was sweepin' and singin'.

*Mama don want no peas 'n no rice
No coconut oil
No coconut oil x2
Mama don want no peas 'n no rice no coconut oil
All she want is Whiskey, Brandy ALL the time!*

De woman says, "You look so happy, I'm sorry I come."

"How come? Don't you like to see folks happy?"

"Yes, Thass how come I wish I hadn't come here. Youse too good a woman to have such a deceitful man. I ain't goin' tuh tell you whut he done, so don' ast me."

*Oh I'm so glad that the law was passed
The women in Tampa got to wash they ass x2
I do not want it in here.*

De woman says, "Nobody can't make me b'lieve my husband ain't right. Not even de devil hisself couldn't break us up."

"Oh, I ain't trying, thass how come I ain't goin' to tell you nothin'. But if you jus' watch you'll see for yourself. Nobody won't have to tell you if you keep yo' eyes open."

*Oh my mama come feed that crow
See how he flies x2
This crow, this crow
Gonna fly tonight
See how he flies x2*

Then she left de woman and went on down in de fiel' where de man was plowin'.

*Oh who in the hell
Uh god damn nation
Shit dis terd on ta pa's plantation
Uncle Bud x5*

*Oh Little cat big cat little bitty kitten
Gonna whoop dat tale less he don't stop shitten
Uncle Bud x5*

“Hello, brother, you sho is a smart man.”

When a man keeps beatin' me to the draw mentally, he begins to get glamorous.

“That's whut makes me sorry to see a man like you wid a woman that keeps secrets from him.”

“My wife ain't got no secrets from me. Thass one thing we don't do, is keep things from one 'nother.”

“Well, all I got to say is, long as a person don't open up a box you can't tell whut they got in it. You jus' got to take they word for it. A secret wouldn't be a secret if everybody knowed it. Don't think I come to talk about nobody. I wouldn't tell you nothin', not even if you paid me. But if you keep yo' eyes open an' yo mouf shet and nobody won't have to tell you nothin'.”

So she went on 'bout her business.
Devil hung round where he could watch.

De man come in and never said a word.
De wife got busy wid de cookin' and never spoke.
He took down de wash pan and started to washin' his hands.
She come snatched de towel out his hands and wiped her face with it.
He set on de stoop and wouldn't ast her wuz dinner ready.
She took de broom and swept all over him and wouldn't ast him to move.

He says, “Looka heah, ole nigger 'oman, whut da hell's de matter wid you?”

She up and stole 'im, “Looka here, Mr. Nappy-chin, if you wanta know, I kin knock some uh dat hell out you anytime you git too high.”

He said, “I kin make out without you any day in the week. Gwan hit me! I dare you!”

So they fought all over de house before they thought to git de thing straight.
So de devil went on and give de woman de new pair of shoes.

*AH some folks call me a toe low shaker
It's a dog gone lie I'm a back bone breaker
Well uh you may go, but this will bring you back*

*Oh you like my features
But you don't like me
Doncha you like my features doncha shake my tree*

Uh well uh you may go, But this will bring you back

Uh HOO-DOO x3

Whack it!

My heels are poppin and muh tonenails crackin

Uh well uh you may go but this will bring you back!

CHAPTER FOUR: CHARACTER ANALYSIS

In order to effectively create a character, three major factors have to be established. First and foremost is the life of the character – the who. Second is the world in which they exist – the when and where of their environment. Third is the business of the present and past – the what and the how. In order to answer these questions, a thorough analysis of the character and its world must take place. Storytelling in particular holds the subject of these tenets to a higher standard, but even more so when there is only one storyteller portraying an array of characters. The specificity and life of each character is the difference between good storytelling and a drawn-out story.

Halimuhfack is the story of a man and his wife’s struggle to protect their marriage from outside forces as told by Zora. It begins with Hurston having a conversation with an acquaintance in a bar. When Zora is hit with a very personal question, “What has been your greatest adventure?”, she tries to answer honestly and she uses a folktale to illustrate how she feels. The story, “The Woman and The Devil” is about a modest couple, a man and his wife and their struggle to keep what seems to be “evil,” the devil and the woman, at bay.

Style

What is the approach and style of the piece?

The approach and style of this piece belongs to the Storytelling genre.

sto·ry·tell·er (stôr'ē-tĕl'ər, stôr'-)

n.

1.a. One who tells or writes stories.

b. One who relates anecdotes.

2. Informal One who tells lies.

(thefreedictionary.com)

The basic meaning of *Halimuhfack* is that even in your hiding place you can be found. Each character in “The Woman and the Devil” was hiding in his or her own way. The Wife hid in doing what was right and just. She did this by taking care of her home and always being a loving and supporting wife. The husband hid by reciprocating his wife’s actions; he worked every day to provide and protect his family. The Woman hid from a life of mundane righteousness and from being what is traditionally seen as being good. She dealt with the Devil and caused strife in the couple’s home just so she could hide in her spoils, the shoes she earned. The Devil, having been known to be an outright adversary, hid while The Woman did his work for him. Zora also hid in telling the story. *Halimuhfack*, the hiding place, is where she goes when she cannot face her immediate present. Instead of dealing with the realities of her life, Zora uses her stories to disappear and to live where she thrives, in a tale.

Background Information

Where does the action take place?

Halimuhfack takes place in the outskirts of Jacksonville, Florida, specifically at a local bar where blacks come and share stories and strong drinks. The building is worn and the furnishings are dark; almost everything is made of wood.

When? What are the historical or sociological factors pertinent to the play, scene and/or character?

Halimuhfack takes place in the summer of 1931. The summers in Jacksonville are especially hot. The humidity is so bad the women wore fashion hats to keep their hair from frizzing. Women's dresses were made from man-made fibers, like rayon. For those who could afford the expensive trend, the simple cotton dresses of their youth were gone. Now nylon stockings were the new fashion trend as well as dresses with zippers instead of buttons.

This also was a time when blue-collar Americans began to triumph over the recent crash of Wall Street. The Great Depression left a huge laceration on the American dream. Capitalism, individualism, and the basis of American democracy were all on trial. The balance of economics encompassed all political debate and led to pivotal federal programming. Under the leadership of Franklin D. Roosevelt, the Civil Works Administration began organizing the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP). In 1935, Roosevelt issued an executive order that banned exclusion of African Americans from the Work Progress Administration (WPA), which commissioned artists to enhance buildings and provided job opportunities for thousands of artists. The Federal Theatre Project (FTP) was a more successful attempt by the government to produce theatrical events. The FTP began in 1935, the same year Hurston joined the WPA Federal Theatre Project as a dramatic

coach.

Mary McCloud Bethune, advisor to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, a civil rights leader, and founder of Bethune Cookman University, began working with the National Youth Administration to help African American youth find work-study jobs. In 1934, Bethune invited Hurston to establish a school of the dramatic arts based on her research findings of folk tales in the South. Unfortunately, the merger never materialized due to Hurston's lack of resources.

