

Lynn Nottage's *Sweat*, Zora Neale Hurston's *Sweat*, and Robert Lowell's "Night Sweat": An Autobiographical Confessional Reading

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Abstract

The paper investigates the aspects of autobiographical and confessional writings in different works – a play, a short story, and a poem by three different authors tackling the same symbolic title, "Sweat," with a view to presenting a historical cultural and personal insights. This paper aims to examine three literary works; namely, Lynn Nottage's *Sweat*, Zora Neale Hurston's *Sweat*, and Robert Lowell's "Night Sweat" from a confessional point of view, because they happen to have similar tendencies of revealing a main concern with internal human conflict and personal suffering. The paper tackles a journey in the inner feelings of a playwright, a novelist, and a poet. All three writers attempt, each in his preferable genre, to construct the features of an inner journey with a view to enlightening the world of the reader. 'Sweat' Symbolizes the hardships in each work in this paper. All the three works deal with the attitude to confess different types of sorrow and drudging in life, though each work targets a different kind of suffering. On the one hand, *Sweat* by Nottage is a play set in a Pennsylvania factory town during the early 2000s, exploring the impact of economic hardship, racial tensions, and the decline of manufacturing on a group of friends and their families. Nottage's play tackles suffering due to both physical and psychological causes. On the other hand, Hurston's "Sweat" deals with Delia Jones, a black woman in the rural South as the central focus. We follow her attempt to give a clear picture of gender abuse, suffering, and the value of hard work. We see Delia as she sweats while working as washerwoman. The conflict between Delia and her husband, Sykes, serves as a religious allegory representing the battle between good and evil. Lowell's poem depicts the psychological suffering resulting from delving into themes of morality, existential angst, and the restless pursuit of the artistic expression. Lowell, on the other hand, offers a vivid description of the physical discomfort of night sweat as a metaphor for inner confusion and emotional force. Lowell was obsessed with the burden of writing and feared his talents were diminishing. His poem reflects a fear that

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he is losing the will or ability to write. Thus, Nottage, Hurston, and Lowell share both physical and psychological agony. However, fear of failure as a writer is the external type of agony to be added to Lowell's internal pain. The three examined works have proven that keeping self-integration and spirit of defiance and insistence on belonging are key to self-redemption and defying pressures, preservation, and shattering forces of collapse.

Key Words: Nottage, Hurston, Lowell, autobiographical study, Confessional poetry, identity, sweat.

This paper aims to examine three literary works; namely, Lynn Nottage's play *Sweat*, Zora Neale Hurston's short story, "Sweat", and Robert Lowell's poem "Night Sweat" from a confessional point of view, because they happen to have similar tendencies of revealing a main concern with internal human conflict and personal suffering which color man's life. The works under scrutiny attempt to follow real people in their agony as they lead their lives. Nobody seems to escape the relentless cycle of being torn between paradoxical situations that prevent man peace of mind and well-being. Even when it comes to the highly talented minority who are creative by nature, one sees that they are not exempted from this suffering that includes the process of creation itself.

It is well known that confessional writing is a sub-genre of autobiographical literature, where authors recount their own life experiences, whether they are memories, autobiographies, personal essays, or even fictionalized versions of their own lives. It is characterized by raw, intimate, and often emotionally intense revelations of personal experiences, feelings, and traumas. Richa Simirit refers to the specialty of confessional writers in that they clarify the picture of the private lives of poets, since in their expression, "they remove psychological barriers and poetic artifice that arrests the free flow of poetic consciousness. They adopt personal history or autobiography as their central theme and direct expression as their methods" (73). So, those writers depend on blurring the line between the private self and the poetic voice. In this type of writing, the autobiographical subject matter is used in different forms to handle

private problems such as addiction, family troubles, grief, relationships, mental illness, identity, suicide, or even an artistic fear. This justifies how this form of writing has a therapeutic and cathartic function. It is a sort of self-exploration or therapy as the personal history is re-experienced rather than is remembered. In this case, the confessional writer invites readers to his private world to explore how individual experience can reflect the universal human struggles.

Though the self is the central interest rather than fictional persona, Family histories and cultural events are often contextualized in confessional writings; therefore, trauma and identity are grounded in real world of those poets. Jo Jill considers confessional writing as

poetic not mimetic, it constructs rather than reflects some pre-textual truths. It is not the free expression of the self but an effect of an ordered regime by which the self begins to conceive of itself but an effect of an ordered regime by which the self begins to conceive of itself as individual, responsible, culpable and thereby confessional. Most importantly, confession takes place in a context of power, and prohibition, and surveillance. It is generated and sustained not by the troubled subject/ confessant, but by the discursive relationship between speaker and reader (4).

