Sweat: The Exodus From Physical And Mental Enslavement To Emotional And Spiritual Liberation

2007

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SWEAT: THE EXODUS FROM PHYSICAL AND MENTAL ENSLAVEMENT TO EMOTIONAL AND SPIRITUAL LIBERATION

by

AQUEELAH KHALILAH ROBERSON
B.A., North Carolina Central University, 2004

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 the University of Central Florida Orlando, Florida

Spring Term
2007
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to showcase the importance of God-inspired Theatre and to manifest the transformative effects of living in accordance to the Word of God. In order to share my vision for theatre such as this, I will examine the biblical elements in Zora Neale Hurston’s short story *Sweat* (1926). I will write a stage adaptation of the story, while placing emphasis on the biblical lessons that can be used for God-inspired Theatre. When viewing the stage adaptation based on *Sweat*, the audience members will understand how God-inspired Theatre aims to help members of society utilize their gifts and abilities to assist others in achieving spiritual stability. The members of the audience will also be informed of my vision to use this piece to inspire others to embrace cultural awareness and sensitivity. This is my vision—helping others to walk in their God-ordained destiny.

With this in mind, I am using *Sweat* as a proposed play because it is closely related to the creation account as recorded in the Old Testament Book of Genesis. In this play, Adam and Eve are replaced with the characters Sykes and Delia Jones. The creation account is a very influential testimony because it is known throughout humanity. Its popularity is due to the fact that the Old Testament is the commencement of the Christian Bible. For those of the Jewish faith, the collection encompasses the Torah, the first five books of the bible—the law for everyday living—as well as the history of God’s promise to them. For Christians, the Old Testament is just as sacred, but they view its religious meaning as incomplete without the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ detailed in the New Testament. Also, Muslims trace their religious roots to some of the figures in the Old Testament although they deny the religious significance of the work as a whole. In essence, the Old Testament is crucial to
Western Civilization. This is why *Sweat* is so powerful. It takes an extremely familiar testimony and shares pertinent messages that help people to become productive members of society.

In order to show how effective *Sweat* is in helping others to live spirit-filled lives, I will use creative staging that will place the characters in the personal space of the audience members. I will achieve this by: having the actors enter and exit from the audience; allowing certain scenes to take place within the audience; and having the actors deliver some lines to various audience members. I feel that by making the audience a part of the production, it will cause them to see that they are not any different from the characters in the play. At some point in their lives, theatergoers have encountered—or been intimate with—an Adam, an Eve, a Sykes or a Delia. This will cause them to not see *Sweat* as just a play, but as a valuable life lesson, triggering self-examination and initiating renovated thinking that helps people to become culturally aware and spiritually sound.

It is imperative that the biblical messages in *Sweat* are conspicuous. Whereas the narrator normally describes Delia’s facial expression or feelings, I plan to write in scenes where her thoughts are audible. Some of her thoughts will include moments when she is praising and worshipping God. This is apparent because she starts to emerge as a woman of strength as the story progresses. Her relationship with God is cultivated on a daily basis. This is why she is able to tolerate her husband’s foolishness. Her husband, Sykes, does not commune with God. To demonstrate his lack of communion with God, I will stage him being resistant to her times of worship—as he normally is according to the narrator. Clearly, the marriage is unbalanced. One partner is trying to please God, and the other is trying to please self. This is not how God intended marriage to be. In the New Testament Book First Peter, it states in the third chapter and seventh verse “husbands are to dwell with them [wives] in understanding, giving honor to the
wife … being heirs together of the grace of life.” Showing the burdensome consequences of destructing God’s original design will pull on the hearts of audience members because they have encountered or known someone who is presently dealing with the consequences of this disobedient act.

I will further reiterate the need for living a spirit-filled life by using costumes, scenic devices, and lighting to convey the godly and ungodly character traits that are embodied within the story. Through the use of colors and patterns, I will project the internal state of the character as in relation to God’s instructions. I will work with a lighting designer in order to help convey the moods of the various scenes. The lighting techniques we choose will help to establish the thoughts and personalities of the characters. These feelings will transcend the minds of the audience and cause them to take the biblical messages into very deep consideration.

The actors are the final ingredients in making Sweat an awe-inspiring, informative piece. Words are what they are, what one perceives them to be, while on paper. It is the job of the actor to give life to these words, cause them to live in the atmosphere, and to make the character come alive. Until the actor embodies the very heart of a character, the message in God-inspired Theatre will not be able to come forth and propel audience members to have a spiritual awakening. This is why people cannot just read Sweat. They must see the trials and journeys in order to receive life-changing revelations from the testimonies within the play.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would first and foremost like to give thanks and honor to God. If it had not been for His love, grace, and mercy I don’t know where I would be. Through His son Jesus Christ He saved me, and by filling me with His Holy Spirit God constantly renews and restores me. You, Lord, have renovated my character and allowed me to emerge from the darkness into the marvelous, unaltering light. I shall serve and honor you with the sum of my being. Hallelujah!

To Ms. Vivian Wade, thank you for planting the seed of performance. You have made an indelible mark in my life. To the Department of Theatre at North Carolina Central University, thank you for taking the time to nurture my gifts and abilities.

To my chair, Lani Harris, thank you for standing by me until the end. Your invaluable support, dedication, and guidance helped me to—successfully—complete this project. I cannot thank you enough!! To my committee members, Dr. Valarie King and Anthony Major, your words of encouragement and service brought clarity to this project. You saw my heart! Thank You! To Julia Listengarten, thank you for taking the time to help me through this process. To the Department of Theatre at the University of Central Florida, thank you for making my learning experience an unforgettable one.

To the God Squad (Five Fold), Cal Brightmon, Robyn Davis, Ann Massey, and Evelyn Tyler, thank you for providing a shoulder for me to cry and lean on. You Rock! To Veronique McRae, thank you for reading my paper and play a zillion times, having my back, and making sure that I stay connected to the Father. You Rock, Buttercup! To Dr. Sylvester & Cynthia Robinson and the Love Fellowship Family, thank you for pushing me when I wanted to stop. Thanks for helping me to find freedom in God.
To my Grandma Mary and family, “We did it!” Whenever I needed you, you were there with open arms—including helping me write the music for my play! There are not enough words to express how I feel about you. I love you!! To LaKisha McDougald, Daisha Watson, and Mario Williams, thank you for being the best cheerleaders ever☺

To my sister, Keturah McCall, you inspired me to go to graduate school and follow my dreams. It was you who sacrificed your wants in order to see me complete my tenure at NCCU. You put your career on hold for me. What can I say? I can never thank you enough. I looked, look, and will continue to look up to you! You are awesome, Sugah, Sugah!

To my sister, Tonya McKoy, you made my transition to Orlando, Florida a smooth one! Oh, yeah! I will never forget our “pancake chats” on Saturday mornings. Thanks, Letha Anne!

Finally to my parents, Ezekial and Luberta Roberson, thank you. You have loved me unconditionally—that is not easy to do☺ I cannot thank you enough! You laid the foundation—helped me to erect my dreams into buildings of reality. I love you!
To my mother, Luberta Roberson, you have sacrificed—and continue to sacrifice—so much for me. Your sweat, tears, and words of wisdom have enabled me to reach this point. I am standing on your shoulders—a living manifestation of your prayers! I love you, Momma!
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER TWO: <em>MY SWEAT, MY TEARS, AND HIS GLORY</em></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER THREE: HIS WORD, HIS PURPOSE, AND OUR BEGINNING</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FOUR: AND GOD SAID</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who is Zora Neale Hurston?</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Plan</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FIVE: DELIA JONES: DRUMS, TAMBOURINES, AND PRAISES</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character Analysis</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delia and Adam</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER SIX: SYKES JONES: A DEAD MAN WALKING</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character Analysis</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sykes and Eve</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER SEVEN: THE GOOD, BAD &amp; UGLY</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER EIGHT: SYKES &amp; DELIA JONES’ HUMANISTIC EDEN: LIFE, DEATH, AND RESURRECTION</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER NINE: SET, COSTUMES, AND LIGHTS</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER TEN: AND LET THEIR BE LIGHT</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ELEVEN: CONCLUSION</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF REFERENCES</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Letter to Burroughs Mitchell Publishing ................................................................. 39
Figure 2: Second page of letter to her publisher .................................................................. 40
Figure 3: Hurston’s fishing trip ............................................................................................. 42
Figure 4: Hurston in the *Miami Herald* .............................................................................. 43
Figure 5: Hurston in Fort Pierce, Florida ............................................................................... 44
Figure 6: Untitled love poem ................................................................................................. 45
Figure 7: Home poem ............................................................................................................. 46
Figure 8: Hurston in her element ........................................................................................ 47
Figure 9: Proposed set .......................................................................................................... 71
Figure 10: George C. Wolfe’s *Spunk* .................................................................................. 72
Figure 11: Costume sketches for Delia .................................................................................. 73
Figure 12: Costume sketches for Bertha ............................................................................... 73
Figure 13: Costume sketch for Sykes .................................................................................... 74
Figure 14: Serpent ............................................................................................................... 75
Figure 15: Costume sketches for townsmen ......................................................................... 75
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

“Indeed, as I looked, the sinews and the flesh came upon them, and the skin covered them over: but there was no breath in them ... So I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army.”
Ezekiel 37:8, 10

The quilt of life is embedded with layers of obstacles, triumphs, and mysteries. Each panel possesses a distinctive personality and testimony that defines the various cultures that shape humanity. The textures are richly imbued by the cathartic experiences that stimulates one’s transformation; exiting the level of being and entering the doors of becoming. The aroma of faith and the sweat of motivation linger in the presence of the quilt. Love is what binds these panels together. Love is the source of the human existence that solidifies the challenges encountered as the insight needed to propel one to conquer holistic growth. In its totality, the quilt displays people whom have endured the loads of life with fortitude and determination. Each face, color conveys a testimony that allows the observer to vicariously experience portions of the journey; thus provoking an examination of self. Laden with wisdom and firm with hope, the quilt symbolizes the essence of the human experience.

This journey, the exodus from physical and mental enslavement to emotional and spiritual liberation is personified in God-inspired Theatre. God-inspired Theatre is theatre endeavoring to help members of society seize holistic growth; emerging into their God-ordained destinies as productive, culturally versed members of humanity. It calls for an amelioration of the traditional mindset and evokes a desire to fervently serve the Heavenly Father, Holy Spirit, and Jesus Christ through a spirit-directed lifestyle. The plays produced help to create an
atmosphere that gives birth to God-fearing men and women who are endowed with the ability to erect kingdom visions into buildings of reality.

This same radical spiritual movement is found in Zora Neale Hurston’s *Sweat (1926)*. This story displays a darker side of marriage in which the joined hearts have been severed, turning the once raging fire into a flowing stream of tearful nights and gloomy mornings. Dreams of a peaceful union have turned into faded memories and been placed in an attic of dead hope.

In *Sweat*, the reader comes face to face with the remorseless Sykes and worn Delia Jones. The couple has been married for fifteen years, but the power of cupid’s potion dwindled at a very early stage. Two months after they pledge their vows before God and man, Sykes beats Delia brutally, and the spirit of infidelity quickens his being like never before. He starts a string of affairs with various townswomen. His current mistress is Bertha, a heavyset outspoken woman who is not favored by many of the townspeople.

While Delia tolerates Sykes’ adulterous spirit, she stays at home doing “the white folks’ laundry” in order to earn a living. She has worked hard to purchase a home that Sykes desires to give to Bertha. In order to get rid of Delia, he capitalizes on her fear of snakes. He seizes a rattlesnake to scare her away, but the snake kills him instead.

This piece not only brings into fruition the consequences of evil, but it covers other pertinent issues as well. In this piece, Hurston sheds light on the failed humanistic Eden experienced by Sykes and Delia in comparison to the creation account recorded in the book of Genesis. The marriage of Sykes and Delia Jones started out nicely, but quickly turned into a ghastly situation. This closely parallels the creation story in that Adam and Eve were forced to leave the Garden of Eden, a God created utopia. Even though the absence of Adam and Eve’s
presence was a physical departure, Sykes and Delia experience a spiritual detachment. They did not attempt to restore their collapsed relationship.

Also, this piece showcases the burdensome consequences of restructuring the original design for the role of man (Adam) and woman (Eve) as God outlined in the Book of Genesis. Sykes does not utilize his ability to be a provider. Instead, it is his wife who furnishes the necessities needed for living. Sykes begrudges Delia’s independence, so he finds other ways to reaffirm his manhood. This is displayed in his somatic dominance over Delia. Sykes uses his physical superiority in an abusive manner by ferociously striking Delia into submission.

Perhaps a more interesting use of narrative is the serpent depicted as a catalyst for positive change rather than the symbol of evil. Hurston cleverly uses that which was labeled as evil and cunning to deliver Delia from her living nightmare. In the creation account one is able to define the serpent as the voice of darkness. By persuading Eve to eat from the tree and by her encouraging Adam to partake in this disobedient act, the serpent is the very creature that helped trigger hardship and pain for the human race. In *Sweat*, it is the serpent that functions as the solution to Delia’s problem by ending the life of her deleterious-spirited husband.

In my thesis, I plan to explore the detrimental roots in Sykes and Delia’s relationship while closely observing the details that point to the future demise of their humanistic Eden. By observing the origin and fall of their utopia, I will be able to compare and contrast it to the creation account recorded in the Book of Genesis.

In my thesis I plan to show how dismantling the original design that God intended for marriage can put unnecessary strain on a relationship, while hindering growth and productivity. God had specific assignments for the male and female that helped to bring order and structure. By disregarding these duties, chaos will inhabit the relationship.
In essence, my thesis will showcase that Zora Neale Hurston’s *Sweat* is a recollection of Adam and Eve’s journey, thus allowing the reader to receive a life-changing revelation. I will show how my stage adaptation will demonstrate that some destructive components in one’s journey are needed to produce lasting and effective change.