How does the style and/or period of the play affect (influence) your movement in the play?

In the beginning moment of the piece, Zora is in a vulnerable place; she is nearly frozen with the sincerity of the answer she gives. She is almost motionless while her words become visions of her past until she decides the presence of her past is too much. She then retreats to Halimuhfack, her place of solace. When she is storytelling, she becomes the Zora she is loved and known for. She is spontaneous and outgoing, and her movement can be sprightly. When Zora speaks for a new character, she not only vocally channels their essence, but she also takes on physical characteristics that embody the person in her mind. The extreme example of this is when she is The Man in the field working. She bends over and stomps her foot into the ground to call on the spirit of The Man, the greatness and depth of his resonance. When Zora embodies The Woman, she has a slinky quality to her person as she slides in and out of situations and uses her qualms to keep the attention of her victims.

How do such factors as physical environment, climate, and familiarity with the surroundings suggest the movement to be used in certain scenes, or the play as a whole?

There are no critical pieces of furniture or props that affect movement and business. Zora's world exists in a bar, and so she weaves in and out of people, tables, and chairs. These

props were not actually used, and so they did not present a problem spatially. As for the story she is telling, that world exists in three places: the home of the couple, the home of The Woman and the field where The Man works. The Woman, who inhabits all three areas, has to adapt to her surroundings and makes herself as comfortable as possible to achieve her task. When she is at home in her element, she is at ease and passive in nature. It isn't until the Devil challenges her that she visits the home of the couple, and then she is out of her element in every sense of the word. She is not welcomed in the home because she is known for causing trouble. She is uncomfortable with the idea of living a life like The Wife's, and when she has to face this home domesticated and filled with evidence of family, it causes her extreme discomfort. When The Woman is in the field with the working men, she is more comfortable than when she is in the couple's home. There she can be desired, and even though she does not participate in their work, she can admire the workers' physique.

How does the mood of the play affect the type of movement to be used?

The setting is 1931 Florida in the summer, but the mood of the piece is relatable. Story telling involves the orator and the listener. Sometimes it even calls upon the response of the listener and thrives off the reactions of the audience. Storytelling frees up the performer to interact physically with the audience and incorporate them as a scene partner. This allows the storyteller the option to connect with the audience physically or to interact non-verbally. This happens when The Woman visits the home of the couple. The Wife is not pleased with the presence of this woman in her home, and when she sings her song making a crack at the character of The Woman, she takes a moment to look to the audience as if to say, "I know what's going on here, don't you?" [Need citation here]

Dialogue and Language

Are there differences in language from one character to another that tend to clarify characterization?

Although all the language belongs to Hurston, there is a difference in the language she uses to present her earnest feelings of loss versus the language she uses to create the world of the tale. When Hurston initially makes reference to her lover, her sentences end abruptly. This is the tip of the iceberg in the answering of the question, “What was your greatest adventure?” Eventually her statements become run-on sentences. They tap into ideas that cannot be contained by words alone. They call on supernatural forces and simultaneously simplify joyous experiences with life’s small accomplishments. When Hurston begins to tell the story, she presents simple facts, layers in her own two cents, and then reverts back to the tale. Instead of using her knack for embellishment to pile a list of adjectives onto any one character, Zora is reminded of a song that epitomizes the character and perhaps reaches the ear of one of her listeners.

What is/are the objectives in the scene? (What do you do to achieve your motivating force/desire?) What is happening in the scene? What do you want?

Zora’s motivating force is to forget the desires of her womanly needs. She just left her husband again and is determined not to be with someone who holds her back. She comes to the bar and begins to talk about her adventures. Telling the stories reminds her of what she has now gained by leaving Herbert. Zora is derailed by a question she feels compelled to answer truthfully. “What has been your greatest adventure?” Her greatest adventure was love, and her best love was Percival Punter. A love she never again experienced with another soul was her greatest adventure. She recounts their split, questioning her own judgment and responsibility for

the greatest loss of her life. The negligence of her discretion has found her, and she recoils to protect herself by telling the story of “The Woman and the Devil.” Her desire to forget is unattainable, but that will never keep her from trying. Her immediate objective is to keep that curious fellow from asking any more questions and to entertain him.

Scene Analysis:

What is the story? What is the author trying to tell us? What is she getting at?

Love unprotected is the prey of evil. The tale of “The Woman and The Devil” begins as an admission of guilt for Zora. She regrets her decision to leave Percival and feels responsible for letting elements from the outside infiltrate the intimacies of their relationship. For example, if Zora is The Woman and Percival is The Man, they begin in a perfect balance. Zora’s insecurities of holding back her perfect match kept her from enjoying the love of her life. She was so convinced that she could not love Percival as much as she loved her career that she didn’t consider a compromise. They were both driven people who stood tall individually. Zora had convinced herself that she was holding Percival back and that he was doing the same for her. This was something she could not stand for. More literally, the tale told to Zora is a moral tale. It is a lesson to husbands and wives about the sanctity of their homes and about trust as a key factor in their relationships. It teaches communication failure is a characteristic of failed relationships. It also utilizes humor as a tutor. The Devil recruits a woman, and the tale follows her story for the most part. There are some versions of the story that end with the Devil being afraid of The Woman and even saying to her, “Here’s yo’ shoes, but anybody slicker than me, I don’t want ‘em close to me” (Every Tongue 56). There also is much to be said about the role women play.

This tale suggests that there are two kinds of women fellas choose: the right kind and the wrong kind. Zora tells the story differently; she ends with The Woman singing a victory song and seemingly the victor. I believe that despite The Woman's dealing with the Devil, she is more like a mischievous nymph who came to teach the couple a lesson. She never intends to break them up, but just to show them they are not above the tricks, and if she could get a pair of shoes out of the deal, then why not?

What's the deeper meaning underneath the plot and all the words?

The Devil isn't your worst enemy. It's our lack of communication, understanding, patience, trust, or forgiveness. The couple never lost power as long as they continued to be true to one another and to themselves. They knew the caliber of the informant, and they still chose to believe The Woman. The Devil masked is more deceptive at reaching his target, but the target must deliver himself into his arms. The masked Devil in this case was The Woman. If The Wife and The Man would have trusted each other and not let the her get in between them then she would not have succeeded in tricking them.

What's the main statement is being made to the audience?

There is an empowerment of The Woman, whether she stands by her man or stands alone: a female is the victor. The Woman was working for the Devil, but she was able to accomplish a task he could not: female empowerment. The negative aspect to this is that the independent female in the story is perceived to be evil; she works with Satan, she flirts with and manipulates men and she feeds off the insecurities of her fellow woman.

What's the conflict? What made you choose these questions?