Thus, the confessional writer is his own prototype. He does not imitate things without; rather, he expresses things within freely with no constraints on the confessant self. The author does not observe external forces, but sees the self as a source of power, and the sincere bond relationship with the reader as the pivotal point.

This paper investigates the aspects of autobiographical and confessional writings in different works – a play, a short story, and a poem by three different authors tackling the same symbolic title, “Sweat” with a view to presenting historical cultural and personal insights. The research tackles a journey in the inner feelings of a playwright, a novelist, and a poet. All three writers attempt, each in his preferable genre, to construct the features of an inner journey with a view to enlightening the world of the reader. ‘Sweat’ Symbolizes the hardships in each work in this paper. The three works deal with the attitude to confess different types of sorrow and drudging in life, though each work targets a different kind of suffering. On the one hand, *Sweat* by Nottage is a play set in a Pennsylvania factory town during the early 2000s, exploring the impact of economic hardship, racial tensions, and the decline of manufacturing on a group of friends and their families. Nottage’s play tackles suffering due to both physical and psychological causes. On the other hand, Hurston’s “Sweat” deals with Delia Jones, a black woman in the rural South as the central focus. We follow her attempt to give a clear picture of gender abuse, suffering, and the value of hard work. We see Delia as she sweats while working as washerwoman. The conflict between Delia and her husband, Sykes, serves as a religious allegory representing the battle between good and evil. Sweat symbolizes Delia’s hard work and suffering. Lowell’s poem depicts the psychological suffering resulting from delving into themes of morality, existential angst, and the restless pursuit of the artistic expression. Lowell, on the other hand, offers a vivid description of the physical discomfort of “Night Sweat” as a metaphor for inner confusion and emotional force. Lowell was obsessed with the

burden of writing and feared his talents were diminishing. His poem reflects a fear that he is losing the will or ability to write. Thus, Nottage, Hurston, and Lowell share both physical and psychological agony. However, fear of failure as a writer is the external type of agony to be added to Lowell's internal pain.

Each work in this paper proves the confessional strain, as each one depends on the real experiences of its writer. In her play, Nottage makes use of some anthropological meetings she held with black workers, being self-interested in both literature and anthropology. This enables her to turn the social facts she gathers about the south into a drama that relates the present disorder to its past roots, thus dramatizing the relation between past and present. Bayat Sanz and Bahee Hadaegh emphasize that "Nottage transforms the intimate confabulation with a close friend living a few blocks away from her and the later interviews she holds into a drama of human pain, fears, relations and friendships" (179). *Sweat* boldly addresses the socio-economic interests that racism and ethnocentrism serve. The play criticizes the complex combination of circumstances which has resulted in social and political animosity between the white working class and minorities. So, Nottage sheds light on the economic and cultural factors behind this racist sentiment. Nottage attempts to document the diasporic nature of the southern population by placing Hispanic and Africa minorities side by side. Ayania Hicks asserts that *Sweat* "represents Hurston's personal experience as she modeled characters after real individuals with whom she grew up" (7). Hurston may have infused her experience into Delia character. It frames the story as both literary and cultural self-

expression even within fictional form. It can be read as a fictionalized reflection of her own experiences and the broader cultural realities of black women in the early 20th century. *Struggle* gives us access to constructed self that may mirror aspects of Hurston's own identity or critique of social strictness.

Being an autobiographical reading, it is very important to clarify that though Nottage's play is not about Nottage's life, her ethnographic work help introduce lived experiences which achieve empathetic sense. As an African-American woman, Nottage seems to be strongly holding and promoting the cause of third-world workers. According to Bayat and Bahee, they are "expected to educate white people as to our humanity" (208). In this way, the characters' struggle with identity reflect the real identities Nottage encountered. Those identities are shaped by economic collapse, racial problems and generational shifts. Nottage as a black playwright tries to redefine the tension of identity during crisis times. She navigates around the social expectations and the personal reinvention of identities. An autobiographical reading of *Sweat* helps to understand the authenticity and emotional truth behind the character's identity struggles. Nottage's effort is meant to tell the stories of marginalized working-class people and prove that the theme of identity is not abstract. It is rather a lived experience that represents her and those she represents. Nottage interviewed real factory workers in Reading, Pennsylvania, one of the poorest cities in the US at that time. She navigated into this world and collected their stories.