It is my hope that I will be able to educate and enrich, as well as entertain theatregoers by allowing them to disregard race and to focus on the many grave affairs that plague society. *Sweat* possesses an abundance of spiritual and emotional insight that can help others to see beyond troubled situations. It can encourage others to know their worth and, as Hurston’s mother frequently said, to “jump at the sun.”
CHAPTER TWO: MY SWEAT, MY TEARS, AND HIS GLORY

This is my adaptation of Zora Neale Hurston’s Sweat. This is not a finished product. It is still a work in progress. I was led by the Holy Spirit to write this adaptation. It serves as a reminder that God is supreme. He has the first and last word. Please read with an open heart as I endeavor—with God’s authority—to deliver the notice that the “prayers of the righteous availeth much” (James 5:16).
MY SWEAT, MY TEARS, HIS GLORY

A one-act drama

By Aqueelah Khalilah Roberson

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### CHARACTERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sykes Jones, M. 40s</td>
<td></td>
<td>Delia Jones’ husband. He works occasionally in Winter Park as a construction worker. He has a solid build. He is mean spirited yet has a charming manner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delia Jones, F. late 30s – early 40s</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sykes Jones’ wife. She takes in laundry from the residents of Winter Park. She is very spiritual, and an extremely hard worker. She is petite and shows signs of being a beauty in her former years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bertha Smith, F. mid 30s – late 30s</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sykes Jones’ mistress. She does not work and is heavyset with an annoying high pitched voice. She is very carefree, bold, and loves to have a good time. She is the opposite of Delia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe Clarke, M. 50s</td>
<td></td>
<td>He is the owner of the town store. He is a hard worker, well respected, and very wise. He has nice salt and pepper hair and believes in being neat in appearance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elijah Moseley, M. late 30s – 40s</td>
<td></td>
<td>A local townsmen. He has a jovial spirit. He works in Winter Park picking oranges. He is nice looking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walter Thomas, M. late 30s – 40s</td>
<td></td>
<td>A local townsmen. He has good work ethics and is usually bossed by his wife. He works in Winter Park as well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim Williams, M mid 40s</td>
<td></td>
<td>A local townsmen. He has fair work ethics and works in Maitland delivering fruit. He is not married.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age Range</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe Lindsay</td>
<td>M. mid 30s – 40s</td>
<td>He is a local. He has fair work ethics. He works in neighboring towns, delivering fruit. He is dating a local.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moss Smith</td>
<td>M. 40s</td>
<td>He is a local and has decent work ethics. He is heavyset and has a loving spirit.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SETTING:

The house of Sykes and Delia Jones and Joe Clarke’s store in Eatonville, Florida.

TIME:

1926

SCENE BREAKDOWN:

Scene 1: *Eden*, The backyard and kitchen of Sykes & Delia’s house, Sunday afternoon

Scene 2: *The Fall*, The backyard and kitchen of Sykes & Delia’s house, Sunday afternoon

Scene 3: *Spirit of David*, The kitchen of Sykes & Delia’s house, Monday evening

Scene 4: *The Trial*, The outside of Joe Clarke’s Store, Saturday high noon

Scene 5: *The Verdict*, The garden and backyard of Sykes & Delia’s house, Wednesday afternoon

Scene 6: *The Storm*, The kitchen of Sykes & Delia’s house, Thursday evening (2 weeks later)

Scene 7: *Affirmation*, The outside of Joe Clarke’s Store, Friday morning/noon

Scene 8: *The Beginning*, The house of Sykes & Delia Jones, Sunday evening
ACT ONE
Scene 1

AT RISE: Lights are up on Delia. She is in the kitchen on the floor sorting loads of laundry. A huge white hamper is behind her. She pulls clothes from the hamper and puts them into the various piles on the floor according to color. Once the clothes are sorted, she takes some of the piles to the wash station SL. She moves back and forth between the two wash stations in the yard SL and DSR. The SL wash station consists of a huge table of previously sorted clothing. The DSR wash station consists of a large wash bench, two huge galvanized tubs, wash soap, and a few other cleaning products. She is singing *This Little Light of Mine* while sorting the clothes. Occasionally, she stops and looks at the road as if checking for someone or something.

Sykes enters USL. He stands quietly on the side of the house so that Delia can’t see him. Sykes watches Delia intently. He has a huge grin on his face. He waits for Delia to return to her SL wash station for more clothes. He carefully tiptoes from the side of the house and prepares to meet Delia. Once Delia begins to take a basket of white clothing over to the next station, he sneaks up behind her, grabs her by the waist, and plants a wet kiss on her face.

**DELIA**

*She screams, jumps a little, and then she breaks into a sweet girlish giggle. Sykes tightens his grip and kisses her more. She basks in this shower of kisses for a moment, then quickly breaks loose, still giggling. Sykes, quit! What you doin’ sneakin’ up on me lak dat? Quit, Syke. This is all playful as he follows her to the DSR wash station still giving her sweet kisses. You knows Ah got tuh get mah work done.*

Sykes picks her up causing Delia to drop the basket of clothes. *She screams in delight. He kisses her.*

**SYKES**

*He is laughing uncontrollably. He, eventually, ends somewhere LCS. Course Ah knows it! He kisses her one more time. That’s how come Ah done it. You always workin’.*

My ‘oman needs tuh rest. *He put her down, takes her chin in his hand, and looks into her eyes. Um, um. You sho’ is fine! Delia blushes.*
DELIA
Oh, Syke. She blushes a little more and then Delia remembers the basket of clothes that she dropped earlier. Oh, Syke! Ah gots tuh get dese clothes up an’ put ‘em tuh soak. She goes to pick up the clothes. Sykes watches her, bending over picking up the clothes.

SYKES
Um, um, um! Lawdy, you sho’ is got one roast on you! He goes up behind her and slaps her playfully on her bottom.

DELIA
Syke, quit dat now. You know dat Ah gots tuh put dese clothes tuh soak.

SYKES
Come on, Delia. We had uh good time at de church house praisin’ Gawd – now heah yuh is workin’. Cain’t a man spend some time wid his’oman? He says this as he helps Delia to put the clothes in the basket. This is the Sabbath, Dee. Gawd wants you tuh rest. By now Delia is at the DSR wash station. Sykes is behind, kissing her lovingly on the neck.

DELIA
Um, Ah don’t knows what kind uh rest dat is. She gives a slight moan, but gets serious again. How can Ah git through by Sat’day if Ah don’t start on Sunday? Breaking away from him gently.

SYKES
What did da preacha say? He said dat you got tuh rest ‘n Gawd. Ah’m your husband, Dee. Rest ‘n me. Gawd, got me heah tuh watch out fuh you. She thinks for a moment and then opens her mouth to rebuttal. Sykes places his finger lovingly over her lips. Shhhh. In all things, Dee. He kisses her. Come on, Dee. Tell yuh what, Ah, help you finish heah – puttin’ dese tuh soak and then yuh can spend some time wid me. A huge smile comes over Delia’s face and she kisses him sweetly. Yes, Lawd! Tell me what tuh do wid dese. He is referring to the clothes at the SL wash station.

DELIA
Syke, if you can give me all da white ones, Ah can put em tuh soak now.

Sykes quickly collects all of the white clothes from the table and places them in the tub where Delia is DSR. She laughs at his burst of energy and starts singing, “This Little Light of Mine.” Sykes joins her as she sings. Sykes works fast. He starts to toss the clothes in the tubs, thinking that he is helping Delia to work faster.
DELIA (cont.)
Syke dat’s de wrong tub. Yuh jest give ‘em tuh me.

SYKES
Sorry, Dee. Ah wanna hurry up an’ finish. *He collects one more bundle from the SL wash station and carries them to Delia. He watches her add more cleaning solution.* Ah be so glad when you don’t haftuh wash dese white folks clothes no mo’.

DELIA
Sykes, please. We done talked ‘bout this time and ‘gin. You knows that Ah haftuh so dat we …

SYKES
Don’t even say it, Delia. Ah don’t wants it heah. Anyhow, Ah done promised Gawd when money git right, Ah ain’t gointer have it in mah house.

DELIA
Sykes, Ah jest tryin’ tuh help bes’ way Ah can.

SYKES
Delia, how yuh thinks Ah feel ‘bout mah wife cleanin’ up after white folks?! It don’t make uh man feel right. You knows dat Ah feels you should be home – not doin’ dis mess.

DELIA
Syke if Ah don’t – whut we gon’ do?

SYKES
Ah ‘pose tuh worry ‘bout dat, Delia. You gots tuh learn yuh place heah.

DELIA
What you mean learn mah … *She stops herself. Sykes has moved away. She inches away slowly.* Sykes. Sykes, les go rest. Ah got tuh git the clothes fuhm de kitchen. *Sykes doesn’t respond, but moves into the yard.* Sykes. Sykes, les go rest. Ah’l worry wid ‘em latah. *She goes up behind him and rubs his back and tugs his ear.* He doesn’t respond immediately, but the tugging on his ear eventually gets to him.

SYKES
*He looks at Delia. He sweeps her off of her feet. She gives a small sound of delight. He looks at the clothes once more.* Ah wanna git ‘way fuhm de house. Ah wanna tak you tuh de lake - wanna sit by the watah fuh a lil’ bit.
**DELIA**

Syke, snakes are down there an’ you knows how skeered Ah is of snakes.

**SYKES**

Ah ain’t gone let nothin’ happen tuh you, Dee. Nothin’ at all. *He is carrying her like a bride over the thresh hole of the marriage chamber. Delia kisses him and starts singing, he joins her. Lights fade.*

---

**Scene 2**

*Lights are up on Delia. She is in the kitchen on the floor sorting loads of laundry. A huge white hamper is behind her. She pulls clothes from the hamper and puts them into the various piles on the floor according to color. Once the clothes are sorted, she takes some of the piles to the wash station SL. She moves back and forth between the two wash stations in the yard SL and DSR. The SL wash station consists of a huge table of previously sorted clothing. The DSR wash station consists of a large wash bench, two huge galvanized tubs, wash soap, and a few other cleaning products. She is singing “This Little Light of Mine” mournfully while sorting the clothes. Occasionally, she stops and looks at the road as if checking for someone or something. Sykes enters USL. He stands quietly on the side of the house. Delia doesn’t see him. Sykes watches Delia intently. He has a huge grin on his face. He waits for Delia to return to her SL wash station for more clothes. He carefully tiptoes from the side of the house and prepares to meet Delia. Once Delia begins to take a basket of white clothing over to the next station, he sneaks up behind her and tosses a bullwhip across Delia’s shoulders.*

---

**DELIA**

She screams and drops the basket of clothing that she is carrying. My, Gawd! Sykes lets out an explosion of laughter. *Once she realizes it is Sykes, she catches her breath and fusses at him. Sykes, what you throw dat whip on me like dat? It ain’t no laufin’ mattah! You knowed it would skeer me – looks just like a snake, an’ yuh knows how skeered Ah is of snakes.*

She picks up the clothing that she just dropped, shakes them out, and places them back in the basket. *Mumbling all the while about Sykes’ foolish jokes and her fear of snakes.*

**SYKES**

He is laughing uncontrollably. Course Ah knowed it! *He is still laughing and unable to catch his breath.* That’s how come Ah done it. You look lak a fool hopin’ ’round ovah dat whip! *His laughter slightly explodes.* If you such a fool dat yuh got tuh have a fit ovah uh earth worm or uh string, Ah don’t keer how bad Ah skeer you. *He leans against the backdoor and tries to compose himself.* Dat wuz good tuh me! *Still laughing.*

**DELIA**

You ain’t got no business doin’ it. *Looking at the basket of clothing and then at Sykes still laughing.* It ain’t funny, Sykes! Gawd knows it’s a sin - uh sin! Some day Ah’m gointer drop dead fuhm some uh yo’ foolishness. *She begins to walk to the DSR wash station and stops.* ‘Nother thing, where yuh been wid mah rig? Sykes stops laughing and begins to
frown a little. Delia sees this and she continues to go to the wash station and carry on with her business. Ah feeds dat pony. He ain’t fuh you to be drivin’ wid no bull whip. You ain’t need no bull whip nether. He too small fuh dat. Ah need dat pony fuh mah work, Sykes. How kin Ah collfect mah washin’ if he ain’t right?

SYKES
You sho is one aggravatin’ nigger ‘oman! He stands up straight and glares at Delia preparing the basket of clothing for washing. Yo mouf is always open ‘bout somethin’! Tore open all de time! He watches Delia ignoring him. Ah done tole you time and ‘gin tuh keep ‘dem white folks’ clothes outa dis house. He steps down off of the steps.

She doesn’t respond to him. Delia continues with her work. Sykes goes into the house and kicks all of the clothes together again. Delia goes back into the house to get the remaining clothes. She starts to say something once she saw what Sykes had done, but she didn’t. He continues to glare at her while she resorts the clothes. She starts to go into the yard, but Sykes stands in her way. She calmly goes around him.

SYKES (cont.)
Holding the screen door open. Next time, Ah’m gointer kick ‘em outdoors. Ah doin’t wantuh haftuh say dat ‘gin. Delia continues working. He slams the door and yells. DO YUH HEAR ME?!

DELIA
She jumps a little. Ah ain’t fuh no fuss t’night Sykes. Ah just come fuhm takin’ sacrament at the church house. As she places some of the clothes in the tub to soak

SYKES
Yeah, yuh just come fuhm de church house on uh Sunday night, but heah you is gone tuh work on ‘dem clothes. You ain’t nothing but a hypocrite. Wanna holla tuh Gawd all night and day – I needcha, Gawd! Rain down on me, Gawd! Wash me, Gawd! He comes down the steps and makes his way to Delia’s work station. He mimics someone who is in the spirit. One of ‘dem amen-corner Christians – sing, whoop, and shout; then come home and wash white folks clothes on the Sabbath.

He snorts scornfully, knocks the clothes to the ground, and steps roughly on the whitest pile of clothing. Delia screams in dismay and quickly assembles the clothing together again – SL station.

DELIA
Sykes, you quit grindin’ dirt on dese clothes! Gawd, hep me! You knows Ah got tuh git mah work done, Syke! She commences to pick up the clothes while examining how much dirt Sykes put on them. How can Ah git through by Sat’day if Ah don’t start on Sunday?
**SYKES**

Dere yuh go – callin’ on Gawd! Gawd, help me! Fuh what?! Quit washin’ on the Sabbath befuh yuh call on Him. *He watches her.* Ah don’t keer if you never git through. *He stands over her,* glaring. Anyhow, Ah done promised Gawd and uh couple uh otha men, Ah ain’t gointer have it ‘n mah house. *He turns to go back into the house, but daringly turns back to Delia. He grabs her roughly by the neck. He gets extremely close to her face and places a fist by her ear.* Don’t gimme no lip neither, else Ah’ll throw ‘em out and put mah fist up side yo’ head to boot. *Sykes turns to go inside the house.*

**DELIA**

She slowly rises from the ground. Looka heah, Sykes, you done gone too fur. *Her very words stop him dead in his tracks and he turns around.* Ah been married to you fuh fifteen years, an’ Ah been takin’ ‘n washin’ fur fifteen years. Sweat, sweat, sweat! Work an’ sweat, cry an’ sweat, pray an’ sweat!

**SYKES**

What yuh sayin’, Delia? What’s dat got tuh do wid me? *He meet her in the yard DS.*

**DELIA**

What’s it got tuh do wid you, Sykes? Mah tub of suds is filled yo’ belly wid vittles mo’ times than yo’ hands is filled it. Mah tub of suds is keepin’ yuh from starvin’! *She references to the wash stations and kitchen.* Mah sweat is done paid fuh dis house an’ Ah reckon Ah kin keep on sweatin’ ‘n it.