The Devil has tried to break up the couple, but they resist his aims. The Woman tries to convince The Wife that her husband is untrustworthy. The Wife resists. The Woman tries to convince The Husband that his wife is not trustworthy, but he does not believe her. The seeds are planted in both their minds, and by the time they are both home, the festering lies have hatched and are now believable truths. The couple begins to treat each other differently, validating the lies implanted in their minds. They argue, insult and physically fight each other before they realize they are fighting over nothing. The conflict lies in the will of the couple to fight the lies of The Woman.

Who's the protagonist?

The protagonist is The Woman, despite her evil ways. Her journey is the one we follow; she is the one left leading us with her new shoes and song. The Woman is the charmed villain, the one who wins over the audience; despite her criminal activity we root for the couple.

Who's the antagonist?

The Woman is also the antagonist. She is the aggressor, and she is the one disturbing the peace of the couple's home. Initially, we recognize The Devil and The Woman as the antagonists, but by the end, the audience is rooting for her.

The following is an in-depth character analysis of the main character of Halimuhfack, Zora Neale Hurston, in “her own” words.

What is my immediate past location?

Herbert and I were married in May of 1927. We separated in less than a year and have been on and off ever since. I fear this is the end of our relationship, but I am delighted because it is not the end of me. I do not have any children, and I am better that way. When a man slows me down, I can leave him. With children, the circumstance becomes a bit tenser.

I have just left my husband’s home, a house we share with his mother. We don’t as much share it as we are boarders in her home. I was washing the dishes and cleaning the kitchen after making a large meal as a way of showing Mother Sheen that Herbert and I are very appreciative of her generosity. We’ve been living in her home for seven months and Herbert and I still don’t have enough money saved to buy our own place, mostly because we never stay together long enough.

Herbert came home and asked me what I had done with my day, and I simply told him what I had done. I had spent the day remembering my childhood and trying to understand why I know the things that I know. I spent the day wishing that I could be that smart little girl who didn’t need friends because the trees were her comforters. When Herbert heard this, it was as though I told him I’d been with another man. He reprimanded me as though I was that eight-year-old I had pretended to be all day long. That is, until my present self awoke to the sound of a man’s voice scolding me. I quickly reversed our roles, turning him into the infant that lets out tantrums the way he had. I knew it from the beginning, but it wasn’t until that moment that I decided to listen to my inner self. I told myself this was no longer my situation. How foolish I

had been to ignore the lessons I had already learned. I suppose I thought Herbert would be different. He was younger. He was a man; this minor detail seemed to be the reoccurring theme that ended my relationships. Pity, I really liked him.

I was not angry, just determined to be away from the negative energy Herbert was throwing my way. I left our home without a thing. I no longer felt tied to anything in that house. I left with just the clothes on my back and my hat with the green ribbon. I had been wearing it earlier when I was pretending to be myself, my natural self, and had forgotten I was wearing it. I wish in my passionate, yet very cool exit I had been aware that I had no shoes. I was walking barefoot through Jacksonville. I hadn't realized I was barefoot until I arrived at the bar. The large gentleman who stood at the door to greet guests and help the pests make their exit told me that I must be in trouble. I said, "Why would you say that?" and he told me, "The only time I've seen a woman walk outside bare," like I was, "was because she was running."

I would never tell this man what I had just undergone; he would have sided with Herbert. He was right, though - I was running, but not from Herbert. The truth is I was running from myself, like a dog chases his tail and a cat his shadow, redundant, pointless, but boy, was it fun. Halimuhfack is my hiding place. Where I come to find, lose and rejuvenate my person. It is not always a bar but tonight it was. Others come here to drink, to love and be loved, to dance and to sing. I come to tell a story, but never my own. I come here whenever I cannot bear to look at his face, when his mother judges me for my pagan practices, and when I no longer choose to enjoy the company of my present. I know just about everyone here, but that never really matters. I have found that I experience the most joy when I can share stories with a newcomer, a traveler, a passerby; then I am without limits.

*Where/when were you born? Who are/were your parents? What do/did they do for a living?
How do/did they feel about that? Were they happy? How do/did you get along with your
parents?*

I was born on January 7, 1891, in Notasulga, Alabama. However, I refer to Eatonville, Florida as my home. Eatonville was an all-black town near Orlando, Florida. Growing up, I was not aware that being black was a disadvantage; in Eatonville, it was a requirement. I am the youngest of five children and the furthest from being the favorite child of my father John Hurston, who grew up as a plantation sharecropper. He made his living as a carpenter, but he was a Baptist Preacher and the mayor of Eatonville. My mother, Lucy Potts, was a schoolteacher, but after the children came, she just stayed home and taught us until we passed her level of understanding. I believe my father was happy when he was preaching or telling me what to do. I believe he felt the most at home in that role. My mother was always encouraging the family. Even when my father and my grandmother would try to stifle my curiosity, my mother would always push me to “jump at de sun”(Speak 8). I like to believe I did.

I was a temperamental child, experiencing the high and lows of my personality on a regular basis. I often found solace in playing outdoors for hours, forsaking the comforts of my tidy home and instead opting for my boundless backyard and favorite tree. One of my favorite things to do as a child was to sit outside until I saw some travelers coming my way. I would then run to the edge of the street and flag them down. When they stopped, I engaged them in insightful conversation, hoping they would be charmed enough to let me ride along with them on their adventure. I never got further than the end of the street, but the excitement of possibility always carried me over until the next passerby came.

The second best thing to do was to run over to the store for my mother. Not because I was concerned with the list of “very important essentials” she entrusted me with, but because I hungered for the adventure I always found at Joe Clark’s store. There was always a group of older men sitting around swapping lies. My mother was not fond of me listening to such raucous speech and always advised me to hurry home, but that didn’t stop my feet from dragging or my ears from perking up.

In school I was always a standout pupil. My teacher would often call on students to read a passage aloud. One day the school had some visitors from up north. These people were not Negroes and had come to see an all-Negro school in an all-Negro town. I’ll never forget their faces. I had never seen women so delighted that such a thing exists. When it was my time to read, the visitors were so impressed, they let me read the remainder of the passage and invited me over to their hotel for more reading. My passion for words and experiences carried me along through grade school to Howard University, where I realized my gift for writing fiction. It was this passion that led me, under the leadership of Franz Boas, the Father of American Anthropology, to research folk tales from my hometown.

What do you do in life? Do you enjoy what you do? Are you good at it?