Theme of identity is very important in the autobiographical reading. Nottage's depiction of this theme is through characters' sense of job and the relationship with work, class, race, and community. The aspects of identity in Nottage's *Sweat* are depicted in such different keys. Work is considered the real identity for characters such as Cynthia, Tracey, and Jessi who consider their job at the steel factory as not just an employment but as a central expression about who they are. So, the loss of their jobs leads to feeling of a sort of betrayal and loss of aim and identity. Bruce says "you think that factory job is a life? That ain't no life. That's just a routine that gets you through the day" (Nottage 37). Here, the concept of identity is very clear as those people accept hard work even if it is monotonous. Work is the main part in their day. In Act one, Cynthia also considers the factory very important to her more than her family. She belongs to her work very much and says "I've been working at Olstead's for twenty- four years. I know that place better than I know my own son". (Nottage, 25)

Nottage's *Sweat* also defines the concept of racial identity as it is clear in types of jealousy and competitions among different races: Black workers and White workers. When the black woman Cynthia gets promotion to a managerial position, many problems happened with Tracey; her white friend. Those black people lose the sense of belonging and the shared generational identity after the economic crises. The young generation in the play inherit their parents' struggles and expectations. For example, Chris who represents the young generation tries to build a new identity through education, yet there is another young character who still clings to his parents' working-class

path. Chris's desire for education represents longing for a new identity. Chris says'' I just wanted something different. I wanted to go to college. I didn't want to get stuck''. Ysset Jason suffers internal conflict after prison. He tries to modify his identity after distortion by trauma and violence. He says, "I'm not a bad guy, but I did a bad thing''. Identity in *Sweat* also intersects with gender roles and masculinity as there are many male characters in the play such as Stan, Bruce, and Jason who suffer the problems of the contrast of expectations of masculinity which is defined by physical labor, protection, and economic dominance and the current hard economic state and crisis. Those characters seem to ask a very important question: who are we without work, community, and status? When man loses the sense of stability, the identity becomes very fragile which reflects Nottage's idea about how identity is shaped according to the economic, cultural and racial forces.

The idea of work and identity in *Sweat* matches the same idea in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. In this novel, Marlowe's job is more than just a function - it defines his moral values, mental state, and purpose. In some cases, work gives characters a sense of stability and identity; in others, lack of work strips them of meaning or becomes a mask for deeper corruption. For Marlowe, work defines identity and self -knowledge. Marlowe's approach to his job is very serious and ethical, despite knowing he is part of a corrupt system. For him, work is a way to stay grounded in an environment that is otherwise surreal, violent, and morally corrupt. He says: "I don't like work. I'd rather laze and think of all the fine things that can be done. I don't like work. But I

like what is in the work. But I like what is in in the work - the chance to find yourself. Your own reality - for yourself - not for others- what no other man can ever know.’’ Therefore, job in *Heart of Darkness*, is not just an occupation; it is a test of character. For some, like Marlowe, work is a way to stay human in an inhuman world. For others, like Kurtz, it becomes a path to dehumanization and destruction. This contrast is intended to prove how identity can be preserved or lost in environments of moral collapse - and how the nature of one’s work reflects the soul beneath the surface. He considers three days without work an eternity or an eternal loss.

Nottage’s willingness to listen and live among economically struggling people forms one of the elements of the autobiographical process. Nottage in her play is not a character, but as a listener and translator of experience. *Sweat*’s events and themes are shaped by Nottage’s commitment to racial justice and nuanced storytelling. Not only this structure which includes the racial and economic tension between friends and coworkers, but also, is a mirror of Nottage’s politics and political principles. Like Nottage’s other plays as a black woman dramatist, *Sweat* portrays complex relationships between the white and the black, and it explores the intersections of race, class, and gender. The racial tensions that arise between friends after one of them gets promotion echo Nottage’s real- life awareness of systemic racism, not only as an intellectual concept but as something that likely informed her own professional and personal experiences. To conclude, *Sweat* can be considered as a kind of personal testimony not of her life’s events, but of her values, convictions, and artistic mission.

Nottage uses structure, themes, and the message of the play as an outlet of her life experience and social consciences of a black woman. There are many points which are proved by the autobiographical reading such as Nottage's dedication to telling urgent human stories. The immersive research process is used by Nottage in writing *Sweat*. She spent over two years interviewing residents of Reading – one of America's poorest cities. This process is labelled as verbatim theatre and this technique is called documentary. Paudyal notes that:

Sweat uses stage projections to make conspicuous absence of the forces truly driving the action: the multinational company heads and trustees and Wall Street investment manipulators. These projections are vital because the characters rarely directly identify the forces behind the job loss and outsourcing. Stan, who functions as the voice of reason throughout the play, attempts to prevent Oscar's beating and redirect the patrons' anger toward the true cause of their misfortunes''. (64)