*Sykes holds up his hand to strike Delia, but she continues to stare him in the eyes, not cowering down like she normally does. He drops his fist. This amazes Sykes. He had never seen this side of Delia, and he couldn’t hide the fact that he was in a state-of-shock.*

**SYKES**

Ah oughter mash you in yo’ mouf! *He looks at her as if disgusted.* You ain’t worth it nohow. *He turns to leave, but stops.*

**DELIA**

Naw you won’t. ‘Nother thing, dat ole snaggle-toothed black woman you runnin’ wid ain’t comin’ heah tuh pile up on mah sweat and blood. You ain’t paid fuh nothin’ on dis place, and Ah’m gointer stay right heah till Ah’m toted out foot foremost.

**SYKES**

Well, you better quit gittin’ me riled up, else dey’ll be totin’ yuh out sooner than yuh expect. Ah’m so tired of you Ah don’t know what tuh do. Gawd! How Ah hates skinny wimmen! *He marches out of the yard. You can hear him charging up the pony in the background.* Delia leans on the table to catch her breath.
DELIA

She calls after him. Sykes, where yuh goin’?! Don’t be gon tuh long wid mah rig. Ah needs
dat pony tuh be right fuh mah runnings tuhmarra. Syke, Sykes!! He can be heard leaving,
fiercely striking the pony with the bull whip. She goes back to working hastily.
He gets on mah last nerves! He is jest evil! Plain evil! Hastily scrubbing clothes. A’ways
startin’ sumethin’! Gawd, how come Ah gottuh … gottuh bear this. Ah done de best Ah could
fuh ‘im. Ah sweat, sweat, sweat! Work and sweat, cry and sweat, pray and sweat! An’ he still
evil! When mah time gointer come, Gawd! When am Ah gonna be able tuh live ‘n peace. She
stops. Ah knows You listen, Lawd. Ah know dat You see me. But Gawd, how much longah?
Mah Sweet Jesus, Ah cain’t take dis much mo’. She goes back to scrubbing. It seems lak the
hardah Ah work, the more Ah go tuh de church house, the more Ah push closah tuh Yuh, the
more foolishness he does!! Ah had such a good time at the service, and then Ah come home to
dis foolishness! He ain’t doin’ right by You, Gawd. She stops. He ain’t! She thinks for a
moment. He won’t a’ways lak dis. He usta haf way do right. He won’t always … She touches
her face and quickly drops her hand. Ah don’t know where or when it went wrong, but it did.
What can Ah do? Gawd, if he don’t listen tuh You, ain’t nothin’ Ah can do. She goes back to
work, then stops. Did Ah fail you, Gawd? Are You mad at me? Ah knows Ah ain’t perfect.
But Gawd Ah am tryin’. No, no … Yuh ain’t lak dat. You won’t hurt me lak dat. You ain’t
lak Sykes. If Ah wrong, show me. Make me right, Gawd if Ah messed up. Ah don’t wanttuh
hurt Yuh. Ah don’t wanttuh fail Yuh. Lawd, hep me tuh be bettah. Hep me tuh be mo’ lak
Jesus. Sweet, lovin’ … Hep me Gawd. Hep me Jesus, Holy Spirit! She begins to cry out to the
Heavenly Father. Everything that she held back while Sykes was in her presence was being
released - moans and wailings.

Scene 3

Lights are up on Delia in the kitchen. She is preparing dinner. She is making a cake, too. She
has some of the ingredients for the cake, bowls, and spoons on the kitchen table. She has two
pots on top of the stove with potatoes and butter beans. She is cooking a ham in the oven.
Occasionally, she goes to the stove to check on the vegetables and the ham that is in the oven.
She continues to make the cake.

DELIA

She starts singing “Amazing Grace.” Amazin’ grace, how sweet de sound dat saved a wrench
lake me. Ah once wuz los’ but now, am foun’, wuz blind but now Ah see. Was grace dat taught
mah heart tuh fear and fear mah heart relieved. How precious did dat grace appear, de hour Ah
furst believed! Amazin’ grace, how sweet da sound dat saved a wrench lake me … Hallelujah!
Mah, Gawd, thank Yuh! Thank Yuh fuh savin’ me. Gawd thank Yuh fuh wakin’ me up dis
mornin’ and helpin’ me, Gawd. Thank Yuh fuh givin’ me mah life, health and strin’th.
Hallelujah! Thank Yuh fuh savin’ me. … Givin’ me ‘nother chance tuh git it right. Thank Yuh
fuh grace and mussy! Thank Yuh fuh bein’ dere fuh me ‘n the midnight ‘our. Yuh coulda let me
go, but Yuh kep me! Thank You Sweet Jesus!! Gawd, Yuh are so awesome, so great!
Hallelujah! She tastes the cake batter to make sure that it is right. She adds a little more vanilla.
Um, um, um! Gawd, Yuh knows this is gointer be good! Thank Yuh, Gawd fuh mah health.
You knows that Ah ain’t made a cake ‘n a long time. Ah feels so good! Ah feels fresh! Gawd,
Ah sorry Ah got so mad yest’day. Ah jest let da devil works wid me sometimes. Syke, don’t no
… he knows bettah, but does wrong. *She goes over to the stove to check on the vegetables. She decides that the butter beans need a few more onions. She gets another onion, cuts it in half, and puts the remaining half back. She goes back to singing.* Ah once wuz los’ but now, am foun’, wuz blind but now Ah see. Was grace dat taught mah heart tuh fear and fear mah heart relieved. How precious did dat grace appear, de hour Ah furst believed! Hallelujah! *She checks on the ham and goes back to the table.* Gawd, Ah wants Yuh tuh help, Syke. Gawd rain down on ‘im. Touch ‘im, make ‘im right, Gawd! In the name of Jesus! Change his heart fuh Yuh. Give ‘im uh heart uh flesh, one Yuh can mold ‘n shape! Rain on ‘im. Rain, rain, rain. Touch his mind! Hep me, Jesus!! Hep me be a light tuh ‘im. Let Yo’ Spirit shine thru me Gawd! Wash us, Gawd. Make us holy, Gawd. Hallelujah! Thank You fuh grace and mussy! Hallelujah! *Delia begins to dance a little as she prepares dinner.* Sykes enters while she is celebrating the goodness of the Lord. He watches Delia for a minute, then slams the kitchen door. Delia stops. Syke, Ah didn’t hear you come ‘n.

**SYKES**

Ah heard you fuhm down de road, holla’n. Still callin’ on Gawd, but Ah betcha still gon’ wash those white folks clothes on de Sabbath.

**DELIA**

Syke, Ah ain’t fuh no fuss t’night. Ah full a joy fuh Gawd!

**SYKES**

Umph! Full of joy! *He exits to the bedroom.*

**DELIA**

*She calls after him.* Dinn’r be ready ‘n uh lil’ bit, Syke. *He doesn’t respond.* She hums “Amazing Grace,” and finishes mixing the cake batter. She gets a cake pan, greases it, and pours the batter. She places it in the oven and checks on the ham. The ham is ready. She takes it out, places the cake batter in the stove, and adds more wood to the stove. The vegetables are ready. *She uncovers the cornbread sitting on the stove and heats it in the oven a little bit.* Bles’ dis meal, Gawd. Let it be good! Good tuh the spirit and body. Yes, Lawd! Hallelujah!

**SYKES**

Delia, where mah brown pants? *She doesn’t hear him at first.* She is still in the Spirit. Delia! Delia – where mah brown pants?!

**DELIA**

They ‘n the bot’m drawah. Thank Yuh, Gawd!

**SYKES**

Ah don’t see ‘em. *Delia leaves to check the bedroom and returns quickly.* She removes the cornbread from the oven.
SYKES (cont.)
If yuh kep’t strait Ah could uh found ‘em.

Delia doesn’t respond to him. She continues to praise, not as loud as before, and finishes preparing the table. She stands back and admires the items prepared. Sykes comes out of the bedroom and heads for the kitchen door.

DELIA
Syke, where yuh goin’? Ah fixed dinn’r.

SYKES
Ah goin’ out. He closes the kitchen door.

Delia stands by the table holding onto the chair. She bites her bottom lip to keep from crying. A faint smile comes across her face.

DELIA
Well Gawd, Ah guess its jest You and me t’night. The lights slowly fade as Delia sits at the table, says grace quietly, and begins to prepare her plate.

Scene 4
Delia is heard offstage singing “Wade in the Water” as an up-tempo. The men gather on Delia’s porch carrying set pieces to depict Joe Clarke’s store. The men enter from SL, SR, from the audience, and etc. They speak as they take their places on the edge of the stage, steps, and leaning against the outside of the store. Greetings are interrupted as they hear Delia singing “Wade in the Water.”

JIM
Heah come Delia Jones. He fans with his hat as he watches Delia pass the store.

The men stop and watch Delia ride pass the store (pantomime). They take off their hats and nod at her as she passes.

JOE
Yep. Hot or col’ rain or shine, jes ez reg’lar ez de weeks roll ‘round Delia carries ‘em an’ fetches ‘em on Sat’day.

MOSS
She bettah if she want to eat. Sykes Jones ain’t wuth de shot an’ powder hit would tek tuh kill ‘em. Not to huh he ain’t. “You got that right,” “Uh-huh,” and other expressions of approval are given by the other men.
WALTER
He sho’ ain’t. It’s too bad, too, cause she wuz a right pritty ‘lil trick when he got huh. Ah’d un mah’ied huh mahseff if he hadnter beat me to it.

ELIJAH
Walt, shut yo mouf! Yuh’d didn’t haffah a needle in a hay stack chance! He lets out a laugh and some of the other men join in. “You called’dat one, Lijah!” “You got dat right!” Walter has a brief embarrassing moment. She wuz right pritty and sweet. My, Gawd!

MOSS
Ah usta wonda how he got huh. How he kep huh. She wuz so full and ripe! But too muck knockin’ will ruin any ‘oman. He done beat huh ‘nough tuh kill three women, let ‘lone change they looks.

ELIJAH
How Syke kin stommuck dat big black greasy Mogul he’s layin’ ‘roun wid, gits me! Ah swear dat eight-rock couldn’t kiss a sardine can Ah thowed out de back do’ ‘way as’ yeah! Some laughter.

JIM
Cuz she’s fat, thas how come. He’s allus been crazy ‘bout fat women. He’d a’ been tied up wid one long time ago if he could uh found one tuh have him.

JOE
Well, aint no fat ‘oman round heah, fool nough tu haf ‘em.

WALTER
Did Ah tell yuh ‘bout him come sidlin’ ‘roun mah wife – bringin’ her a basket uh pecans outa his yard fuh a present? Slight sounds of shock and disapproval are heard around the porch. “What yuh do, Walt?” “What she say?” “No he didn’t!” “Ah would of cut ‘em!” Yeah, mah wife! She tol’ him tuh take ‘em right straight back home, cause Delia works so hard ovah dat washtub she reckon everything on de place taste lak sweat an’ soapsuds. Ah jus’ wisht Ah’d a’ caught ‘im roun’ dere! Ah’d a’ made his hips ketch on fiah down dat shell road.

JIM
Ah know he done it, too. Ah sees ‘im grinnin’ at every ‘oman dat passes. But even so, he useter eat some mighty big hunks uh humble pie tuh git dat lil’ ‘oman he got. She wuz ez pritty ez a speckled pup! What uh shame!

MOSS
Dat wuz fifteen years ago. A long time ago! He lets out a slight laugh. He receives some disapproving looks.
ELIJAH
He useter be so skeered uh losin’ huh, she could make him do some parts of a his duty. They never wuz de same in de mind.

JOE
There oughter be law ‘bout him. He ain’t fit tuh carry guts tuh a bear. Delia is a good ‘oman – go tuh church, serve the Lawd. When yuh find one pritty and livin’ right, yuh bes’ hold on tuh huh. Sounds of approval are heard around the porch.

ELIJAH
Yuh got dat right. Ah don’t see how she stand ‘side ‘em in de church house. Dat’s a sin fuh ‘im tuh go in. He lets out a small laugh and some join him. “You crazy, Lijah!” “You got dat right!” “Hush, yo’ mouf!”

WALTER
Ah heard dat’s why she changed huh ‘membership. She didn’t won’t ‘im ‘round huh. He sho’ ought tuh do betta. “He sho’ ought tuh.” “Yep” ... etc..

JOE CLARKE
Tain’t no law on earth dat kin make a man be decent if it ain’t ‘n ‘im. There’s plenty men lak dat ... takes a wife lak dey do a joint uh sugar-cane. It’s round, juicy an’ sweet when dey gits it. But dey squeeze an’ grind, squeeze an’ grind an’ wring tell dey wring every drop uh pleasure dat’s in ‘em out. Some of the men agree. When dey’s satisfied dat dey is wrung dry, dey treats ‘em jes lak dey do a cane-chew. Dey thows ‘em away. Dey knows whut dey is doin’ while dey is at it, an’ hates theirselves fuh it but they keeps on hangin’ after huh tell she’s empty. Some of the men agree. “Dat’s show whut he done tuh huh.” “Sho right Joe” “You calld’dat right.” Den dey hates huh fuh bein’ a cane-chew an’ in de way.

MOSS
You said dat, Joe. Cuz he done tuk all da sap outa huh!

ELIJAH
All dat good stuff gone! Don’t make no kinda sense. We oughta take Syke an’ dat stray ‘oman uh his down to Lake Howell swamp an’ lay on de rawhide till they cain’t say Lawd a’ mussy!

WALTER
He allus wuz a ovahbearin’ niggah, but since dat white ‘oman from up north done teached ‘im how tuh run a automobile, he done got too biggety. Expressions of approval go up around the porch.

MOSS
Biggety niggah!

The conversation trails off a little.
JIM
It sho’ is hot tuhday!! I feel lak de devil himself is sittin’ right ‘side uh me!

JOE CLARKE
Seems lak de days git hottuh and hottuh. Times a changin’.

JOE
Tuh help tak our minds off uh de heat, how ‘bout gettin’ a melon fuh yuh customers, Joe Clarke? We’s all sufferin’ wid de heat. De bear’s done got me!”

ELIJAH
Thass right, Joe, a watermelon is jes’ whut Ah needs tuh cure de eppizudicks!

WALTER
Come on dere, Joe. We all is steady customers an’ yuh ain’t set us up in uh long time. Ah choose dat long, bowlegged Floridy favorite, mahself!

JOE CLARKE
A god, an’ be dough. You all gimme twenty cents and slice away. Ah needs a col’ slice m’self. Heah, everybody chip in. Ah’ll lend y’ll mah meat knife.

Everyone chips in and prepares for the feast. Joe Clarke goes to get the watermelon. Before the men can partake in the feast, they hear Sykes and Bertha laughing from offstage. The men quickly put the watermelon away. *Note: Sykes and Bertha’s entrance should be from the audience.

SYKES
You kin git anything you wants. Ah mean anything. Sykes lets out a naughty laugh Bertha blushes. Dis is mah town an’ you sho’ kin have it. He stops and twirls Bertha around. Lawdy, you sho’ is got one portly shape on you! Um, um, um! He slaps her on her bottom and she laughs a little. They start back walking. Ah’nm gonna give you dat lil’ ole house soon’s Ah kin git dat ‘oman outa dere. Everything b’longs tuh me an’ you sho’ kin have it. My lawdy, you gots one roast on yuh! He says this while looking at her rear-in. Ah sho’ ‘bominates uh skinny ‘oman.