I am equally the slave and proprietor of the curiosities of life. I have spent my life working to fund my personal endeavors. I have risked my life and conquered deaths to tell the story, but the risks I take are not solely for my own gain. I research and explore for the sake of the human experience. Recently, I traveled to Jamaica to study the genealogy of the Moors, descendants of slaves. Even there I found the women were not treated with the same respect as their male counterparts. I was astounded. It amazes me that we Americans put so much effort into

distinguishing ourselves with race and class, and the truth is we all have the same problems. The very first time I traveled to collect folk tales, I returned with my heart lower than my knees. I could not believe I had returned void. I soon learned that my approach needed tweaking. I thought surely coming home would be just that, a homecoming, a welcomed receiving of my presence. I knew collecting stories would not be problematic. The only issue was I had been gone too long. I spoke like my colleagues and friends at Howard and Columbia, not like a girl from Florida. My proper and polite requests were met with proper and polite rejections. “No, I’ve never heard of anything like that.” “Maybe you should try the next town?” I was so disappointed in myself and ashamed to face my advisor. However, it was possibly the best thing that could have ever happened to me. After licking my wounds, I redirected myself and emerged fresh and new. How so? What did she do differently? I was able to go back to my hometown and record enough research that made my first attempt shrivel and die. Since then, I have conducted fieldwork in several states, and this year I was published, “Hoodoo in America,” in the *Journal of American Folklore*.

What is your philosophical/religious background and/preference? Do you believe in God or gods? Spirit? Force? Do you practice a religion?

I was raised the daughter of a Baptist preacher, and my mother was the superintendent of the Sunday school. As a child, I remember hearing the word of God preached at home and from the pulpit, and it sounded glorious. Most people see church as a scary thing; racked with guilt, they let themselves be convicted on the inside. I enjoy the high drama of the church ritual. I remember my father, with the voice of a bear, would preach until all the sinners had made their way to the altar. Then he would get real quiet and whisper a song. It always started with him leading the

choir, and they, like a Greek chorus, would back him up and lead the congregation in an all-out revival. My favorite part of church was at the very end when the “newfound” brothers and sisters would come up and tell the story of how they found God or how we say it, “how they got over”. Every Sunday, different members would come up and share the same story with newfound excitement and amazement. It always tickled me how some would tell the story wrong and then try to cover it up and make it right. Yes, everyone finds God their own way but, there are some milestones you’ve got to mention. Even more bewildering was how the older members of the church would act as though this was the first time they had heard such a thing.

I enjoyed attending the high drama procession and even more so the religious ceremonies, especially the ones I actively participated in. I remember one day I approached my father and his colleague about a concern I had about the faith. Mainly, if God hated to send his son Jesus to die and Jesus didn’t want to die, then why didn’t God make it so that Jesus didn’t have to die? And if Jesus died for our sins, why is it we can’t breathe without sinning? And if he died so we don’t have to, then why all the funerals? Clearly somebody’s dying. I was sure my father had been bamboozled and would be ever so grateful to his little one for pointing out this very pertinent information. Sorry for me, he was not thrilled, and after he and his friend set me straight, I had no answers and knew not to ask another question. Since then, I’ve been afraid to admit my musty cloud of doubt to anyone, not even my friends because then I would have no one. I kept it secret all these years, going through the motions but on the inside no feelings at all about God. Not the kind you’re supposed to have. Now that I am older and have studied the religions of other cultures, I realize it is all the same, except with different circumstances.

I see religion as a great comfort to those who need it, and I would not deny anyone the opportunity of the experience. I, however, think it sacrilegious for me to bow down on my knees

and pray to a God who has already taken the time to make a plan for the world and all its inhabitants. Far be it from me to think that He would change His plans to accommodate little of me. And so I do not pray. Instead, I rely on the good sense and the will “the powers that be”, have already granted me. I am responsible for everything I do and take full ownership of it and the repercussions. I am now the same as I was when I first asked my father about God, in a gray musty fog.

What is your societal level? What are your political beliefs or affiliations?

I do not subscribe to class, racial prejudice, or the constraints of gross generalization. It is not becoming of me, or the wearer of such a garment. It is useless for me to point blame or praise at an entire race for the actions of an individual. There was a time when I concerned myself with the race agenda, solidarity and consciousness, but that time has passed. Why should I be proud of something I had no part in deciding? Race is simply a general classification of physical characteristics. There is nothing to be learned about the character of the person from such shallow labels. And so I decided, in order to have “Race Pride” I had to have the shame that goes along with it. Why shouldn't I revel in the spirit of human achievement when it is coincidental that the victor is white or black? There is no legitimate reason and so I do. “Racial Consciousness” is more detrimental to the world than terrorism and I choose not to lift it up.

Movement and Physicality

How old are you now? Physical Characteristics?

I am 40 years old, but no one knows that. Shh. I look much younger than I am, and I never tell my real age. I have lied about it so much that on occasion I forget my real birthday. I

am in ideal shape in my opinion. I have been eating well and learning recipes from Herbert's mother when we are cordial, which is not always.

I sometimes appear heavier, but I believe that putting on extra pounds is good for the soul. I am a solid woman, attractive and full-figured. My skin is almond brown and radiant in the summers. Today I am wearing a dress made of man-made fibers. It is peach with purple silk trim and I am also wearing a tan sun hat with green trim. I am barefoot but that's because I was chasing an old dog in the street. He stole something that didn't belong to him. When I'm not wearing my hat, my hair is pinned back loosely with a few soft curls framing my face. Always dressed to impress, I am known for my style and the flourish of my hat or flowery embellishment on my head. I love to wear dresses and sun hats, but I am famous for wearing men's trousers; they are a favorite of mine.

My face is full of joy and I am usually smiling. As a child, I was temperamental, but with age comes grace. Now, I am proud to say that I am even more of a fiery spirit than I was then, and rightly so. I know much more and have seen even more. My outgoing personality and charm have helped me gain many rewards in life, and the most valued of these are my friends. It is often said that when I enter a room I can snatch the attention of every person, man or woman, hold them hostage, and then have to beg them to leave. I won't deny this; it is a gift. I generally enjoy long walks where I am alone with my thoughts and in the company of natural elements. I've learned that if you walk enough, you're bound to find something, even if you're not looking. This can be a blessing or a curse.

CHAPTER FIVE: PERFORMANCE PROJECT AND STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS

Halimuhfack began with three tales, “Why the Waves Have White Caps”, “The Neatest Trick” and “The Woman and The Devil.” I selected these tales initially because they were the three that amused me most, though in different ways. “Why the Waves Have White Caps” is a mythical story that pits the Wind and the Water as natural enemies. “The Neatest Trick” is a story of a man with three competitive daughters who subject themselves to an array of humorous obstacles to win their fathers’ affection. The last tale, “The Woman and The Devil,” is a tale of trickery, love and The Devil.

When I tested the first draft of the script in front of a petite trial audience, the assortment of tales was satisfying and intriguing; however, transitioning from one tale to the next proved to be confusing and perhaps required too much of the audience. If this were performed with an ensemble or even one other actor, it would be more beneficial. The additional actor or ensemble member would provide a very distinct division between tales. Trying to solve the problem, I suggested using folk songs as transitions between the tales to help eliminate any audience confusion. However, It seemed that, the audience would still be either confused or taxed from the presence of one actor performing and from the fragmented nature of the action. Presented with this dilemma, I decided I would focus on one tale. I resolved that “The Woman and The Devil,” more than “Why the Waves Have White Caps” or “The Neatest Trick,” provided me an opportunity to experiment with place, character and song.