Nottage depicts characters in *Sweat* as having spent decades of their lives thanklessly laboring in Reading Pennsylvania's local steel and textile mills amid poor working conditions. Emine Fisek assumes that *Sweat* can be

multi-faceted, ranging from the pride associated with the expenditure of physical strength and effort, to the shame associated with a frowned – upon bodily excess. In the context of new age cultures of self – care and wellness, sweat can signal a form of bodily self – realization, whereas its class

connotations are central to the questions at the heart of Nottage's play. (2)

Hurston's short story, *Sweat* explores Delia's recollection of a happier past. She recalls her memories of working hard to build their home, yet it become a place of torment, create a painful contrast between what was hoped for and what became. She longs for calm and safe life. Maybe, she imagines her first hope at the beginning of her marriage. This nostalgia is public not personal or private concerning for Dellia, yet it is for all Black Women in the rural South. So, Nostalgia in *Sweat*, whether it is written by Nottage or by Hurston is an expression about longing for love, safety, and dignity. It also highlighting the fact that memory and hope can both haunt and sustain someone living in hardship and suffering.

In Hurston's "Sweat", the story is set in Eatonville, Florida, where Hurston grew up. She uses a vernacular which reflects her anthropological interest and her first-hand experience with African American communities in the South. This sets for the cultural and regional authenticity. Hurston chooses Delia, the strong black female protagonist, as a reflection of her ideals. Hurston sees aspects of her own resilience and independence in Delia. Themes of resistance and liberation and female empowerment mirror Hurston's own advocacy for women's autonomy in the face of racial and patriarchal oppression. Delia's triumph over her abusive husband can be seen as a reflection of Hurston's belief in personal freedom and justice for women. Thus, realistic language and detail are rooted in personal observation and cultural experiences. The setting that is grounded in Hurston's real-life

hometown, and the female protagonist who resembles Hurston in strength are autobiographical elements in “Sweat”. This short story illustrates several forms of violence that occurred, ranging from physical violence to psychological violence. Sykes terrifies his wife by throwing bull whips. His wife who thought the item was snake, felt shocked and scared.

Hurston questions gender roles and associates them with the world of women through the title of her short story. She confronts the political, racial, and sexual backdrop. Laura Lindenberger assumes that “within the historical time frame of its writing, “Sweat” bring up an interesting dialogue between oppression and repression of women, as well as an emerging identification of women with their gender and the restrictions imposed by society based on race, sex, and class” (53). Hurstons’ choice of the title “sweat” is very suitable because it is not merely a bodily response, but a poignant emblem of human resilience – a quiet chronicle of toil, endurance, and the silent suffering that forges greatness in the shadows. Her exhausting work of laundering the clothes of whites in her community has made her a symbol of endurance, resistance, a mark of honor and a form of resistance against the racial and gendered exploration of African American works.

Labor in Hurston’s” Sweat” is not just background, it is the central force of Delia’s identity and liberation. Hurston uses labor to contrast virtue vs. vice, female strength vs. male tyranny and action vs. inaction. It is a symbol of suffering and a mark of honor. Delia’s labor is a form of resistance. The moment she refused to be driven from her home when she stopped fearing Sykes, it marked a turning point, as she

no longer submitted to his psychological control. Her silence and inaction, at the end is a final act of passive resistance and the gate to identity and liberation when Sykes is bitten by the rattlesnake he brought into the house. As a black woman in the Jim Crow South, Delia's labor reflects the broader racialized and gendered exploitation of African American workers.

The psychological exposure of the protagonist, Delia Jones, and the implicit spiritual reckoning that shapes the story's moral tone represent the confessional element in Zora's *Sweat*. The internal struggle is considered a confession. Delia does not express her feelings openly to others. The readers are given access to her private pain especially regarding her abusive marriage to Sykes, her spiritual reflections such as her prayers or contemplation of her suffering, and her moral dilemmas and endurance as a Christian woman. Delia says: Ah been married to you for fifteen years, and Ah been takin' in washin'fur fifteen years. Sweat, sweat, sweat! Work and sweat, cry and sweat, pray and sweat! – this dialogue is as close to confession as it gets, revealing the years of unspoken pain. Redemption and moral strength overwhelm the story. This is related to the Christian framework of confession. There is also a symbolic confession through setting. Hurston uses symbols and setting to evoke confessional tone rather than using the formal confessions among characters. The sweat Delia pours during her work is both physical and symbolic of her cleansing and sacrifice. Delia does not intervene to save Sykes who is dying in the last scene. This scene may be representative as a final confession by Delia as she recognizes her own moral decision. Delia's

decision reflects the emotional emancipation Hurston celebrated in her heroines. Hurston believes deeply in individual freedom as she says, “I love myself when I am laughingand then again when I am looking mean and impressive” (Cumber 324). This is one of the features of autobiographical reading of “Sweat”.