BERTHA
You sho’ knows whut tuh say tuh a lady! She giggles.

They approach the store.

Sykes attempts to be cordial to the townsmen. Good day tuh yuh. It’s a mighty hot day, ain’t it? The men give a light response and some ignore Sykes and Bertha. He turns and looks at Bertha. She giggles loudly and some of the men snicker, others look in amazement.
JOE CLARKE
What you needin’, Syke? Trying to quickly get rid of Sykes and Bertha.

SYKES
Jest uh few things, Joe. Pickin’ up uh few things fuh de Missus’. Some of the men comment, but Sykes ignores this and turns to Bertha. Git whutsoever yo’ heart desires, Honey.

BERTHA
She lets out a loud giggle and quickly catches herself. She is hanging all over Sykes. Oh, Syke! Ah wanna a bottle of strawberry soda-water, a block a chewin’ gum, a butterscotch stick, and a pound uh coffee … Can Ah git somethin’ else? You don’t mind do ya?

SYKES
You kin git anything you wants. Dis is mah … He catches himself. Git anything you wants.

BERTHA
She lets out a loud laugh and kisses Sykes on the cheek. Sykes turns to the other men to boast, but some have a look of disgust written on their faces. Bertha doesn’t see this. Gimme a whole ham, a wat’rmelon, and a quart of parched ground-peas. Joe goes to get the items. Bertha pushes up closer to Sykes.

SYKES
Yes, suh! You kin git anything you wants! Joe Clarke returns with the items. He clears his throat twice to get Sykes’ attention. Sykes lets out a laugh once he realizes that Joe has been standing there. Joe Clarke gives him the items and writes him a ticket. He takes the items. Good day. Some of the men tip their hats and others look in the opposite direction. Sykes and Bertha exit. They are still laughing and carrying on.

The men take out the watermelon, and Joe Clarke begins to cut it. They continue with their conversation.

JOE
Did yuh see dat?

JIM
Ah, sho’ didn’t wanttuh see it! Some of the men laugh.

JOE
Where did Syke Jones git da ‘oman from nohow?
WALTER
Ovah Apopka. Guess dey musta been cleanin’ out de town when she lef. She don’t look lak a thing but a hunk uh liver wid hair on it. Some of the men laugh and agree with this comment.

ELIJAH
Well, she sho’ kin squall. Did you see huh mouf? Um – all dem teef! When she gits ready tuh lauf, she jes’ opens huh mouf and latches it back tuh the las’ notch. No ole grandpa alligator down ‘n Lake Bell ain’t got nothin’ on huh. Laughter. Joe don’t be stingy wid da cuttin’! Moss, don’t need dat big piece. His wife cook ‘nough fuh de bof uh ‘em! They continue to eat and laugh.

MOSS
Alright, Lijah!

JOE CLARKE
Ah’m movin’ fast as Ah can, Lijah. Ah see talkin’ has increased ya’ appetite. Teasing.

ELIJAH
Dat hunk uh liver wid hair a’most made me loose it. So while its back, Ah wanna enjoy it fuh it leaves a’gin. Laughter.

The scene closes with the men eating, commenting on other women in town, and laughing.

Scene 5
Lights up on Delia in her flowers SR and DSR. She is watering, planting, and talking to them. She looks so peaceful and happy. Her flowers are beautiful, full of color, and life. She plants another rose bush and checks on the others.

DELIA
Um,um. You growin’ right nice. Smell good, too. Gonna look so pritty ‘n a lil’ bit. She checks another flower. You need some water. She goes to get some water and waters the plant. ‘Dere you go. She goes back to planting the rose bush. Gawd, this is where Ah b’long, ‘n Yuh sunshine, takin’ care uh dese flowers. A butterfly flies around her. She follows it carefully with her eyes for awhile, then moves in for a closer look. She picks it up in her hands. Gawd, its so beau’ful. She places it on a flower. All uh your creations are pritty! She finishes planting the rose bush and continues to check on the other flowers. Feels lak Adam in de Garden uh Iden! She hums a up-tempo spiritual. Sykes is heard offstage. He enters carrying a box which he places by the kitchen door.

SYKES
Delia! Delia! Where yuh at? Delia!
She composes herself and goes to see what Sykes wants. He is standing on the back porch. He has moved the box out in the backyard. Delia notices the box.

SYKES (cont.)
Look in de box dere Delia, Ah done brung yuh somethin’!

DELIA
Delia looks in the box and screams. She almost falls. Oh, Jesus, haff mussy! Syke! Syke, mah Gawd! Yuh take dat rattlesnake ‘way from heah. You gottuh. Jesus!

SYKES
Ah ain’t got tuh do nuthin’ uh de kin’ – fact is Ah ain’t got tuh do nothin’ but die. He calmly steps down from the porch. He slowly makes his way close to Delia. Tain’t no use uh you puttin’ on airs makin’ out lak you skeered uh dat snake – he’s gointer stay right heah tell he die. He moves towards the box. He wouldn’t bite me cause Ah knows how to handle ‘im. Nohow he wouldn’t risk breakin’ out his fangs ‘gin yo’ skinny laigs.

DELIA
She paces a little and fans herself, trying to clam down. Naw, now, Syke, don’t keep dat thing ‘roun heah tuh skeer me tuh death. Yuh knows Ah’m even feared uh earth worms. Thass de biggest snake Ah evah did see. Looking at the box and moving somewhat close to the box. The snake rattles and she quickly moves away. Kill ‘im Syke, please.

SYKES
Doan ast me tuh do nothin’ fuh yuh. Goin’ ‘roun’ tryin’ tuh be so damn uppedty. Naw, Ah ain’t gonna kill it. Ah think uh damn sight mo’ uh him dan you!

Delia looks at Sykes with disgust and hate in her eyes. She walks pass him, heading for the kitchen door.

SYKES (cont.)
He grabs her by the arm. Dat’s a nice snake an’ anybody doan lak ‘im kin jes’ hit de grit.

DELIA
She yanks herself loose and gives him a look that would kill. Whatever goes ovah de Devil’s back, is got tuh come undah his belly. Sometime or ruther, Sykes, lak everybody else, you is gointer reap yuh sowin’. She goes into the house

SYKES
Who yuh callin’ uh devil? He laughs a little and looks at the snake. The townsmen can be heard offstage. Their entrance should be from the audience. They make their way to the backyard where Sykes is standing.
WALTER
Hey dere, Syke! We ‘eard yuh caught a six-footer. Where he at?

SYKES

ELIJAH
How de hen-fire did you ketch dat six-foot rattler, Syke?

SYKES
He’s full uh frogs so he cain’t hardly move, thass how Ah eased up on ‘im. But Ah’m a snake charmer an’ knows how tuh handle ‘em. *The men are looking at the snake and talking to Sykes.*

JIM
Sweet Jesus! That’s uh big one!

SYKES
Shux, dat aint nothin’. Ah could ketch one eve’y day if Ah so wanted tuh.

MOSS
How did yuh ketch ‘im?

SYKES
Ah got ‘im full uh frogs an’ rats.

ELIJAH
Whut he needs is a heavy hick’ry club leaned real heavy on ‘is head. Dat’s de bes’ way tuh charm a rattlesnake.

SYKES
*He is feeling very high.* Naw, Lige, y’ll jes’ don’t understand dese diamon’ backs lak Ah do. You gottuh knows how tuh handle ‘em. Charmin’ is somethin’ else …

*Sykes continues to talk to the men (ad-libs). Delia stands at the Kitchen door, unseen. Lights go down.*

Scene 6
*Lights are on Delia in the kitchen setting the table for dinner. Sykes enters from the bedroom and sits at the table in the SL chair. He says the grace and the two start eating. They eat for awhile in silence.*
**DELIA**

Syke, Ah wants you tuh take dat snake ‘way fuhm heah. Ah done put up wid a lot uh yuh mess. Yuh done starved me an’ Ah put up widcher, yuh done beat me an’ Ah took dat, but you done kilt all mah insides bringin’ dat varmint heah.

**SYKES**

*Sykes takes another bite of his chicken before responding.* A whole lot Ah keer ‘bout how you feels inside uh out. Dat snake ain’t goin’ no damn wheah till Ah gits ready fuh ‘im tuh go. So fur as beatin’ is concerned, yuh ain’t took near all dat yuh gointer take ef yuh stay ‘roun’ me.

**DELIA**

*She stops eating. She takes a moment before she responds.* Yuh tryin’ tuh make me hate yuh. Ah ain’t done nothin’ but try tuh luv yuh. Ah cain’t take no more! Ah done took an’ took till mah belly is full up tuh mah neck. Dat’s de reason Ah got mah letter fuhm de church an’ moved mah membership tuh Woodbridge – so Ah don’t haftuh take no sacrament widcher. Ah don’t wantuh see yuh ‘roun’ me atall. Lay ‘roun’ wid dat ‘oman all yuh wants tuh, but gwan ‘way fum me an’ mah house. Mah sweat, blood, tears, prayers paid fuh dis house. Yuh ain’t paid fuh nothin’. Ah ain’t done nothin’ tuh yuh, but tries to luv yuh. Ah may not be what yuh wants me tuh be, but Gawd knows Ah tries. Leave me if yuh wanttuh. But don’t keep dat varmint ‘roun heah.

**SYKES**

*Sykes almost let the cornbread fly out of his mouth.* Done de bes’ uh what? Worryin’ de hell of uh me. Ah’m so tiahed uh you hangin’ ontuh me. Ah don’t want yuh. Look at yuh stringey ole neck! Yo’ rawbony laigs an’ arms is enough tuh cut uh man tuh death. Yuh looks jes’ lak de dewul’s doll-baby tuh me. Ah hates yuh. Ah been hatin’ you fuh years.

**DELIA**

*She pushes back from the table, stands up, and slams her dinner napkin down.* Ah done prayed fuh yuh, turned mah plate down fuh yuh. Ah cooks fuh yuh. You runnin’ ‘round wid dat snaggle tooth black ‘oman – and yuh says you hate me! Everybody ‘n town knows yuh doin’ it – and you hates me. *She throws a plate that barely messes Sykes.* He ducks and jumps up. *Delia moves in close to him.* Yo’ ole black hide don’t look lak nothin’ tuh me, but uh passle uh wrinkled up rubber, wid yo’ big ole yeahs flappin’on each side lak uh paih uh buzzard wings.

**SYKES**

*He slaps Delia.* Yuh mus’ fuhgot who yuh talkin’ to. *He slaps her again.* It knocks her back by the stove. *He moves in to give her a brutal beating.*

**DELIA**

*She grabs an iron skillet and tries to strike him.* He recovers but quickly backs away. *Delia screams.* Don’t yuh lay yo’ black han’s on me! *He is shocked.* Ah’m goin’ tuh de white folks about you. Lay yo’ han’s on me ‘gin. Gawd knows Ah done took too much a’ready. Ah ain’t takin’ no mo’! Mah cup is done run ovah!
Sykes stands looking at Delia with deadly hate. Delia does not back down. He storms out of the house and slams the door shut. She slams the skillet on the table in frustration.

**DELIA (cont.)**

*She opens her mouth and calls to Heaven like never before. Ah, need Yuh, GAWD! She begins to cry, falling to her knees. HEP ME GAWD!! HEEEP ME!!*

*Lights out.*

**Scene 7**

*The men gather on Delia’s porch carrying set pieces to depict Joe Clarke’s store. The men enter from SL, SR, from the audience, and etc. They speak as they take their places on the edge of the stage, steps, and leaning against the outside of the store.*

**WALTER**

Heah all dat racket at Syke and Delia’s place otha night? *He takes a sip of his drink (water) and passes it to Elijah.*

**ELIJAH**

Yeah. Say she mad ‘bout dat six-footer, Syke brung tuh de place.

**JOE**

Yep. Don’t know how come he done it. Say he lef de place pritty hot!

**MOSS**

Dat fella does some strange things. Don’t know what he won’t tuh do dat fuh. He knows she skeered of snakes … anything dat crawls.

**JIM**

Dat’s any ‘oman.

**WALTER**

Maybe he tryin’ tuh get rid of huh and move ‘n dat hunk uh liver wid hair on it. *Some of the men laugh.*

**ELIJAH**

Whut in da name of Gawd would make him do dat?! Ah don’t see how he kin stomack tuh lay down ’side huh.

**JOE CLARKE**

It’s a shame whut a man does tuh gets ‘is way. Tain’t ‘n ‘im to be fair ‘bout the situ’tion. Tain’t ‘n ‘im at all.
Sykes and Bertha can be heard offstage. The men wave and continue to comment. All the while you can hear them laughing and talking (ad-libs).

MOSS

It's jest uh shame how he does dat ‘oman.

WALTER

She works so hard ovah dat place.

The conversation fades and the lights go down on the men commenting on the events (Ad-libs).

Scene 8

Lights are up on Delia. It is a Sunday evening. She goes to the side of the house and gets the two huge galvanized tubs she uses to soak the clothes. She remains in the backyard working at the SL and DSR wash stations. She is taking some bundles from the SL table and carrying them to the DSR wash station to soak. She is singing while working.

DELIA

Oh Jurdan rivah, Ah’m bound tuh cross. Jurdan river, Ah’m bound tuh cross. Oh, Jurdan rivah, Ah’m bound tuh cross. Ah got one mo’ rivah tuh cross. Mudah, she’ll be waitin’. She can’t hep me tuh cross. Mudah, she’ll be waitin’, she can’t hep me tuh cross. Mah Mudah, she’ll be waitin’, but she can’t hep me tuh cross. Ah got one mo’ rivah, Ah got one mo’ rivah tuh cross. She looks at the box beside the kitchen door where the snake resides. She quickly turns her head and continues to sing, getting full of the Spirit. Jesus, he’ll be dere. He’s gonna hep me tuh cross. Oh, Jesus he’ll be right dere, He’s gonna hep me tuh cross. Oh, Jesus, He’ll be waitin’ dere an’ He’s gonna hep me tuh cross. Ah got one mo’ rivah, Ah got one rivah, Ah got one rivah tuh cross. She leaves the DSR wash station and heads for the back door. She stops singing and looks at the box by the kitchen door. Whut’s de mattah, ol’ satan, you ain’t kickin’ up yo’ racket? There is complete silence. Ol’ satan, yuh heah me? There is complete silence. Her face lights up for a moment; thinking that her threat might have scared Sykes into getting rid of the snake. She goes into the house. She goes to the stove to get a match to light a lamp for the bedroom. The box was empty except for one match. Dat rascal wouldn’t fetch nothin’ heah tuh save his life, but he kin run through whut Ah brings quick enough. Now he done toted off nigh on tuh haff uh box uh matches. She grabs the lamp sitting on the kitchen table. He done had dat ‘oman heah in mah house, too. She takes a moment to compose herself. Oh, no yuh won’t, satan! You won’t still mah joy tuhday. Jesus, he’ll be dere. He’s gonna hep me tuh cross. Oh, Jesus he’ll be right dere, He’s gonna hep me tuh cross. She stops singing for a moment. What did Ah come ‘n heah tuh git? Oh mah hampah. She goes back to singing and heads for the bedroom. Delia can be heard singing offstage. She screams suddenly. Oh, Jesus haff mussy! Lawd hep me!! She runs from the bedroom, drops the lamp on the kitchen floor (it goes out), and runs quickly out the door into her garden. She falls down, and hurriedly gets back up, running into the audience. She is a gibbering wreck the entire time. How did dat snake git out, mah Gawd! How did it git out! Hep me, Gawd. Haff Mussy! She exits through the audience still running, going for help.
The sound of a horse is heard. Sykes enters from USL. He is slightly drunk. He stands in the yard for a moment, then goes to the box beside the kitchen door. He kicks the box. He snickers slightly. An evil grin comes across his face. He goes into the house. He stumbles over the lamp lying on the floor. He picks it up and ponders for a moment.