The second draft began with just the tale and songs. Since I was no longer using all three tales, I could add more songs to “The Woman and The Devil” and enhance the story telling

experience. I was surprised to find that incorporating the songs with the tale not only worked, but also came with ease and was one of the most satisfying experiences of this process. Yay! It was as though the songs were meant to be a part of the original oration. After a few rehearsals, it came to my attention that there was something missing from the piece. Mostly, I felt wildly awkward about just walking onto a stage and telling a folk tale. Who was I going to be; a griot, the cultural guardian and keeper of the people's history? A nameless storyteller, or myself? I managed to recommend every type of person I could think of besides the one who was echoing in my mind- Zora. The thought chilled me to my very core. There was no way I could capture the magnitude of this woman. It was there in my fear I realized it was what I had to do. ☺

I fought with the idea as much as I could until I finally allowed myself to be bullied. At first, I didn't like the thought of portraying Zora, because it meant I had to speak as Zora. Ethically, I felt it was wrong to put words in the mouth of the deceased. I felt it would be disrespectful. I searched her autobiography, documentaries and writings and wrote out quotes I connected with the themes in the text. Then I organized the quotes so they followed one train of thought and seemingly appeared to be a monologue. This became Zora's introduction. It provides the audience the opportunity to see Zora simply as a woman and, most importantly, in her own words.

Zora and The Tale

Featuring Zora as the main character opens a plethora of information to be used as backstory for the piece. For instance, the exposition is loosely based on facts from Zora's life. In order to understand why Zora is revealing such candid details about her life, it's important to know where she is and to whom she is speaking. I set the scene in a bar. This is a familiar spot

for Zora, and she wastes no time striking up a conversation. After she entertains her acquaintances, Zora is asked about her greatest adventure. She is surprised, not by the question, but by the sincerity of her answer. A recent argument with her husband, Herbert Sheene, has caused her to reflect on the sacrifices she's made in her life, the biggest sacrifice being Zora's relationship with Percival Punter, the greatest love of her life. She answers the question by saying, "I have loved." Zora expounds upon the depths of their love and reveals why she chose to leave Percival: "It was that I had this thing clawing inside me that must be said...it gives you no choice... There is no agony like bearing an untold story inside you" (*Dust Tracks* 176). Despite the love she shared with Percival, this quote reveals how Zora's love of her life's work would ultimately win. It was her belief she was equally the slave and proprietor of the curiosities of life.

The first line of the tale reveals the initial situation: "There was a man and a woman who always lived lovin'"(*Every Tongue* 51). However, Zora is not ready to tell the story. She slips into her inner thoughts about love with her own commentary: "Love makes your soul crawl out of its hiding place" (*Dust Tracks* 204). This was one quote that at first did not seem to fit, but I was adamant about using it, and it later became the inspiration for the title of my piece. Zora is in the process of admitting her great loss, and instead of following the impulse to be honest with herself and the listener, she escapes to her hiding place. That hiding place is telling tales, and in this case, the story of "The Woman and The Devil." Zora issues a warning to the audience: you can run and hide, but love *will* find you and make you stand in its presence. Using that quote also presented another opportunity for Zora as a woman to interact with the audience in a way that she cannot while telling the tale. It is a warning to the audience as well as an admission on her part.

The tale resumes, and the inciting incident is revealed: “Devil didn’t like that so he decided to break them up” (*Every Tongue* 51). This is the first time we see direct conflict between the characters of the tale, and this is what leads to the climax of the piece. The Devil is unsuccessful in his efforts and almost gives up until he discovers The Woman, who accepts his challenge to break up the couple. The Man and The Wife unsuspectingly fall prey to The Woman’s devices and reach the climax of the piece when they fight. The Woman exits with a victory song, bringing resolution. Does she break them up? How does it end?

Folk songs

The folk songs used in *Halimuhfack* were selected from the book, *Speak, So You Can Speak Again: The Life of Zora Neale Hurston*, written by Zora’s niece, Lucy Ann Hurston. Listening to each song on the CD that accompanied the book was delightful, and I wish they all could have been incorporated in the show. I was surprised when I heard Zora speak and even more so when I heard her sing. I was entranced also by the lyrics of the songs. I felt like a young kid in the 1980s must have felt listening to a record of Red Fox or Richard Pryor. I knew I would be satisfied but was not aware of the depth to which I would be surprised. In the songs, I found the language was coarser than in the tales I chose; however, they did mimic the tone of the other tales included in *Every Tongue Got to Confess*.

The selection of pieces to use was dictated by the tale and not exclusively according to my taste. The songs are not included merely to entertain the audience or to affect the mood of the piece, though this is inevitable. The folk songs were interpolated to act as extensions of the characters and to progress the action of the text. For example, the first time the song “Uncle Bud” is sung, it acts as a theme for the Devil.

Uncle Bud's a man,

A man like this

Can't get a woman

Gonna use his fist

Uncle Bud x5

O go in to town gonna hurry back

Uncle bud's got sumthin' I sure do like

Uncle Bud x5

(Speak, Audio Companion)

The lyrics describe a forceful man who takes advantage of others for his own gain, all the while remaining appealing. After having no success with the couple, The Devil, very sad sings a mournful song to draw sympathy from a seemingly concerned individual. He sings,

Weep like a willow

Morn just like a dove X2

Oh I been down so long,

Down don't worry me

(Speak, Audio Companion)

Sung like a negro hymn, The Devil uses this song to express that he has nearly given up all hope of breaking up the young couple.

The first time we see The Wife, she is in her element, "De woman was sweepin' and singing"

(Every Tongue 51)

Mama don want no peas 'n no rice

No coconut oil

No coconut oil x2

Mama don want no peas 'n no rice no coconut oil

All she want is Whiskey, Brandy ALL the time!

(Speak, Audio Companion)

I chose this song because it was upbeat and it seemed to add to The Wife's already punchy personality. It's appropriate because her husband is at work, she's in her own home and no one is around. Or so she thinks.

The Wife is a wise woman, so when The Woman begins to drop hints of The Man's indiscretion her response is to simply ignore the foolish girl. The Wife knows this Woman is up to no good and so this gave me the opportunity to include this funny song, "Tampa".

Oh I'm so glad that the law was passed

The women in Tampa got to wash they ass x2

I do not want it in here.

It's the perfect fit because it allows The Wife to maintain her cool all the while she's letting the audience and The Woman know exactly how she feels about her and her word of advice. The blocking for this song shows The Wife returning to her chores and even making eye contact with the audience as if to say, "Do you believe this?"