Spiritual and cultural roots expose many evidences that narrative may reflect Hurston’s own life experiences, values, and identity. The cultural setting of “Sweat” reflects Hurston’s Southern, black and Christian upbringing. Delia’s prayers and moral struggle are rooted in Black folk Christianity and this is what Hurston practiced and studied as an anthropologist. The snake is a biblical and cultural image which reflects Hurston’s anthropological fascination which she documented during her work in the South. Another autobiographical feature in *Sweat* is clear in voice, narrative rhythm and the language of the story. “Sweat” is written in African American dialect to honor the linguistic culture of the people she knew and lived among. “Sweat” seems to be an oral storytelling Hurston would have heard growing up which supports the existence of her cultural identity and strengthens the autobiographical signature.

Lowell’s confessional poetry features the use of private and shocking autobiographical material. Early confessional poets wrote openly about mental illness, infidelity, dysfunctional families, and alcoholism, ushering in an age of personal revelation. “Night Sweat” tackles personal life of the poet under the stress of psychological state of mind, crisis, sex, family, private humiliation, and expression of

personal pain. Ujjwal Srivastava and Nivedita Gupta see confessional poetry as

a distinctive genre in contemporary literature, [it] is known for its intimate and honest introspection. Originating in the 1950s with American poets, this style marked a significant shift in poetry, moving from political themes to personal experiences. Termed ‘The Art of Self- Disclosure’ it intertwines a poet’s private life with public expression, making a profound impact on readers. (5)

Lowell’s “Night Sweat” reveals both the inner workings of the self and its entanglement with the world. When Lowell says “My mind’s not right” he pinpoints to his mental instability as well as the spiritual confusion he suffers. “Night Sweat” is very rich in confessional as reflected in the following stanzas. He says:

Work, work, to exhaustion; work that lasts

As long as I crawl and close my eyes

In tears and ache for the day’s vanity.

These lines reflect how the poet subjects himself to relentless physical and emotional labor. This echoes Lowell’s obsession with writing. There is a tension between the desire to rest and the obligation to keep pushing forward. This tension is very clear through the use of the image of ‘crawling’ which suggests weakness and illness. Closing the eyes evokes not restful and calm sleep, but despair. Then, he ends the stanza weeping and aching both physically and emotionally. He expresses his pain when he refers to ‘the day’s vanity,’ which suggests the

meaninglessness of his efforts and labor. This stanza includes many features of confessional poetry such as the use of the first-person voice reflected in the use of the subject pronoun 'I', known as personal exposure, the mental / physical suffering, and the creative struggle.

The second stanza intensifies the confessional nature of the poem as it includes many confessional themes such as psychological and physical exhaustion, insomnia and despair, labor and blindness, and persistence through fear. Here are the lines then the analysis.

Stanza 2:

This is the end of a long day's spasm.

My closed eyes cannot see the evidence of yet another morning;
I'll go back to work.

Blind in the dark. It is not resignation –

I'm still crammed with fear. I seize the handlebar of the plough,
and grope blindly in a delirium.

The first line in the second stanza contains a typical aspect of the confessional writing as Lowell uses the body's involuntary reaction as a metaphor for the uncontrollable nature of his mental illness. This is typical of the confessional writing, where the body becomes a battleground for the psyche. The word 'spasm' conveys pain and involuntary suffering. The body and mind are overwhelmed. The second line refers that morning doesn't bring hope but dread and despair. This emotional disruption and the loss of the natural rhythms of life is common in confessional writing which often deals with

endurance through suffering. Lowell denies giving up and insists to continue but through fear. He says “It is not resignation - / I’m still crammed with fear”. Then he admits honestly his instability as he does not claim divine inspiration or control, just desperate perseverance. This is clear in his words “I seize / the handlebar of the plough, / and grope blindly in a delirium”. Fear is both existential and personal: fear of madness, of silence, of irrelevance and of self-destruction. There is also another aspect of confessional writing in this stanza such as referring to the poet as a worker and writing is a burden not an act of joy. The speaker is also aware of his condition.