**SYKES**

He mus be ful’ now! There is a shred of delight in this comment. He goes to the stove and searches for a match. He throws the empty matchbox down on the floor. He ponders a moment before going into the bedroom. He goes in. At first, nothing is heard, but then we hear things falling and Sykes chattering, yelling. Mah, Gawd! ‘ef Ah could on’y strack uh light! We continue to hear footsteps, the sounds of flesh hitting a wall. Oh, fuh de light! Ah thought he’d be too sick. Mah Gawd, Ah thought he’d be too sick!

Outside Delia and the townsman enter from the audience. “Dat six-footer prob’ly done got ‘im,” “Its gone be uh’right Delia,” “Don’t worry, Delia, we gone help yuh,” “Ah don’t knows how we kin git outa dis one,” “Why he done ‘n de furst place,” and others comments are made as the men enter. They stop suddenly when they hear a cry that might have come from a maddened chimpanzee, a stricken gorilla. All the terror, all the horror, all the rage that man could possibly express, without a recognizable human sound.

**ELIJAH**

Mah Gawd fuhm Heben!! Come on. The men hurry to the house (ad-libs).

**DELIA**

Delia should be in the middle aisle (if possible). Worry, fear, and frustration are resting on her face.

**DELIA**

Well, Ah done bes’ Ah could. If things ain’t right, Gawd knows tain’t mah fault.

The men open the kitchen door and to their surprise, Sykes is there. He has managed to stumble into the kitchen and prop himself up using the stove. He barely holds himself up. The men are shocked as they look at his horribly swollen neck and swollen eyes. Only one eye is open, shining with hope.

**SYKES**

Delia is dat you Ah heah?

The men are spellbound. They watch him die slowly before their eyes.

**WALTER**

Naw, Syke. It ain’t Delia.
SYKES
Lige is dat yuh? Ah almost had ‘em, Lige. Ah almost had ‘em. He collapses. They take off their hats as to give their respect for the dying. The men go to get Sykes. Only Elijah returns to Delia. His hat is still off.

ELIJAH
Ah sorry, Delia but … Syke didn’t make it.

Delia’s knees buckle. Elijah wraps his arms around her and walks her off. She stops and looks up to Heaven.

DELIA
Mah, Gawd! Jesus, haff mussy!! Ah done de bes’ Ah could!! Haff mussy!! She releases a scream that is full of hurt, grief, pain, excitement, and a twinge of joy.

Lights go down as the men are placing Sykes’ body on the table, placing his arms neatly beside him, and bowing their heads in reverence for the dead.
CHAPTER THREE: HIS WORD, HIS PURPOSE, AND OUR BEGINNING

In the beginning was the word of God and in the beginning is the word of God (John 1:1). He is omnipresent, omnipotent, robed with majesty, crowned with all glory and honor. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the great I AM—living outside of time and dwelling beyond eternity. His word, the embodiment of His sovereignty, is able to transform any situation, causing all witnesses and hearers of it to release permissiveness – acknowledging His omniscience. Therefore God’s word, does not “return to Him void, but it accomplishes that which pleases Him … and prospers in the very thing assigned” (Isaiah 55:11). In the beginning God’s word soared into the atmosphere causing cultivation of the earth, auguration of the animal kingdom, and the erection of humanity. The Old Testament Book of Genesis chronicles how God imparted a portion of Himself into the created—causing us to become heirs of a spiritual inheritance tagged with royalty.

The Old Testament is the commencement of the Christian Bible. It is the term used by Christians to refer to the Hebrew Bible. It recounts the testimonies of the ancient Israelites, Hebrew people, and contains the laws and rituals that comprise their religion (Dobson 1). For those of the Jewish faith, the collection encompasses the Torah, the first five books of the bible—the law for worship and everyday living. For Christians, the Old Testament is just as sacred, but they view its religious meaning as incomplete without the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ detailed in the New Testament (Dobson 1). Also, Muslims trace their religious roots to some of the figures in the Old Testament; although they deny the religious significance of the work as a whole. In essence the Old Testament influenced many cultures,
religions, and played a crucial role in the development of Western Civilization. It has greatly influenced the way many view God, ethics, the world, and the nature of man (1).

The creation account, as aforementioned, chronicles how God created the world in six days from His own creative powers, resting on the seventh day, and creating man (Adam) in His own image. From Adam, he created Eve, Adam’s companion, taking her from Adam’s rib. It is in their life in the garden that the reader learns of: the hierarchy that God established for humanity; His plan for the created to reside in Eden to serve Him; and the fall from innocence; and expulsion from Eden when the forbidden fruit is eaten (Parrinder 99). The fall does not cause Adam and Eve to relinquish their status as created beings endowed with the qualities of the Creator, however it requires them to sweat and toil for that which was freely given (Gordon 23).

I find this account to be a treasured montage of destiny, purpose, wisdom, hope, and power. It is where one can secure his/her foundation, tapping into his/her spiritual endowment. James Weldon Johnson’s *The Creation* best captures the splendor of the creation testimony. Johnson carefully describes how God meticulously placed the awesome wonders so that mankind can bask in His glory. Johnson’s rendition even provides vivid pictures of how God “kneeled down in the dust, like a mammy bending over her baby” shaped man in His own image. Powerful analogies like this, is what helps to make the recollection even more fascinating. This is the spirit I endeavor to share in *Genesis: His Word, His Purpose & Our Beginning*.

In the beginning the earth was without shape and form—a watery void. God saw this darkness and He gives it life. On the first day, God summons His marvelous and unfaltering light to rain through the darkness. As soon as the words flowed from God’s lips, the light split the air, stood at attention, and divided the darkness. So on the first day, God made the day and night (Genesis 1:3-5).
God made sure that the light was bright and glorious as His smile. However, the waters were weighing on it. So God tells the waters to recede from His light. The waters humble themselves as God commands and allow His light to shine bright as ever! This pleases the Creator. It pleases Him so much that the Father calls the sky Heaven—the place where the angels dwell declaring His holiness. This was the second day (Genesis 1:6-8).

When the third day arrives, God looks at the light and separates the sea and earth (1:6-10). God said that the separation was “good,” but it was missing something. So God gives the word and vegetation comes forth. The Creator tells vegetation to cover the earth. Vegetation quickly heeds to God’s command and sprinkles himself all over the earth. This pleases the God. Vegetation goes beyond the call of duty and gives God his best. Now beautiful plants and flowers were resting on earth. God is pleased! He blesses vegetation and allows glorious colors to live with the plants that were yielded to His earth (1:11-13).

On days four and five, the Creator separates the light into the sun, moon, and stars (1:14-19). With the separation of the lights, God establishes the seasons. This pleases the Heavenly Father. So He calls sea creatures and fowls of the air to come forth. Once again, they quickly answer to God’s call and take charge of the land and sea. Because their obedience pleases God, He tells them to multiply (1:20-23).

God creates the animals of the earth on the sixth day. God looks on what He has created and calls it “good,” but something was still missing. Then God thinks and decided to make a man, Adam. So God carefully shapes Adam in His own image and places Adam in the garden. He quickly sees that Adam is a little lonely so creates Eve after His heart to nurture Adam (Genesis 1:24-28). God blesses their union and instructs the plants to yield fruits and vegetables
for them (1:29-31). Adam and Eve’s home is a beautiful paradise, the Garden of Eden—created by God for His created.

God gives them free reign in the garden. He allows them to have dominion over the animals and vegetation (Genesis 1:29-30). Also, God grants Adam the honor of naming every animal (Genesis 2:19). The only restriction that they have is the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:17). God instructs them not to eat from this particular tree. If they eat from this tree, death would visit them (1:17).

While residing in this paradise, Eve encounters a crafty serpent who convinces her to eat the tree’s forbidden fruit—assuring her that she will not suffer if she does so (Genesis 3:1-5). Eve eats the fruit and shares it with her husband, Adam, and the two are immediately filled with shame and remorse (3:6-7). While walking in the garden, God calls them out on their disobedience (3:8-11). After cursing the serpent, He curses the couple. Eve’s punishment causes her to suffer painful childbirth and submit to her husband’s authority. Adam’s disobedience results in him toiling and working the ground for food.

And so it was, is and will continue to be—God’s creation, Adam and Eve’s testimony.
CHAPTER FOUR: AND GOD SAID …

I first read Zora Neale Hurston’s *Sweat* when I was a sophomore in high school. I will never forget how intrigued I was after reading the first four pages. The remaining four pages dazzled me so much that I decided to perform the piece as a one-woman show. Needless to say, I got preoccupied with other things, and I never tackled the project. I did, however, continue to read her works.

I absolutely love the way Hurston writes about the Southern Black Culture, showing that we are more than just depressed, bitter beings. We have spunk, sass, intelligence, and most importantly, we are people of strength—not just strong people. It was a relief to find a writer other than Langston Hughes, James Weldon Johnson, and the other well-known writers of the day, who embraces the natural qualities of the Southern Black Culture.

During my junior year in high school, I revisited *Sweat*. I did a dramatic interpretation of the piece for a high school Forensic Competition (speech and debate team). I can not find the words to describe the fire that raged within as I assumed the personalities of Sykes and Delia Jones. I really felt compassion for Delia, burning guilt for Sykes, and tasted the salty perspiration of hard work—a never-ending stream of tears. My interpretation of the piece allowed me to take home the title of “North Carolina Forensic Dramatic Interpretation Champion (1998).” The honor of going to Saint Louis, Missouri to compete in the National Forensic Championship was bestowed upon me. I did not win, but the words of the characters stayed with me. Throughout college, I would think of adapting the story into a play, but I never did.

It wasn’t until Spring 2006, my second year of graduate school, that I picked up the short story once again. In Dramatic Theory and Criticism Class, I opted to do a case study in addition
to a research paper on the short story. It seemed like I fell in love with Hurston all over again. *Sweat* and I were back together!!

I commenced to study the powerful writer’s story. The focus of my paper was on the Christian literary devices found within *Sweat*; the image of Delia and other African-American women within all of Hurston’s works; and the economical and political situations of Blacks in Eatonville, Florida in the 1920s. To be honest, I spent more time reading about Zora Neale Hurston. She was so mysterious. I found myself engulfed in her writings, letters, travels, and essays. “Who is this woman?” I kept asking myself as I read more. My case study was a success. I received an “A” on the project, but I still had more questions.

I made the decision that I was going to write my thesis on *Sweat*. I was going to continue to research the points that I outlined earlier in my research paper for class. I continued with my research. I found this to be very enriching.

I left for Saint Louis, Missouri in August of 2006. I was interning at a theatre company that focused on sharing life from the African-American perspective. This went along with my research! *I did not make the connection that I had been there ten years earlier competing in the National Forensic Championship.* I found that the research bored me. Plus, it seemed that scholars had written on the topics already. I was very puzzled about what I should do. I continued to work on my original points. At this point, I thought that it would be crazy for me to start all over. This was my thinking, but God saw otherwise.

While reading Valerie Boyd’s *Wrapped in Rainbows*, a biography on Hurston, God spoke to me and told me to compare the characters’ journeys in *Sweat* to Adam and Eve’s testimony in Genesis. YES!! I got so excited. He told me to use God-inspired Theatre as my base. The next
morning, God woke me up around 3:30am and gave me parallelisms and points to stress throughout my paper. I was ecstatic! This was going to be awesome!

My attitude changed, however, when I realized that I could not find enough research to support this connection. Did I hear God correctly? Maybe I had been eating way too many hamburgers or something. Nevertheless, I continued to move on what He had given me. Once again, I found myself reading a lot of information about Hurston’s life, dreams, goals, and ambitions.

I will never forget how I felt when I read about the many visions she had as a little girl. According to Valerie Boyd, Hurston had three distinct visions when she was younger. They included: seeing herself leave Eatonville, Florida in the middle of night; going to a little white house and experiencing unimaginable horrors; and meeting two women—towards the end of her life—who gave her peace, shelter, and security. I was floored. The second vision really got me. It reminded me of Delia. “God,” I asked, “is Hurston Delia Jones?” I was instructed to investigate.

I found that Hurston lived in a house similar to Delia’s in Eau Gallie, Florida during the 1930s and 1950s. “My God,” I thought, “this is Delia’s house.” Hurston also lived in this house shortly before her death. The solid proof arrived when I came across a letter written by Hurston to former publisher Burroughs Mitchell in 1951.

The letter detailed her present condition at the time, living in a small white house in Eau Gallie, Florida (see figure 1). The house is almost identical to the one described in *Sweat* written twenty-six years earlier. In the letter, Hurston tells how she enjoys her garden, protects the birds and other animals from the wood snakes, and questions God on why her life is so hard. These are some of the same things that Delia does in the story. Plus, Delia gets frustrated
spiritually because Sykes is so abusive. In the letter, Hurston becomes the Adam in her humanistic Eden.

I could not believe it; this was the answer. This was the connection that I needed. This was a major confirmation to me. In the research that I found, many did not connect Hurston to Delia. They connected Hurston to the narrator in the short story. How did people overlook this letter? It was definitely meant for me to find.

This is why I decided to use Hurston as a major source in developing Delia’s character in my adaptation, *My Sweat, My Tears, His Glory*. There are just too many similarities between Hurston and Delia. I started looking at old photographs, trying to get a better understanding of Hurston (Delia). I was still asking the question, “Who is Zora Neale Hurston?” In order to understand *Sweat*, I had to find her, “Zora Neale.”

Alice Walker once said, that a people do not throw their geniuses away … they must collect them … if necessary, bone by bone” (Bloom 69). This was a powerful statement. It said so much to me. Hurston placed herself within this story. She left some major clues. I was compelled to find them, examine the evidence, and let the world know. The words spoken by Walker stayed with me as I began to discover Hurston.
Eau Gallie, Fla.
July 15, 1951.

Dear Burroughs Mitchell:

I am writing to you about my book and the things that happen in my garden. I have planted many seeds and flowers, and I hope that when I receive your letter I will be able to water them. I have also been working on a new novel, which I hope to complete soon. I think that it will be a great success and I am looking forward to its publication.