Another instance where the folk song progresses the plot is after The Woman and The Wife have had their altercation. The Wife stands firm with faith in her husband and their relationship and textually never lets on that the "warning" from The Woman is actually convincing. It isn't until The Man returns home that we find out she is convinced he is untrustworthy. Adding the "Crow Dance" song allows The Wife to reflect on the words of the

warning. However, The Wife's intention is ambiguous; she has the option to either show the audience she is worried or to use the song as a warning to her husband.

Oh my mama come feed that crow

See how he flies x2

This crow, this crow

Gonna fly tonight

See how he flies x2

“Uncle Bud” is sung a second time to set the scene of the field where The Man works.

Oh who in the hell

Uh god damn nation

Shit dis terd on ta pa's plantation

Uncle Bud x5

Oh Little cat big cat little bitty kitten

Gonna whoop dat tail less he don't stop shitten

Uncle Bud x5

(Speak, Audio Companion)

These lyrics transition the audience to the next scene. The Woman is leaving the house of the couple to find The Man in the field. The blocking in this particular moment is stylized to resemble field plowing and aids in setting the tone. During this time period, it was normal for the men to use coarse language in the work place among other men. The lyrics are amusing and would provide entertainment for the men while they worked. The folk songs were a part of Hurston's journey to collect the treasures of the South, and their presence is justified in *Halimuhfack*.

The last song in the piece is “Halimuhfack.” I always felt it had to be included in the piece, but I wasn’t sure how. It helps The Woman celebrate her victory. She accepted The Devil’s challenge and won. This song describes The Woman perfectly, “some folks call me a toe low shaker,” she puts it out there that she may or may not have a bad reputation, and then she luxuriates in the glory of her wickedness, “That’s a dog gone lie I’m a back bone breaker!”

Style: Language and Rhythm

Halimuhfack is pure storytelling. The storyteller invites the listener into her world by merely showing up and speaking. There are no props or scenery to create the world of *Halimuhfack*; in my arsenal, there are simply words. These words, as written, are responsible for transporting the audience to 1931 Florida. One of the greatest attributes of Hurston’s work is that she not only collected the folk tales but also protected the integrity of her research, the words of the people. The language of *Halimuhfack* is classified as black dialect of the rural South. This dialect creates a more relaxed mood than, for example, the meter of Shakespeare and informs the audience of the type of person they are listening to. It may inform them of place, the company of the person, or speaking the class, socioeconomic status or education of the character.

The rhythm of *Halimuhfack* can be found in the southern rural dialect. One characteristic is the elimination of end consonants; for example, the word “singing” is replaced with “singin”.

Another common theme is the replacing of percussive end consonants. A closer look at the text, The Use and Training of the Human Voice by voice specialist Aurthur Lessac, will help to identify these sounds. Lessac’s training encourages the association of consonants to musical instruments. He refers to those letters as “The Consonant Orchestra”. Just as the orchestra is made of sections, so is The Consonant Orchestra. The consonants “p”, “t”, “k”, “b”, “d”, and “g”

are all percussive consonants and therefore they are all associated with an instrument of the percussive section. “D” is the tympani drumbeat, and “k” is the tom tom drumbeat. Consonant blends, these are two consonants that blend together to create a new sound, are also associated with an instrument. The consonant blend “ts”, normally seen as “t’s” in words like that’s, bets, or limits, is associated with the high hat cymbal (*Use and Training*70).

In this case instead of eliminating the end consonant altogether, the speaker, pronounces the word “That’s” as “Thass.” Other substitutions include “d” for “th” or “k” for “c.” Double negatives are also a popular motif, as in “nobody won’t have to tell you nothing.” A rare example of call and response is found in the argument between The Man and The Wife:

*He says, “Looka heah, ole nigger ’oman, whut da hell’s de matter wid you?
She up and stole ’im, “Looka here, Mr. Nappy-chin, if you wanta know, I kin knock some uh dat
hell out you anytime you git too high.”
He said, “I kin make out without you any day in the week. Gwan hit me! I dare you!”(Every
Tongue 53)*

It is common to overlook this back and forth; however, the give and take that is inherent between the couple is reminiscent of children on a schoolyard: “Your head looks like a raisin.” “Oh yeah, well your face looks like a smashed up moon pie!” “Oh yeah?” “Yeah!” However, the most prominent characteristic used to create the rhythm of the southern rural dialect is the abundance of monosyllabic words and the way they are linked together to create new sounds: “You better git outa yo’ flowery beds uh ease, an put on yo’ flying trapeze, cause yo’ red ball uh simmons done carried yo’ flame uh flapperation tuh yo high tall mountain” (xix).

When I began constructing *Halimuhfack*, I had three pieces in mind. As the work evolved, I met each discovery with the mission of maintaining the story's integrity and at the same time allowing myself the freedom to use my imagination and aspects of Hurston's to fill in the gaps. As Zora had done in her own research, I intended to protect the authenticity of her life and her words. The greatest influence on the dramatic organization and structure of *Halimuhfack* was to remain rooted in Hurston's history, and subsequently in the style and dialect of southern folklore.

CHAPTER SIX: JOURNAL THE ROAD TO HALIMUHFAK

11-1-10

Today was the first time I was able to meet with Mik and Rachel, the heads of my artistic team. Mik will be serving as dramaturg for *Halimuhfack* and Rachel as Director. The goal of today was to prepare the soil for tilling, to talk through major ideas and to discuss blocking concerns.

We began by reading through the script, after which we talked about my general notion of the piece. We talked about the type of work I wanted to create. I shared with them my passion, my purpose in pursuing *this* type of work, *these* stories and *these* songs. We also talked about how they interpreted the script and what they hope to bring to this project.

The script was submitted long over a week ago, so that sensitive state of vulnerability I was anticipating was not present. Oddly enough, there was a numb and tranquil, almost sobering distance from the piece. *This was not a bad thing; I think subconsciously I was separating myself from the piece so I could be open to possibility.*

The read-through is common practice in a rehearsal process but may be perceived as a throw-away. In my case, it was the first time my creative team heard the text. This reading gave me, the actor, the challenge of attacking my impulses and earnestly seeking out my objectives and goals. This rehearsal tests my planning and initial ideas. It's a chance to see if Mik and Rachel hear what I hear, in the text and in the music: an opportunity to confront the work with others present for the first time. Hearing laughter, response, silence, grief, exclamation or lack

thereof, Big Day! And for Mik and Rachel, they get to make new or reinforce their judgments. It will also reveal holes, weak spots, etc.

Here's the gist of what we found:

Why the Waves Have Caps- This story is mystical and beautiful. Its characters, the water and the wind, are magnificent, larger-than-life forces of nature personified by bitter, petty female friends, women who argue over whose children are better. It gives a humanistic view of larger-than-life entities in a practical civil dispute. The expected end is that their mindless rivalry is the cause of a naturally occurring environmental happening: "Why the Waves Have White Caps".