Stanza 2 of “Night Sweat” is related directly to Lowell’s personal life and reveals a lot about him. According to his biography, Lowell suffered from manic depression. His life was marked by intense manic episodes followed by depressive crashes, often requiring hospitalization, sometimes involuntarily. The word ‘delirium’ evokes the altered mental states he experienced during mania. Lowell does not write about madness; he writes within it. The essence of confessional writing is that it does not just tell the truth; rather, it lives inside it. The previous line documents - rather than dramatizes - his life. These lines can be read as a snapshot of his inner world during one of his breakdowns. He speaks about the isolating nature of psychiatric illness, which is a key theme in confessional writing. His inability to perceive morning is something that most people take for granted as underscoring a loss of orientation and connection to the outside world. In hospital, he was subject to sleep disruption due to both his illness and treatment. This stanza prepares the readers to what comes next in stanza three

which deepens the confessional intensity as it introduces familial estrangement, psychic torment, and a dissolving sense of self. Lowell does not just narrate suffering, he inhabits it. His poetic voice seeks lost intimacy (mother) and confronts internal enemies (thief) with brutal honesty. According to his biography, Lowell experienced several near-psychotic or suicidal episodes, where his poetry emerged as fragile lifeline. He literally wrote “on the edge” of death.

Stanza 3:

I have to live on the edge of death to know you, Mother, faintly,
or not at all.

I look for you, my substitute, and my enemy, and for the thief
who eats through my shadow.

In the first line, Lowell, as a confessional poet, reveals that his survival depends on expressing what destroys him. He speaks of the necessity of suffering as a precondition for getting hold of memory, identity, and meaning. According to biography, Lowell’s mother was unresponsive and detached on an emotional level. Therefore, the mention of ‘Mother’ is ambiguous. Maybe, his actual mother, or it may symbolize mental stability. Then ‘thief’ may be used metaphorically to refer to mental illness or death. The shadow symbolizes the soul or the creative identity. The last line reveals the poet’s terror of being hollowed out by forces within or beyond him.

According to the previous analysis of Lowell’s stanzas, it can be noticed that identity is explored through the clear physical and existential decline and the artistic struggle. Lowell depicts the struggle

between the physical self and the creative self. The speaker in the poem suffers the consequences of illness. Being drenched in sweat physically and mentally is unstable. So, he faces a battle between what is mental and emotional and what is physical. The real identity of Lowell is depicted through the speaker who is a dedicated poet to his craft of writing. He says, 'I am tired. Everyone's tired of my turmoil.'

Sweating in Lowell's poem is a physical type yet expressive of the ruined relationship with his mother and failure in achieving poetic success. It could mean the results of fever or illness. He refers to mental exhaustion. He experiences the writer's profound distress. The poem deals with the common fear that intense creative anxiety can submerge or even destroy an artist's potentials. "Night Sweat" is a poem about writing of poems. It deals with the hardships and suffering which the writer faces during the creative steps to achieve mastery of his craft. Sweat is a result of exerted effort. Therefore, the title of the poem refers to both a physical and metaphorical agony. Yet sweat, for Nottage, refers to the hardships in the working-class life in Reading, Pennsylvania. Lowell's paralysis and the sense of failure in creative productivity can be interpreted as manifestations of anxiety not in the literal sense, but as a symbolic fear of losing agency, potency or creative power. When he says, 'I have to live in it all my waking life,' he reveals a sense of entrapment, common in depressive or neurotic states. He cannot escape his psyche, and the inability to write or create may reflect a deep ego conflict between the id, the ego conscious self, and the superego.

When using an autobiographical approach, many themes emerge. Among these are, for example, memory and the past, struggle and resilience, identity and self-understanding, belonging and alienation, transformation and growth, family and relationships. The confrontation with the past, especially when authors reflect on formative events, is often central to the autobiographical reading. Those points will be covered in the following paragraphs.

Nostalgia and regret or the idea of change is a common theme among the three works. In Nottage's play, the characters constantly recall better times such as times of stable jobs, strong friendship, and a sense of aim of existence. Characters in the play try to relive the past and struggle to accept the change. This nostalgia for better times reveals denial and the pain caused by the economic decline and job loss. This reflects how past events shadow over the present and affect and control characters' emotional states. For example, Tracey is very attached to the past yet Chris and Jason bear the weight of past mistakes, showing that trauma and social struggles can pass through generations. This affirms Nottage's idea that collective histories shape identity in Lowell's "Night Sweat" and also in Nottage's *Sweat*. We notice that characters in the play switch between happiness and hardness. The speaker in "Night Sweat" also passes over happy and hard times. So, time switching and the resulting psychological mood of both characters and the speaker are a very important common aspect in the analysis of the two literary works. By switching between 2000 and 2008 throughout Nottage's play, one can see the characters in happier times. In 2000, they sit in the bar and reminisce about their families'

jobs at the steel mill. Although it is hard, they appreciate the stability of the job, the union benefits, and the support it has given to their families. They even question Chris, who wants to give up his job and go to college, as it is a safe and secure job. They have a lot in common to talk fondly about life past and present working in the factory. Cynthia is also saving for a holiday in Panama; Jessie talks about travelling around the world; and Jason wants to retire at 50 with his pension. Even Stan, who has a limp and cannot work in the factory due to an accident, remembers his time there warmly. However, this nostalgia turns to regret. After the mills start cutting down on hours and employing non-union cheaper workers, everyone's hours are cut, and others lose their jobs, and their hopes and dreams wither. Jason and Chris attack Oscar as he becomes one of the cheaper workers at the factory, and all of the workers are left to think 'what if' about their life choices and to regret decisions and actions they took before their livelihood and way of life was turned upside down.