As you know, I have been traveling a lot lately, but now I am back in my little house, and though facing a paved street, two blocks off the road, I have a nice view of the trees around me. My neighbors are all very friendly and they often come over to chat. I have a little garden of my own, and I have planted many flowers and plants. I also have a small pond in my yard, which I use to grow my vegetables.

I am very happy here. The house is small but cozy, and I have everything I need. I hope that you will come and visit me soon. I would love to show you around my garden and my house.

Yours truly,
Zora Neale Hurston
This is the second page of the letter written by Zora Neale Hurston to her publisher, Burroughs Mitchell, on July 15, 1951. Some of the elements within this letter resemble those shared by Delia in Hurston’s *Sweat* (1926). This letter was taken from Lucy Ann Hurston’s *Speak So You Can Speak Again: The Life of Zora Neale Hurston.*
Who is Zora Neale Hurston?

She was sexy, elegant, regal, and a powerful intellectual. When she lithely walked pass you the aroma of distinction tickled that pudgy thing on your face, and made you follow her and ask, “Who are you?” When she walked into a room, you acknowledged her, and when she spoke, your ears were captivated and your mind leaped for joy as her words transported you to another dimension—another world. Alice Walker coined it best when she referred to Zora Neale Hurston, or “Zora Neale” as many of her friends affectionately called her, as the “genius of the south” (Bloom 116). Her writing enticed you and you wanted more. Hurston’s life story comes together like a luscious garden thick with collards, apples, orange and mango trees, jasmine, and waterways tending her way (Hurston 5). She was a mysteriously delightful, renaissance woman!

This seductive enigma was born on January 15, 1891 in Notasulga, Alabama to John and Lucy Potts Hurston. The family relocated to the all black municipality, Eatonville, Florida, in 1892 (Kaplan 773). It was here that Hurston’s gift of storytelling and writing were cultivated. Her father became a successful Baptist minister and carpenter, while her mother exhorted her to “jump at de sun!”

Hurston gleaned the passion from her father’s fiery sermons and her mother’s determination and emerged from the swamps of Florida as a sterling writer. During a time when a woman would be praised for becoming a teacher, marrying sensibly, or becoming a mother, Zora Neale climbed over those aspirations and became a literary prodigy.
An unrelenting spirit, she traveled all over the United States and the West Indies, collecting folklore, transforming them into numerous colors, shapes, and rhythms. (Nathiri 20). Some of her most famous transformations (books) are: *Jonah’s Gourd Vine* (1934); *Mules and Men* (1935); *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937)—considered to be Hurston’s best novel, written in only six weeks; *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica* (1938); *Moses, Man of the Mountain* (1939); *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942), an autobiographical piece; and *Seraph on the Suwanee* (1948)—a major departure from her previous works, but still very zoralistic! In addition to these Hurston, has written a lot of articles, essays, plays, and short stories.

The end of Hurston’s life was not as glamorous as the beginning and middle. Hurston was not able to continue to support herself on her writings alone. Her health declined as well.
She died on January 28, 1960 of hypertensive heart disease while residing in the St. Lucie County Welfare Home in Fort Pierce, Florida.

Figure 4: Hurston in the *Miami Herald*
This was taken from the *Miami Herald*, March 27, 1950. It is a sad portrait for a woman who believed in living life to the fullest. This also reminds you of Delia’s condition. This photograph was taken from Valerie Boyd’s *Wrapped in Rainbows: The Life of Zora Neale Hurston*.

The Plan

Being that I will stage this adaptation, I had to obtain more visual aids. This is Delia, no doubt. I have the letter and the hardships in Hurston’s testimony to prove it, not to mention all of those visions. Hurston was a striking young woman. I read that men found her creamy nutmeg skin and wide hips to be quite “irresistible” (Boyd 145). Hurston loved to dress, and she had a lot of style. Fannie Hurst, famous American novelist and an associate of Hurston, once said that she had a type of bizarre elegance (Bloom 23). She had style that others only thought about. She could wear a hat and knock you off of your feet (see figure 5). The pictures that I
found of Hurston show a woman who is full of life, light, revelation, and power. They tell me about her past, joys, hopes, and dreams.

Figure 5: Hurston in Fort Pierce, Florida
Zora Neale Hurston, November 9, 1934. Photograph by Carl Van Vetchen, Yale University. This photograph was taken from Lucy Ann Hurston’s *Speak So You Can Speak Again: The Life of Zora Neale Hurston*.

While researching, I discovered quite a few poems written by Hurston. I also found poems that I felt connected Hurston to this piece even more. A writer has a tendency to place a
portion of himself/ herself within his/ her works. I wanted to find Delia’s feelings about Sykes in the short-lived honeymoon phase of their relationship. I did not just want to associate Delia with Hurston. Zora Neale Hurston is Delia. I believed that some of the unimaginable horrors experienced in the house—according to her second vision—were triggered by an abusive relationship. I also found a few pictures of some of her beaus. Delia had a lot of suitors in her day (Gates & McKay 1002).

Figure 6: Untitled love poem
This is an untitled poem written by Zora Neale Hurston on April 21. She was a student at Howard University at the time. This poem can be used to describe the Edenic period in Sykes & Delia Jones’ relationship in Sweat. Sykes had to woo Delia in order to secure her hand in marriage. This poem was taken from Lucy Ann Hurston’s Speak So You Can Speak Again: The Life of Zora Neale Hurston.
Also, Hurston had quite a few unhappy moments in her life. She was usually in search of funds, shelter, and security. She did what no other black writer did during that day and time; she tried to live solely by her writings alone. Many black writers were taking jobs as professors in order to have financial security (Boyd 67). Hurston did not want to conform. She wanted to make her own rules.

Figure 7: Home poem
This is a poem written by Zora Neale Hurston in the 1920s, while a student at Howard University. This can be viewed as part of Delia’s dream of having peace in her house. This poem was taken from Lucy Ann Hurston’s *Speak So You Can Speak Again: The Life of Zora Neale Hurston*.

One of the most memorable photographs of Hurston was one taken shortly before she passed. She had gained some weight and was much older. Her health was declining as well. This photograph is what I’ve used to shape Delia in my adaptation. I am impressed with Hurston’s ability to keep on pushing in spite of the many obstacles placed in her path. This applies for Delia, too. I also used this picture to help develop some of the costumes for Delia.
Figure 8: Hurston in her element
This is Zora Neale Hurston in Fort Pierce, Florida. The date is not for certain, but it is believed that the picture was taken during 1958-1959. The photograph was partially damaged by a fire that destroyed some of Hurston’s manuscripts after her death (January 28, 1960). This photograph was taken from Lucy Ann Hurston’s *Speak So You Can Speak Again: The Life of Zora Neale Hurston.*
All of this information piqued my interest in *Sweat*. However, I was still puzzled as to how to move on with this project. I did not want a stereotypical adaptation of this story. I did not want to show a story in which the characters are one-dimensional and impersonal. I wanted it to be full, rich, and purposeful, which is one reason I included the opening scene. Sykes was not always a bad man. Somewhere—either in his marriage to Delia or prior to his marriage—he lost a part of himself. Delia’s independence did not help matters at all. This is one reason why he is always beating Delia down about her work. To help paint clear depictions of their lives, the Holy Spirit revealed scene names and the messages they should convey.

**Scene One: Eden** - Eden was a God-created utopia where Adam and Eve did not have to work hard, but blessings were given freely as long as they remained in the will of the Lord. This ended when they ate the forbidden fruit. Prior to this event, they enjoyed themselves. This scene captures the honeymoon phase of their marriage. It is full of passion and sweetness. This is how it was in the beginning. Even though Hurston does not tell us about the courtship, the townsmen provide clues by telling how beautiful Delia was and how Sykes was scared of losing her (Gates & McKay 1002). This scene lets us know that abuse was not always in the picture. *The first brutal beating could have been because a townsman was looking at her.*

**Scene Two: The Fall** - This symbolizes the end of the honeymoon period. The passion dwindled and everything changed from this point forward. There was a physical separation as well as a spiritual abortion. Delia changed her church membership and it seemed clear that the two were no longer intimate with each other. This could have been one reason why Sykes was continually running around with other women. Delia did not seek comfort in the arms of another man. Instead, she cultivated her relationship with God and started taking care of her garden and
home. This is why these things are so important to her. *In a sense they became her children, her mate.*

**Scene Three: *Spirit of David*** - In the bible, David was a man after God’s own heart (Acts 13:22). He was constantly praising and worshipping God no matter what transpired in his life. In the Old Testament Book of Psalms, written primarily by David, he might start out questioning God. In the end, however, he always closes with giving God high praise (Psalm 69:1-36). He continually acknowledged the greatness and goodness of the Lord. In this scene, Delia could have easily gotten upset and cried herself to sleep. Instead, she saw this as an opportunity to spend more time with God.

**Scene Four: *The Trial*** - The townspeople admire Delia’s work ethic. The men talk about it at Joe Clarke’s Store and their wives talk about it as well (Gates & McKay 1002). She is constantly working trying to better herself and to make ends meet. The townspeople understand Delia’s battle, and they respect her for continually remaining strong in spite of Sykes’ unruly behavior (1002).

**Scene Five: *The Verdict*** - This scene ends with Delia telling Sykes that he is going to have to reap what he has sown. It does several things: foreshadows Sykes’ death; reaffirms her spiritual stability; confirms her mental and physical divorce from him; and it signifies the beginning of better and greater things.

**Scene Six: *The Storm*** - This scene lets the audience see just how Sykes truly beats Delia. The beating is stopped because she threatens to hit him with an iron skillet. This shocks him more than anything. We see the end of the “slave and master” relationship in this scene. After fifteen years she starts to fight back (Gates & McKay 1001). This lets us know that her faith and relationship with God has increased. Just like people overlooked King David (I Samuel
Prior to his kingship, he was a shepherder. While tending the sheep, he praised and worshipped God. People did not realize that his relationship with God had grown (I Samuel 16:23). Sykes did not realize that God was strengthening Delia. He heard her singing and praying, but because he did not have a relationship with God, he did not realize that God empowers His children (II Timothy 1:12).

**Scene Seven: Affirmation** - Once again, the townsmen support Delia. In the end, they know that everything will work out for Delia. In other words, they are confirming what God has already revealed to her. This foreshadows that they feel Sykes will reap what he has sown. This is Delia’s affirmation to her next position in life—spiritually.

**Scene Eight: The Beginning** - Sykes’ death signifies a beginning of a new life for Delia. Her home will now be a place of tranquility. She will be able to rest. Sykes will not be there to torment her. She thought that Sykes would get better, but his spirit was ridden with evilness. She was not praying for him to die, but she was praying for him to change. Her prayers were answered, but not in the way that she expected them to be. Her turning her back and waking away from Sykes is Delia walking away from her former life. Unlike Lot’s wife, she does not look back, turning into salt; instead she continues to walk into her God-ordained destiny! (Genesis 19).

The title of the adaptation, *My Sweat, My Tears, His Glory*, encompasses Delia’s exodus from spiritual and mental enslavement to emotional and spiritual liberation. She believed in God before, but she became more intimate with Him during her marriage to Sykes. He, unintentionally, pushes her closer to God—causing her to know her worth as the Heavenly Father’s child. God used Delia’s oppressor to bless her (Gates & McKay 1008). God using
Delia’s hurt to help her walk in the fullness of life really touched me. It really inspired me once He revealed how Delia’s life was going to transform me.

One morning in December, I was talking to God about my frustration with the project. I was falling behind because of my hectic work schedule. I was tired and angry that I could not devote more time. I was not able to get the vision for this project on paper. I heard God as clear a bell. He informed me that “I will produce this thesis through my sweat.” And HE WAS RIGHT!!! It seemed like I was never going to finish this project. I cried and prayed a lot! I felt like Delia—I think that was the point☺ Therefore, this project is personal because I have emerged through this experience as the woman God has preordained me to be. Only I could write this paper and stage adaptation. I was far away so I could not cry on my Momma’s shoulder. I cannot go into detail about everything that I went through. To make a long story short, I gave up my job, moved out of my apartment, and stopped everything just to finish this project. I did not have any money—only what God gave me. He said that I was going to emerge from this better than when I started. And HE WAS RIGHT!!

It is more than just about Zora Neale Hurston and the characters in my play—it is about me. God wanted me to learn from Delia’s testimony. The quilt of Hurston’s past was for me to experience vicariously.

We all know these characters. We might even find them in ourselves. Yes, I said that correctly. So my advice to you is to read this project, study it as to get a revelation that will propel you to fulfill your destiny. I say to you, read on and enjoy!!
CHAPTER FIVE: DELIA JONES: DRUMS, TAMBOURINES, AND PRAISES

She is a woman who puzzles, yet inspires, almost every reader that picks up Zora Neale Hurston’s *Sweat*. In fact, prior to adapting the forcible eight-page depiction of African-Americans in an exclusive all black town in the 1920s—whose lives are concentrated with humor and anguish, drenched with vigor, and soaked in expectancy—I could not fathom the totality of her being, emotionally or spiritually. In the story, the characters do not discuss Delia’s parents, siblings, or upbringing. Therefore, I can only deduce her familial background from how she functions as a citizen, operates as a wife, and handles the responsibilities in her given profession. Who is Delia Jones? As a director—playwright—I decided to carefully pick through Hurston’s life in order to find any connections or clues to help bring clarity to this mysterious, slightly vague, and complex woman.

As any artist knows, there is a piece of every writer revealed in his or her work. The work of a writer, rather fiction or non-fiction, becomes a mere fragment of his/her journey in this labyrinth called life. This said, I must turn to the pages of Zora Neale Hurston’s life and investigate further.

**Character Analysis**

Zora Neale Hurston’s journey is one that is richly colored by riddles, trials, and jubilation. It comes together like a “luscious garden thick with apples, orange and mango tress, and waterways tending her way” (Hurston 5). It transcends various cultures, proving to be a
magnificent attestation of her faith to fulfill her destiny. Her life, a unique collection of sweat and tears, displays a woman who has endured many of the loads of life with fortitude.

It is this foundation, perseverance and determination which rest beneath the feet of Delia Jones. Delia, like Hurston, was raised in a loving and sturdy home. Her father, unlike John Hurston, was not a preacher. He did, however, place a high premium on living a spirit-filled life. This is evident because throughout the story, as well as the play, Delia is seen going to church, praising, and worshipping God. When Sykes Jones, her husband, tries to quench her spirit she simply tells him that she “aint fuh no fuss … Ah just come from taking sacrament at the church house” (Gates & McKay 1000). In other scenes throughout the play, she continually intercedes for Sykes, asking God to cleanse his heart of the evil that presently resides there. Only a spirit-filled woman is able to pray and fast for a man who constantly abuses her both mentally and physically.