The Story of the Man and the Woman- With this piece, I was able to use the largest amount of songs with the story and it not only made sense, it furthered the story line. Unlike "Why the Waves Have White Caps", where the story is so short, adding a song might build up too much anticipation; ultimately, the story lacks the depth to see that expectation through. I thought it would be a let down to the audience to have the conclusion come so soon. *The Story of the Man and the Woman* tells the story of pure love and reveals what happens when you let evil infiltrate your mind, home, family relationships, and ultimately your life. The beauty in this story is that the source of "evil", the villain, never changes.

"The Neatest Trick" - This story is one of my favorites whether we use it or not- it was one of the few that actually made me laugh out loud while reading. It shows a familial love between a father and his daughters as they attempt to win his love. Its characters boast their talents and parade around trying to sway their father to favor them.

We talked about the advantage of using three stories: it gives me a chance to actually tell stories, which is the point. I wondered if one story would fill the time, and if a single story

would be enough to maintain the audience's attention. Then we began to weigh the cons. All three stories took about 15 minutes just to read aloud. How do they connect? They are women, they are strong women, they all have a common bond, but what is it? Will the audience be able to understand the link or is this one of those rehearsal room connections that won't read?

Ultimately, we discovered that the three pieces really don't fit together. I selected these three because they showed different aspects of the black family during this time. Zora's work celebrated tongue and diversity and African-isms, but her work never made comment on the sadness of the race problem; instead she chose to highlight the things that make us the same and that can be found in the characters' relational awareness.

I do feel it's important, as a woman, to show different types of women at different rites of passage, and, as a black woman, to represent the race and not create a minstrel show. This is a bit of a soap box for me, but theatre is meant to show life representing life and to be didactic, and my selective choice process wasn't going to be tailored just for entertainment purposes. Since the stories did not fit together, we discussed what we found to be common themes or perhaps a through line.

The characters:

The Woman who tricks the Devil-

The woman who stands up to her husband

The women who bicker about their children

The three daughters in competition with each other.

Themes: Competition, love, rivalry in young and old, loss, lesson, moral, family, hate, evil, deception, celebration - a perfect show!

Still, there was the idea that the audience wouldn't be able to follow me. That their attention span would not stretch to allow me to create each of these worlds, as a person isolated from them all.

The Story of the Man and the Woman is the strongest of the three. The story is clear: it is a decent length, there are several locations; it has several characters and is well-crafted with the music I've chosen. It seems to be the stand-out piece. This is my first major cut. I feel relieved and I am content. Now I no longer have to worry about whether the audience will understand that I'm telling a different story. It's all the same and offers less chances for them to get lost.

Music: After our discussion, I shared the folk songs from Hurston's collection. A great time was had by all. Mik and Rachel seemed to be eager and excited about working on this piece! There was wonderful discussion on whether I would embody Zora or a grio-type character; one who is the keeper of these stories, or if I would just be myself. Truthfully, I was, am and will be terrified by the idea of playing Zora. That's when Mik looked at me and said, "Then you should do it."

11-12-10

Since I'd made a large cut to the script, it was time to hear the piece again and to see if one story was substantial and worth telling. Actually, reading the one story was absolutely boring and that's to be expected; a *storyteller* shouldn't be *reading* anything. So I got up on my feet and began to move around, acquainting my body with this space in this time and reminding myself that movement is good, that it's actually required. After activating the words in context, we decided to work on our first chunk. There is no planned blocking; for this process, it's

important that I, the storyteller, am in control of my body and feel free to move where ever I feel inclined. I won't use every opportunity, but it's important that I feel like I can.

We began to discuss who Zora was as a woman – storyteller, lover, etc. -- and how that could affect the piece. My goal was to present a complete picture of Zora; the woman, a philanthropist, adventurer, writer and lover. I realized that since I was without a full cast or set, and am simply portraying storytelling in its minimalist form, I, as the actor needed to come up with a way to introduce my character, Zora, as all of these things. In my mind, it was extremely difficult for me to picture this. It felt like a forced idea. It was an unnatural, inconvenient and campy way to start the tale. It was not organic, not the style of the piece, not me and not Zora. So we spent a lot of time talking about this idea; mostly, it was Rachel trying to explain to me what she meant and me not really listening because I was against writing a monologue for Zora.

It didn't make sense until I started looking at what we were referring to as an intro in a different way. I realized Zora didn't have to be funny at the top of the piece because she's funny later. You don't write her jokes, it's her tongue that whips a phrase and that's what makes it funny. Before I realized this, I started writing this woman who could blow away a room with everything she said, so I ended up with a very stereotypical sassy black woman who spoke in phrases. I wrote things you haven't quite heard before but that contain some degree of familiarity to them. It was like writing choreography without really doing the moves, like someone who knows the steps without really capturing the essence of the dance.

I remember I typed for what seemed like an hour but only filled a page before barely grazing the third line of the second page. I wrote a spicy woman, out to have a good time and lay out anyone who got in the way, but Zora wasn't a bully. And though she ran her mouth, she wasn't blowing hot air, so the first draft didn't feel right. I didn't want to write this in the first

place. I remember when Rachel asked me to write, and thought, “*Look I’m already having issues simply portraying the woman; it frightens me. But now you want me to put words in her mouth? I can’t do it. It’s unethical, it’s not right.*”

That didn’t feel right, so I turned to a random writing spurt, a journal-like entry from over a month ago when I was reading her biography and writing that part of my thesis. It was completely random; I had an urge to write that I really could not resist: “*You know that unseen force from somewhere in space that commands you to write in the first place... You take up the pen and you write what you’re told.(Dust Tracks 173)*”

I left it alone for a few days, then came back and discovered that perhaps I needed to hear Zora to write her. I needed to read her words. I searched for famous quotes of hers, re-read parts of her autobiography, and watched a documentary on her life that directly mentioned Percival, the love of her life. From there, I compiled a list of things that spoke to me and to this part of the piece and what I felt would be appropriate. If it had anything to do with a theme of love, time, distance, space, loss, philosophical outlook on life and meaning, or even it was a quick phrase to remedy a sad face, I wrote it down. I disconnected phrases, cutting and pasting her words, putting them in order and rearranging them again. The result was something I’ve never been more proud of, a fusion of her words to string as a dialogue, her talking to a man about *the* man.

I let it simmer for a few days because I felt very sensitive about it and was excited to see if Mik and Rachel would be as excited; after all, they were the ones who understood my interpolation of the songs into the piece. Maybe they would understand these monologues? (See Appendix)

What was most interesting about this process and what validated my input today was that my voice is incredibly important to this process. As we went back and forth debating on which

piece should go where, I thought I'd give them the pieces and then let them decide what was best. I don't know why, as an artist, I wait for approval. I sometimes want someone else to tell me it's ok and that my thoughts are valid. Our end result today was that Zora needed to tell her story and somehow intertwine it with the tale told by the storyteller.