The sequence of narration of cycle of life, with all turns of happiness, regret, stability and instability, refers to time-space challenges on those group of people. Nottage's technique of presenting dialogues among characters seems to be circles of confessions as each character expresses his / her experiences and views. Similarly, the speaker in Lowell's "*Night Sweat*" switches from past to present and vice versa. He speaks about life and death. He confesses his feelings in moments of illness and relief. Relationships are also common among the two literary works. In Lowell's poem, relations have many forms, for example, the relation between man and life. There is also the

relation to art as the speaker is the poet himself who suffers in the writing process which is called *Ars poetica*. The other shape of relation is husband and wife relationship. Lowell says:

Behind me! You! Again I feel the light

Lighten my leaded eyelids, while the gray

Skulled horses whinny for the soot of night

Yet, in Nottage's play, all characters are interconnected with each other either by familial ties or long friendships. Nottage explores how poverty and deprivation cause changes of human nature. These features of hard life lead also to motivate racial prejudice, hostility, envy and loss of the bonds of friendship. Marwa Ghazi Mahmmed affirms that:

Sweat examines the right of the working-class community to have a good life like other classes. Those workers have dreams which are invested in vain. Nottage has intended to give voice to those poor workers who continue living in the past to escape their reality; she wanted to shed light on them and bring them to the area of visibility. Economic and social invisibility are diseases causing crisis as what happened at the end of the play.... Nottage shows the consequences of treating people as invisible. (42)

Therefore, fragmentation, the intended maltreatment, racism, ignoring the existence of black poor people are the cause of the seeking self-liberation of the main character in Nottage play.

Liberation is another common aspect between *Sweat* and “Night Sweat”. Rania Saber Ahmed Abdel Rahim who considers “Lowell’s poetry as liberation argues that he can convey his freedom to his readers. First, he attempts to remove his socially obstructive masks for personal liberation. His writings set examples of rising above cultural forms of social fear. Second, after his success in Life Studies Lowell adopts a strategy to create an ever-widening sphere of influence for the sake of individual freedom. The same idea is obvious in Nottage’s *Sweat* as it interrogates the idea that hard work inevitably leads to success, showing instead how systemic forces- especially deindustrialization, racism, and economic inequality- undermine that dream for many.

Sweat explores the idea of the American Dream in many points such as illusion of upward mobility, racial and class tension, generational power, economic displacement, and disillusionment and betrayal. “Nottage begins *Sweat* with the ending of Hughes’ poem as a form of foreword. From the first stanza there is an outlining of the writer’s opinion on the American Dream, one that has far seemed unobtainable. Yet, there is a declaration for change. (<https://www.paperbackparis.com>). Nottage gives voice to the disillusioned working class, highlighting the human cost of economic policies and the social divides that fracture communities. Characters feel betrayed – not just by their employers, but by the entire American system that promised stability and self-determination. This betrayal leads to anger, addiction, and a sense of hopelessness. The dream turns into a nightmare for many characters in the play. Oscar’s words highlight the

relentless pursuit of the American Dream through hard work, despite systemic barriers that prevent recognition and advancement. Oscar refers to labor and recognition when he says:

My father, he swept up the floor in a factory like Olstead's – those fuckas wouldn't even give him a union card. But he woke up every morning at four A.M because he wanted a job in the steel factory. It was the American way. So, he swept fucking floors thinking 'one day they 'll let me in'' (Act 2, Scene 5).