Delia’s parents resemble Hurston’s parents in that her mother did not work while Delia was growing up. It was Delia’s father who provided for the family and made sure that her mother took care of the house. This is apparent because Delia was described by many of the townsmen as being so “pritty” (Gates & McKay 1002). The beauty is indicative of her home life with her parents. In order to stay “pritty” she had to work in the house with her mother. Hard labor would have worn on her physical countenance. Her physical superiority over a lot of the other townswomen is further indicated when Walter Mosley, a local, tells how Sykes had to “eat some mighty hunks uh humble pie tuh git dat lil’ ‘oman he gots” (Gates & McKay 1002). This shows that her father worked hard to keep nice clothes on her back. In order to remain pleasing to the eye, she could not do strenuous labor.
Delia’s upbringing continually shines through her shared perspective with Hurston. Hurston’s ideal union is one in which “man not only serves as a provider and protector, but he is a creator in a humanistic Eden” (Plant 167). In this fancied alliance, the patriarch must bravely face the challenges of “dame nature;” protect and provide for his family; and have the love and support of his mate (167). Delia shares this same perspective with Hurston because, in the story and in the play, she attempts to restore the ideal relationship (Gates & McKay 1004). This is why, in the play, she is cooking dinner and trying to make friendly conversation.

Delia does not have a lot of pass-times, although working in the garden is her favorite. For Zora Neale it involved traveling the south, collecting folklore, and studying various cultures (Nathiri 20). Delia does not have many friends other than the women at the church. Even with them, the intimacy can only go so far. Her relationships have a tendency to remain on the surface. This is mainly due to the fact that all, or almost all, of the townspeople know about Sykes’ adulterous spirit. This is extremely embarrassing to her, and is one of the reasons she tries to avoid many public places other than church (Gates & McKay 1004).

Just as Hurston spent a lot of time studying various cultures, Delia spends a lot of time in her garden. It contains so much beauty. Her garden is the place where she can nurture God’s creations, love unconditionally, and rest. The plants do not mistreat her. In fact, they show their love for her by blossoming into such beautiful flowers. She is their respected provider. In a sense they are like her children. Zora Neale’s books and projects were like her children, too. She obsessed over completing them and recording the folktales and stories with great accuracy (Kaplan 772). It was important for the world to know the truth about the African-American culture (Nathiri 24). This is how Delia felt about her plants. She wanted them to look nice and
get attention. No matter how Sykes treated her, her Eden was beautiful. It was the only thing that he could not taint.

Another reason Delia hides from the townspeople is because her looks have faded like a flower out of season. This is one reason I selected the last picture taken of Hurston shortly before her death (see figure 8). Delia was a raging beauty, but of course all that has changed. She does not want people to see her (Gates & McKay 1004). This is one reason why she takes such pride in doing laundry. She has built a nice reputation for herself because taking in laundry has allowed her to pay for a house, keep food on the table, and purchase transportation. The white patrons of Winter Park feel that she does an excellent job—hence the reason why she can go to them for help (Gates & McKay 1005).

She does not make a lot of other pretty things outside of pristine laundry and flower arrangements. This is why she is so excited about making a cake; she has not celebrated her gift of baking in a long time. Her celebration is ruined when Sykes refuses to eat. Delia’s attempt to restore her relationship with Sykes fails.

Delia does not want Sykes to die, but she wants him to treat her with respect. She prays throughout the play because she knows the importance of having a spirit-filled marriage. She wants the man she knew—who courted and wooed her.

Delia’s spine—main objective throughout the play—is to acquire spiritual liberation, peace and harmony with those around her. She constantly makes an effort to treat others like she wants to be treated. Delia constantly cooks for Sykes even when he is rude towards her.

When God answers Delia’s prayers, she accepts His decision. This is why I compare her to Hurston. Hurston eventually accepts the consequences of her decision. She does not try to look for a high paying job, but settles for the hand she is dealt (Nathiri 54). I am not saying that
God selected this path for her. Honestly, I feel that Hurston was supposed to hold the office of a prophet, but she took up other beliefs. *These gods guided her.*

**Delia and Adam**

Hurston’s life is a magnificent attestation of her faith and determination to fulfill her destiny in spite of the many obstacles hurled in her path. When hearing the experiences of others, one must remember that there were many who experienced terrifying nights so that he/she could be soaked in the glorious sunshine of the newly summoned morning. Hurston, by sharing portions of her life through the characters in her stories, allows readers to emerge from the ruins of their life as indefatigable beings. They rise from their ashes as persons armed with unrelenting spirits and a burning desire to bathe in the joys of life. Women like Delia made other women understand the importance of taking the time to consider their marriage partners. Delia’s trials are a voice echoing the importance of understanding what God places in the spirits of His created.

Delia is a woman who is determined not to allow the negative rainfalls of life to wash away her optimism of better days. Instead, she resolves to use life’s rainfall of positive and negative experiences as the strength needed to sustain the turbulent storms of her relationship with Sykes. Delia’s life is immersed in physical and mental exertion. She “works and sweat, cries and sweat, and prays and sweat” (Gates & McKay 1000). The only time Delia is not able to taste the salty perspiration that constantly flows through her pores is when she is working in her flowers. It is in the sweetness of nature, God’s creation, that she is able to taste the melodious joy of living (1001). Taking care of her home is very important to her. It is the one thing, other than laundry, that she can beautify.
It is Delia’s pleasure in handling the external and internal affairs of her home that classifies her as the “Adam” in the relationship. According to Genesis 1:26, Adam was given charge over “the fish, birds, cattle, earth, and every creeping thing.” It was Adam’s job to take care of the animals in the Garden of Eden. However, Eve was to assist him (Genesis 2:18). Just like Adam oversaw the daily routines of the animals, Delia invests the same time into yard work and gardening (Gates & McKay 1001). Her home is her paradise. It is the one beautiful source of strength and power that Sykes cannot control or dictate.

This is the picture of her that I want embedded in the minds of the audience members. Delia is the Adam in her self-created Eden. Her hardship pushes her into the purpose for which Adam was created. This strength was not there in the beginning stages of her marriage. She assumed the role of Adam because she did not have a choice (Gates & McKay 1002). This causes her to grow as a woman and as a creator. This is why Hurston desires for people to view the destructive components in their journey as a source for positive change. Delia grew spiritually in the midst of her rocky relationship.

As the director, I want this to be demonstrated to the audience members in a variety of staging compositions and scenic devices. I see the flowers as being bright and somewhat exotic as those imagined in Eden. When Delia is working in the garden, her posture must reflect her superiority over what she has created. She must be God’s heart and love every single plant (see chapter three). The actress I cast must see the flowers as Delia’s children. She loves the flowers because she gave life to them. It is the same way that a mother loves a child because she bore him/her. The members of the audience will be able to identify with this association.

The staging I use for Delia during her Adam moments will also reflect the wisdom she possesses. In the story, Delia is extremely observant and chooses her words wisely. Most of the
time she elects not to speak. This silence, however, angers Sykes even more (Gates & McKay 1000). Wisdom was one of Adam’s traits. Adam was not tempted by the serpent’s crafty words. Instead, the deceptive creature seduced his wife. Adam heeded to the warning given by God to stay away from the tree of life (Genesis 2:16-17). Delia understands that she cannot wait for Sykes to assume the position of Adam. This is why Delia has an astounding work ethic; in order to live she must work. Her work has become an expected consistency. Joe Lindsay, a townsmen said it best when he said, “Hot or col’ rain or shine, jes ez reg’lar ez de weeks roll ‘round Delia carries ‘em an’ fetches ‘em on Sat’day” (Gates & McKay 1002). The reaction of the townspeople clarifies the attitude toward work—work is admirable. The fact that Delia works on a Saturday and is as regular as the seasons establishes her as person worthy of their respect (Gates & McKay 1002).

Another quality that correlates Delia as the head is her ability to create. God gave Adam the ability to name the creatures that He created (Genesis 2:20). After all, Adam was created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). Therefore, if God was able to speak the earth and humanity into existence with its numerous textures, shapes, and colors, then Adam could do so as well.

Delia’s work acts as a metaphor for the work of the human creator, the artist. Susan Gubar describes metaphors for female artists in her essay “The Blank Page and the Issues of Female Creativity.” She says that many women view their own body as “the medium for art … within the life of domesticity; the body is the only accessible object for self-expression” (Glassman & Seidel 117). When one applies these statements to Delia, the sweat of her body—which has laundered, cooked, and cleaned—is the source of her art. Her basket of pristine laundry stands as an artistic instrument created by her own body. Her creation—her home, garden, and laundry—serves as the paint on her canvas (117).
I want this quality as an indelible image in the mind of the audience members. Delia not only assumes her position as the heart of God, but she walks into the image of God. By walking in His image, she starts to become a woman of strength instead of being a battered woman. This is essential. This is why testimonies are used as a source of light to guide others.

In order to reiterate her strength and blossoming beauty, I have opted for a change of colors in Delia’s costumes. As the play progresses, I desire for her dresses to look less faded. I am adding more color because Delia is adding more color to her life—her canvas. At the end of the play, she will wear a cream dress with some type of floral design. I selected cream to be the base-color because it is closer to white, purity. Although, Sykes’ death will put her where she needs to be, she must walk into this door. She must embrace this transformation and step on through to the other side.
CHAPTER SIX: SYKES JONES: A DEAD MAN WALKING

Sykes Jones grew up the very opposite of Delia. He is a representation of Hurston’s dark period. Sykes’ character is symbolic of the relationship that Hurston had while residing in the little white house—her second vision. He also represents the grief that Hurston felt when her mother died and the pain experienced prior to her death. That said, I am turning to Zora Neale in order to help define Sykes Jones.

Character Analysis

Like Hurston, Sykes Jones did not grow up in a loving household. She was a favorite of her mother, but her father always resented her. He found her to be too unladylike for his tastes (Boyd 35). This is one reason he always purchased gorgeous, lacey frocks for her sister (35). Sykes’ father did not favor him—a man needs this type of confirmation. This could be something that he witnessed from his father; he had one of the most desirable women in town, yet he used and abused her. He treated her like a sugar cane—he chewed her up and sucked the sweetness out of her (Gates & McKay 1002). Either one or two things happened, his father beat his mother or she was not present in the home. He does not know how to nurture a woman—reason for his string of affairs. There is a part of himself that he is not able to give in a relationship.

Hurston was the same in her relationships. This is one reason she found herself dating young men. There was only one man that she loved. He inspired Hurston’s most popular novel, Their Eyes were Watching God (Plant 173). She thought she could immerse herself in her work in order to get rid of him. This did not help. After this relationship, she continued to date young men. Some can speculate that these young men reminded her of her true love (Plant 172).
According to Valerie Boyd, Hurston once said of her true love, “We had divine nights and devilish days.”

Secondly, Hurston did not have a father figure. Even though, her father was in the home and he provided for his family, he was always traveling. Plus, he was not fond of Hurston. This caused her to grow up to be very independent (Plant 173). She did not date older men, but she preferred those who made her feel young and spicy.

Sykes loves to gamble, drink, and taste various women. He frequents parties in Winter Park (Gates & McKay 1003). He loves to have a good time and be seen. He takes Bertha to Joe Clarke’s store and spends money because it makes him feel manly (1003). He loves giving her a good time. This is one of the reasons he does not like white folks; he wants to be where they are financially, economically, and politically equal.

Hurston was a flashy person as well, but it did not consume her. She loved to look good and have nice things, but she did not fight others for it. She worked hard to acquire those nice things (Nathiri 18). This is where she and Sykes differ. Sykes does not have many friends. The townsmen do not like him. They feel that Sykes is very uppity. They call him a “biggety niggah” (Gates & McKay 1003).

Sykes spine is to get rid of Delia and fulfill the desires of his flesh. In every scene he is attempting to have his way—get what he wants regardless of how others feel. This is why he abuses Delia and parades his concubines around. He wants to hurt Delia to make himself feel better.
Sykes and Eve

Lust is a deadly disease that slowly eats away the sensibilities of the mind, hardens the heart, and disturbs the spirit. It can be infectious, slowly controlling one’s very nature—creating a monster. This is the condition that Sykes Jones suffers. Like Eve, Sykes allows his flesh to overpower his spirit and heart (Genesis 3:6). The serpent manipulates Eve into going against God’s will because she desired power. It was not until the snake informed her that eating the fruit would make her like God that she decided to eat (Genesis 3:5). Lust for power consumed her and Sykes.

As aforementioned, Sykes does not work. He is upset at the fact that Delia has purchased their home and keeps things going (Gates & McKay 1001). In order to bring a “balance” to the relationship, he uses brutal force with Delia. According to the townsmen, he has “beat huh ‘nough tuh kill three wimmen” (1002). He has changed Delia’s looks over the years. She once was “pritty ez a speckled pup” (1002). Sykes’ reliance on phallic objects—bullwhips and snakes—is an overcompensation for his “emasculated” condition as a dependent of Delia (Glassman & Seidel 117). His brutality is a chosen compensation because he does not work, and many members of the community look down on him (Glassman & Seidel 112). When the townsmen inquire about the rattlesnake that he caught, it makes him feel good. When speaking to them, he uses his “superior’ voice (Gates & McKay 1005).

This is one reason he is so obsessed with Bertha. She makes him feel special. He is constantly telling Bertha that this is his “town and she sho’ kin hav’ it” (Gates & McKay 1003). Delia constantly reminds him that he isn’t a provider by asking about her pony and her carriage (Wall 11).
Just like the serpent in the Garden of Eden destroyed Adam and Eve’s innocence and expelled them from the garden, the rattlesnake ended Sykes’ life (Gates & McKay 1008). The snake bites Sykes on the martial bed. Sykes calls for light, but it is too late for him and his relationship with Delia. He is lost in the darkness—all that is left is the coldness of death. It was also too late for Adam and Eve. They thought that the fig leaves would hide their sin, but they had to be punished for their disobedience (Genesis 3:7).

Hurston provides an agonizing pun at the end of the story as death creeps up to “extinguish the eye,” or “I,” that was once Sykes’ (Gates & McKay 1008). In the ironic conclusion, Delia is freed of the psychological bondage that has caused her to tolerate his abuse and freed of the marriage itself.
CHAPTER SEVEN: THE GOOD, BAD & UGLY

The serpent in *Sweat* resembles the serpent in the Garden of Eden in that they were both cunning (Genesis 3:1). Sykes was deceived into thinking that the snake did not pose a threat to him just like Eve thought that the serpent was helping her. Sykes and Eve both failed to recognize that these serpents were tricking them, because they shared a satanic connection with them.

Sykes’ very name sounds like a snake. He is evil and constantly looking for ways to torment Delia—hoping to kill her spiritually and emotionally (Gates & McKay 1004). A snake can be dormant and strike without warning. Although, Sykes is consistent in his abusive behavior, the severity of it varies. This personality trait confirms his satanic connection. The bible speaks of Satan as a spirit that roams the earth, “seeking whom he may devour” (I Peter 5:8). Sykes preys on Delia’s physically less superior body mass and regards her as a possession to be disposed of whenever he pleases (Glassman & Seidel 114).