11-14-10

Goals:

- Find transition between introduction and storyteller
- Identify small moments
- Distinguish the difference between Zora the woman and Zora the storyteller
- *Halimuhfack*- what's the real meaning behind why this is the name of your piece and how does that truth resonate throughout the piece or affect your decision making process?

Evaluation:

After getting on my feet for some time and reintroducing myself to the space and the material in front of an audience, albeit two people, I found I was becoming Zora the storyteller as soon as I started the piece. I was playing a very showy Zora while telling her own personal story. In most cases, when thinking of Zora and the type of person she was, this is not out of her norm. In fact, it is indicative of her personality. However, because of the vision I had for this piece, it is inappropriate. Zora was the type who could effortlessly walk into a room and gather the heart of any person; her aura lit up a room and her stories magnified it. The key component

here is her lack of effort. She didn't have to try to make people love her; they just did, or else they hated her! I was trying too hard to win the room and was using "to recruit" as an active verb in my work but not an active goal in mind. In order to create the right tone to begin the piece, I played and experimented with different objectives to start the piece:

To confess

To confirm

To defend

Of the three, I chose what seemed most honest, to confess truthfully and defend my honor as a woman with heart. After all, how would it look to portray Zora, a woman of tales and stories, without her having lived a full life herself?

Questions to answer:

- When is her guard down?
- Who is she speaking to?
- Who did it remind her of?
- What propelled her to begin telling the story?

11-15-10

Last time, we realized that I need to have a question to cue me into the world where I would say I have loved... what are we walking in on? What's the situation? At first, I was convinced she was defending herself against this man who told her there was no way she could

have loved a man because no man would be fool enough to love her back. However, after doing it a couple of times, I felt that response was too aggressive and ; it was not the way I wanted to start the piece.

I still felt compelled by the objective “to defend,” but I didn’t think it would have made sense to the audience and they would have felt accosted. So, I asked Rachel to begin cuing me with a question that came from some dialogue. Last week we were talking about what was happening in the scene the moment before that moment. I told her I felt Zora was defending herself against this man, as I mentioned before, but over time the thought has grown and evolved into a conversation. I feel as though Zora is sharing her stories and adventures, impressing the people, and as she finishes her best story of the night, one listener asks, “Is that your greatest adventure?” When she replies “ naw”, the curious man insists , “Well, then if that wasn’t, then what was?” She answers, “I have loved.” ☺

11-16-10

Today I’ve had a lot of problems with my body. I feel a force and I feel the need to move. To tell the story I gotta move! I gotta move! The note Rachel has given me the most today is that I don’t need to move as much. As I learn this piece and embody the story, I am discovering that I am physically very responsive to the text. This is a good thing, but in order to differentiate between Zora the storyteller and Zora the woman, I need to present a sturdy, solid- grounded woman who is vulnerable and open and as a result escapes into her hiding place as the storyteller.

Either way, the note was not just that I am moving in the beginning, but also that too much movement during the story telling takes away from what I'm saying.

Questions:

How does she escape her reality and how does she deal with her own demons?

How does movement affect the transition of woman to storyteller?

How can I find Zora's power in stillness and the power of her voice?

11-17-10

Today I created specific movement to distinguish each character, using sensuality to define The Woman, a sprightly yet grounded energy for The Wife and a heavier and steady movement for The Man. I also worked on solidifying the voice of The Wife in their final conflict. I discovered that this moment did not call for a great deal of movement, reintegrating the power of stillness in storytelling.

Questions:

What distract and defrays my energy?

What can enhance my energy?

11-18-10

Today was the first run in the space. The rehearsal space was a lot bigger, and I spent a great deal of time mapping out the physical spaces each character occupies. I experimented with the direction travel in "Uncle Bud." Instead of traveling down stage and then back up, I

switched back to traveling across the stage parallel to the proscenium. This change makes it clearer that the field lives upstage left, and it does not invade the area occupied by the couple's house.

The space is a three-quarter thrust, and it is imperative I am able to play to the entire house. Somehow I felt lost in the space; my pacing was off, and so was my consciousness of movement.

11-19-10

Planning and strategy guided through the rehearsal process. It was time to let go allow myself to be free within my boundaries. It didn't matter if I was ready or not.

I remember waiting in the wing. Heart beating, skin warm, feet clammy and sticking to the floor. I knew I was nervous because my voice trembled. I was filled with a radiant energy. I remember trying to focus and channel that energy in to Zora, as we had in our acting studio. I tried to use it as her reaction to the question, "What has been your greatest adventure?" I remember the performance in small frames, glimpses.

I entered by making eye contact and connecting with the audience. Taking in and processing their facial expressions. The first time the timber of my voice changed, and they understood I was now a different character. I didn't transform at once, with each character it was different. Sometimes the voice came first and then the body settled. Other times I moved and sang to transition into my new character. When I began singing "Little Cat, Big Cat, Itty Bitty Kitty" I did not rush through as I had the day before.

My final turn after the Man and the Woman finished arguing back into the story teller did I land in the right place? Was I positioned in a way that I wasn't upstaging myself?

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

The idea for my thesis began with the life of Zora Neale Hurston and the constant personal struggle between the love of her life and the uncontrollable force that commanded her to write and to tell stories. The great cause of her life was to seek out and tell stories, tales that teach, remind, amuse and honor traditions of the rural south. I'd always been interested in folktales and as it is the crux of Hurston's work it provided the perfect source material for my thesis. I had no idea what was truly in store for me or what would manifest from my intrigues.

As the initial inspiration for this thesis, the biographical research of Hurston's life was the singular most successful component to my project. The details of Hurston's life not only enabled me to create an additional character, but it also helped shape the arch of *Halimuhfack*. The addition of Hurston as primary character contributed another element of artistry to *Halimuhfack*, the human experience.

Before I concluded that Hurston's biography would be the source of my exposition, I spent time writing narration, trying to create the text. I attempted to find her voice within myself. I spent time writing about the thoughts and personality traits we have in common. The material was not used; however, it proved to be an amazing exercise in character development, which helped me to portray a more authentic Hurston in *Halimuhfack*.

Creating *Halimuhfack* has been the summit of my academic career. I studied Hurston's life and the canon, and I am glad to say the outcome was successful. I was initially inspired to use Hurston as the subject of my thesis because of the lasting impression her legacy has left in Central Florida. I have lived in Orlando for seven years and hadn't, until now, truly understood the presence of Hurston's life. What I have sown has been merely time, money and brainpower;

however, what I have reaped has been an experience abundant with education, catharsis and validation. Work-shopping *Halimuhfack* caused me to face some inner truths I'd been hiding, burdens I've carried as an African American raised in Florida and, in turn, I hope that it will inspire another performer to do the same.

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