In addition to these satanic characteristics, Sykes is very fleshy. He has an unholy passion for flesh of the opposite sex. Eve shares this quality as well, but hers is a lusting for power. This is why the serpents are not viewed as deadly threats. Both Sykes and Eve share some snake-like qualities that make it easy for them to befriend the serpents. There is an old saying that states, “birds of a feather, flock together.” How can Eve or Sykes feel threatened by something that shares the same interest as them?

The shock comes when the serpents both reveal how they have outsmarted Eve and Sykes. The two, however, receive the revelation too late. Sykes brought the snake into the house to get rid of Delia. He made sure that the snake did not rebel against him by keeping it full
of frogs and rats (Gates & McKay 1004). He was so focused on getting rid of Delia and
gallivanting with Bertha that he did not feed the snake. The snake had become hungry and
restless. It was ready to strike. Once Sykes discovered the snake, he remained in the home,
thinking that he could handle it (1007). The snake gets the best of him and leads Sykes in a
dangerous game of hide and seek. Hurston describes it best at the end of the story.

She mused at the tremendous whirr inside—which every woodsman knows is one of the sound illusions. The rattler is a
ventriloquist. His whirr sounds to the right, to the left, straight ahead, behind, close under foot—everywhere but where it is.
Woe to him who guesses wrong unless he is prepared to hold up his end of the argument! Sometimes he strikes without
rattling at all (Gates & McKay 1007).

In the end, Sykes was beaten at his own game. There was something more powerful,
dangerous, and vicious than he was. The snake slowly devoured him at the dawning of a new
day—killing the source of Delia’s oppression (Gates & McKay 1008).

Eve’s plan failed, as well. Because she allowed her lust for control to get the best of her,
she lost everything that was good for her. Adam and Eve’s removal from the God-created utopia
hurled them into a life of intensified labor and pain. The positive in this situation was that Adam
and Eve had a chance to start over (Genesis 4:1).

It is in these two journeys one is able to see the different impacts that the serpents had.
One killed someone who wanted to kill and the other introduced hardship to humanity. Both of
these serpents committed nasty crimes, but one just eliminated a source of lethal paroxysm.
CHAPTER EIGHT: SYKES & DELIA JONES’ HUMANISTIC EDEN: LIFE, DEATH, AND RESURRECTION

When I think of marriage, I think of two whole beings joining together and becoming an effective, successful unit. The connection is greater because each individual has a clear understanding of his/her worth. They are able to become one because their spirits have been dipped in wisdom and dried in self-awareness. My idea of a marriage is when the man can love his wife as Christ loved the church (Ephesians 5:25). Marriage is another level of intimacy and connection. My vision is one that is rooted in God’s perfect and unaltering design for the role of man and woman. God intended for the man to protect and provide, but it is the woman’s job to love and nurture (Ephesians 5:22). He created man in His own image, but He fashioned the woman after His heart. The heart of a woman is complicated, yet it is her heart that is able to massage the aches and hurt in marriage. Together, husband and wife are able to emerge from the swamps of life and partake in the black beaches and crystal clear waters of ecstasy.

Zora Neale Hurston shares a similar yet different perception of marriage. Her vision is one that echoes the heart of almost every woman. Perhaps, it is something that she tried to find in her several marriages as well—peace and protection (Boyd 64). It is Hurston’s vision of the ideal relationship that comes into play within many of her works. Her ideal union is one in which the man not only serves as a provider and protector, but he is a creator in a humanistic Eden (Plant 167). In this utopian alliance the benevolent patriarch bravely confronts the challenge of “dame nature,” protect and provide for his dependents, and have the love and support of his mate (167). Furthermore, Hurston believed that a man’s destiny was to face the raging storms of life. A woman’s destiny was to understand his destiny and to stand by him regardless of the tormenting winds. (Plant 168).
Perhaps Hurston’s childhood had a lot to do with this credence. After all, it was her parents’ relationship that helped her to see the type of man that she needed. Her father, John Hurston, was a successful Baptist minister and carpenter. Her mother, Lucy Potts Hurston, was a loving and supportive woman (Boyd 33). Hurston’s father, however, had quite a few extramarital affairs that weighed heavily on her mother. Yet, Lucy Hurston still remained a faithful wife and dedicated mother (44).

In *Sweat* this cosmology does not come into play. Instead, the reader finds a demise of this fancied partnership and is forced to see the very opposite of Hurston’s ideal relationship. Sykes’ adulterous behavior resembles that of Hurston’s father, but he is not the provider that John Hurston was.

The Eden created for Sykes and Delia was destroyed early on in their marriage. After two months of marriage the honeymoon period ended when Sykes gave Delia a vicious beating. The dream held by Delia for marriage imbued with devotion and adoration shattered. This was the end of their humanistic Eden.

Just like Sykes’ physical violation of Delia’s body, mind, and spirit brought the end of their Eden experience eating the fruit demolished the security provided by God for Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:6-7). Once Adam and Eve were banned from the Garden of Eden, God instructed Adam that he would live by “the sweat of his brow” or the “sweat of his face” (Genesis 3:19). In other words, what was given freely to Adam—food and shelter—will come as a result of hard work. Strenuous labor, toil, and pain were now part of their lives due to their disobedience. Their lives were torn from the rich fertile grounds of prosperity and tossed onto rocky soil that was nearly drained of all its nutrients.
These elements are also a part of Sykes and Delia’s relationship. The story opens with Delia engulfed in work. She is sorting loads of laundry and humming a song in a mournful key (Gates & McKay 999). The laundry symbolizes a lot of things, but here it suggests an attempt to clean up her marriage to Sykes. Somewhere in her mind, she sorts through old memories of when they were happy. She prays for peaceful times again.

This is the scene that characterizes her life. It is in this scene that her life story is revealed, and the walls of her heart are leveled—readers can discern the true agony she harbors. This scene speaks volumes about Delia’s feelings without her saying a word. As a director, I see her surrounded by mounds of white clothing. Delia is wearing a floral dress (see figure 11). It is a faded lilac dress with pink and crème roses. I have selected lilac because it is a soothing color and fragrance. Usually a deep purple represents wealth and prosperity. Her dress is faded because she is not viewed as Sykes’ queen. Instead, he treats Delia as his slave. Her dress reflects her loss of passion for Sykes.

Because this scene is so powerful, the lighting must convey the paroxysm of her pain. Her aura must be clearly shared with the members of the audience as they observe her working. Soft colors of gold, mixed with bluish and purple hues would cast enough shadow (tormenting life) with glow (hope, foreshadowing of the end of her enslavement).

Delia is hurting, yet she finds time to grow in the midst of her turmoil. This scene denotes the woman she was (the loads of white clothes), the woman she has become (faded dress), and the woman she will be (the sorted and soon-to-be clean clothes). Her dress will change as the play progresses, because I want the members of the audience to understand how close she is to being liberated from her physical and emotional enslavement. Her exodus must be foreshadowed in this opening scene. One cannot see the end, but the beginning.
In order to demonstrate her future deliverance, I want the laundry to be a great contrast between what she is wearing and her pain. The laundry, throughout the rest of the show remains the constant symbol of Delia’s work and heartache. This symbolic element is kept in a huge hamper in their bedroom (Gates & McKay 999). It characterizes her relationship with her estranged husband. There is no peace or rest in their bedroom—the place where love should be consecrated and reaffirmed. Instead, it is a place of sweat, tears, grief, and hard work. They are not husband and wife, but slave and slaveholder.

The actress I cast for this role has to embody every emotion at this point. Her voice, posture, and movements must echo Delia’s heart. This scene encompasses Delia’s testimony and summarizes her journey.

In addition to this, Sykes is not present when work is being done. This demonstrates how the partnership lacks balance. Sykes normally shows up when the work is completed (Gates & McKay 1001). It is only later, through some of the townsmen’s conversations, that the reader learns of Sykes’ unethical work habits (1002). The “sweat” is only being produced by Delia because is the only one working to better the relationship. Even though sweat and hardship were a part of Adam and Eve’s relationship they were still together. In fact, they had children (Genesis 4:1). This suggests that they became closer. Once they were banned from paradise, Adam named his wife “Eve,” the mother of all living. This demonstrates two important things: Adam respected his wife and he still carried on the responsibilities that God gave him in the beginning of his tenure on earth (Genesis 2:20).

In a marriage, both partners must take care of each other’s emotional and spiritual needs before intimacy can take place. Sykes and Delia no longer united in their marital bed. Instead, it was a place of isolation (Gates & McKay 1001).
These points are extremely prevalent when \emph{Sweat} is divided into scenes. The scene of Delia, the laundry, and the snake appears twice, once in the beginning of the story and once near the end (Glassman & Seidel 99). This scene establishes the life that Delia possesses—work and mistreatment by a husband she supports. The scenes provide the main symbols of the story, which are the white folks’ laundry, which causes the sweat of the title, and the snake, which reveals Sykes’ hatred for Delia (100).

Furthermore, Delia changes her church membership to Woolbridge so that she does not have to take sacrament—a religious ritual that ushers in God’s grace—with her husband (Gates & McKay 1003). This personifies the spiritual separation between the two. Experience guides and instructs the human nature. There is no hope of a reunion because the two cannot stand before God together—seeking grace (Glassman & Seidel 98).

Their relationship is filled with despair and darkness. This is why the opening scene must effectively communicate the true feelings and interworkings of their relationship. The message is clear, marriage is a sacred and holy union that should not be defiled.
CHAPTER NINE: SET, COSTUMES, AND LIGHTS

This is my idea of the set. I want it to be reflective of the period. I decided to omit the bedroom scenes within the story. I have brought these events onstage and placed them elsewhere in the play. The set is small and is easily transportable. I want this show to tour as well. The emphasis will be on the actors and not the set. For example, Delia’s back porch becomes Joe Clarke’s store. The change will take place with the actors bringing on set pieces for the store.

Figure 9: Proposed set
This is the proposed set for My Sweat, My Tears, His Glory.

As for the costumes, I am still trying to decide what I want. The costumes will be reflective of the period. These are just some ideas that I have. The first two figures are from George C. Wolfe’s 1990 production of Spunk. This is a play consisting of three short stories.
written by Hurston: *Sweat, The Gilded Six Bits,* and *Spunk.* Some of the townswomen’s
costumes will be based on this style (see figure 10).

I want Delia’s dresses to be based on this style as well (see figure 10). Her dresses will
have flora designs on them. Also, I plan to incorporate some of Hurtson’s style within Delia’s
costumes (see figure 8). It is important to have Hurston’s presence within the play. As for
colors, I see Delia in crèmes, lilacs, browns, grays, dark blues, reds, and yellows. *I am playing
with the idea of placing flowers over her left bosom. I got this idea from the Scarlet Letter. She
is a marked woman—reason why the townsmen talk about her so much.*

Figure 10: George C. Wolfe's *Spunk*
This is a 1990 production of George C. Wolfe’s *Spunk.* These photographs were taken from
George C. Wolfe’s and Chic Street Man’s *Spunk: Three Tales.*
Figure 11: Costume sketches for Delia
These are the sketches of Delia’s costumes. The one on the right is her Sunday outfit.

Figure 12: Costume sketches for Bertha
This is one of Bertha’s outfits. Bertha’s dresses will have bolder colors and patterns than Delia’s.
I want Sykes’ costumes to be reflective of the period as well. His clothes are a little better than Delia’s. Sykes’ outfits will be of better quality because it will symbolize the “master and slave” dynamic in their relationship. I see him wearing browns, blacks, whites, greens, and oranges. Since the snake will not be onstage, Sykes’ costumes will reflect the presence of the snake. *I am playing with the concept that the snake is inside of Sykes.*

Figure 13: Costume sketch for Sykes
This is one of Sykes’ costumes. He is a very neat dresser.
Figure 14: Serpent
This is the snake within the play. This is my motivation for Sykes’ character. This photograph was taken from Mike Dorcas and Gibbon Whitfield’s *Snakes of the Southeast*.

Figure 15: Costume sketches for townsmen
These are some sketches of the townsmen costumes.
Due to the fact that it is a realistic set, I will be using a general wash. I will work with a lighting designer to select colors that will convey the different times of day. Also, I will use specials to highlight certain scenes and moments. I want the internal state of the characters to be projected during these moments. *I know that this is going to change once the actors, set designer, and costume designer begin to bring the script to life.*
CHAPTER TEN: AND LET THEIR BE LIGHT …

I am very excited about staging this adaptation. However, I must obtain the rights in order to do so. I admit, I am not a fan of this process. I contacted my former professor at North Carolina Central University (NCCU) who staged an adaptation of Zora Neale Hurston’s *Of Mules and Men*. He informed me that I needed to contact Ruby Dee because she held all of the stage rights to Hurston’s works.

Wow!! I get to contact Ruby Dee! I have met Ruby Dee—only once. She visited NCCU briefly while I was a student in the Department of Theatre. I had the opportunity to take a picture with her. *I wonder if she remembers me.*

I went racing to the internet trying to find her contact information. I could not access it. Anthony Major, one of my committee members, told me to contact Mrs. N.Y. Nathiri, the Executive Director at the ZORA! Museum. I did. She was extremely helpful! Mrs. Nathiri gave me the needed contact information to obtain the rights! You will be seeing my adaptation soon☺

I had no idea how hard this task was. I have never written a play. *Well, I did write one in playwrighting class.* The only thing that I knew to do was copyright my project—in hopes of quickly obtaining the rights for the play. I will keep you posted, but please know that I am waiting for answers.
CHAPTER ELEVEN: CONCLUSION

“No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper; and every tongue which rises against you in judgment you shall condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is from Me.”

Isaiah 54:17

After all the sweat, heartache, and tears comes a reward. Whether tangible, emotional or spiritual, you welcome it into your life. Life is a rainfall of positive and negative experiences. It is up to you to use these showers as the fuel needed to reach your destiny. Some point during Delia’s fifteen-year storm she decided to live. She was a little wounded but she still continued to press for the mark (Philippians 3:14). In the midst of this storm she became God-sufficient, confident, and prosperous. She ceased being and started becoming a woman of purpose. Sykes’ death just allowed what took place inside of her to manifest in the natural. God used Delia’s hardships to strengthen her.

God also used Adam and Eve’s disobedience to make them better servants for Him. They were saddened by their eviction from the Garden of Eden, but it allowed them to see another dimension in their relationship. The hard work pushed them closer together. Through Adam and Eve, God birthed humanity.

By studying their journeys, I was able to step into my God-ordained destiny. God used my “sweat” to make me trust, serve, and honor Him. Experiencing Delia’s testimony—Hurston’s storm—vicariously allowed me to view my hardships as the light needed to guide others. This is what God-inspired Theatre is about—helping others to walk in the God given purpose.
My adaptation will help people to hear, see, and understand that they must embrace their trials in order to taste the sweetness of life. Delia, Sykes, and the residents of Eatonville, Florida physicalize the Word of God—His promise to those who follow Him.
LIST OF REFERENCES