The play presents a critical examination of the American Dream, revealing how systemic inequalities and economic challenges hinder the aspirations of working-class individuals. This portrayal encourages audiences to reflect on realities behind the pursuit of success and societal structures. The following words clarify Stans' cynicism towards political promises. Stans says "I decided a month ago that I'm not voting, cause no matter what I pull it will lead to disappointment" (Act 1, Scene 5). Nottage challenge the myth of the American Dream and criticizes how the sense of self is tied to the systems. However, all moments of hope and optimism in a better future through the attainment of strong economy disappear. The unions brought nothing but despair to the workers. All hopes of 2000 that have been talked spiritedly of shatter in 2008, clouding the present moment for all character

Chronological order in Nottage's *Sweat* has a dramatic purpose. It is based on nonlinear structure. Therefore, it builds suspense and dramatic irony as the audience sees the consequences before fully understanding the causes. It also illustrates how the past lingers in the

present, affecting future generations and community dynamics. Courtney Mohler and Christina McMahon and David Roman consider that:

In setting goals, in order to solve social / human problems, there prevail critical terms and categories of the humanistic psychology and psychotherapy, such as: self-actualization and human potential. It is an approach tending towards wholeness, taking into account human beings' free will, subjectivity, human experience, self / development, spirituality, creativity, positive thinking, client-centered and context- centered, approach / invention, empathy, helpful to know that there is growth, development and hope when it is guided in true self-knowledge. (30)

Accordingly, psychological suffering is an issue that the three works share it could result from struggle with the outside world to win rights and prove identity and this what we have in Nottage's and Hurston's work however psychological suffering can result from a different type of pain. This is the result of inner doubts, uncertainty, and lack of trust. This type is found in Lowell's "Night Sweat" since Lowell's internal war is with himself rather than with external society. It is a struggle emanating from the writer's self-questioning whether his literary creative works will continue impress the reader and win respect. Thus, though Lowell's work is internally oriented yet he still shares Nottage's and Hurston's worries about the issue of identity. Though the latter battle is externally oriented.

The three works are similar in dealing with the idea of belonging. Lowell has a complex relation with his mother. He does not feel belonging to his mother. In “Night Sweat”, the presence of mother is like a ghost, shaping the psychic construction of Lowell’s suffering rather than appearing as a character. On the other hand, Hurston’s “Sweat” depicts the idea of losing the sense of belonging which results both of the psychological and physical suffering. Delia and Sykes are a married couple who have a very strained relationship. When the story begins, the couple has been married for fifteen years. Delia seems to be clinging to the last shreds of the love. Syke has been physically as well as verbally abusive. He exploits her fear of snakes to torment her by placing a snake on her neck. Delia was highly aware of the gossip that runs through the town, associating him with a mistress named Bertha. So, there is a social and familial disintegration which affirms of the idea of losing belonging to wife, family, society, and race. Syke and Delia have dysfunctional relationship. He criticizes Delia for taking in white people’s washing. He disorganizes her work, kicking her whites across the room. When he tells her he won’t have her he won’t have her taking in laundry anymore, she loses her meekness and stands up to him, saying that her work feeds him ‘‘Mah tub of suds is filled to belly with vittles more times than yo’ hands is fied it ‘’. Thus, Fear is a common technique used by the speaker in Lowell’s “Night Sweat” and Hurston’s “Sweat” but in a different way. According to Lowell, fear is a technique of continuity and perseverance. Yet, according to Hurston, Delia’s fear is a technique of victory.

To conclude, this paper has attempted to explore the ramifications of the three works belonging to three different literary genres that happened to share the aspects of confessional and autobiographical writings. It has attempted to trace aspects of confessional and autobiographical writing, the supposed basis to be common in them. By the end of this paper, it can safely be said that the title Sweat in each work is very suitable to reflect how each writer has been successful in expressing both physical and psychological suffering of targeted human self in each work. The three examined works have proven that keeping self-integration and spirit of defiance and insistence on belonging are key to self-redemption and defying pressures, preservation, and shattering forces of collapse. Each work in this paper is very rich and deserves a lengthy study from different critical points of view, Thus, this paper recommends those literary works for other new academic researches to explore and discover the various and valuable literary ideas that need further consideration through different critical approaches.

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الليل للشاعر روبرت لويل و القصة القصيرة بعنوان التعرق للكاتبة زورا هيرستون. قراءة في ملامح السيرة الذاتية و السرد الاعترافي في مسرحية التعرق للكاتبة لين نوتج و قصيدة

تعرق

ملخص

قراءة في ملامح السيرة الذاتية و السرد الاعترافي في مسرحية التعرق للكاتبة لين نوتج و قصيدة تعرق الليل للشاعر روبرت لويل و القصة القصيرة بعنوان التعرق للكاتبة زورا هيرستون.

يهدف هذا البحث الي تتبع ملامح الكتابة الاعترافية من خلال قراءة السيرة الحياتية لثلاثة اعمال لكاتب امخلفين في تخصص الكتابة الادبية حيث انه تصادف ان تلك الاعمال تحمل نفس الاسم و هو التعرق او العرق - ذلك الاسم الذي يجمعهم ليس فقط كمسمي و انما في المغزي و المعني الاستعاري الذي يشير اليه. ان كل عمل منهم يعبر عن مدي الكد و الكفاح و المعاناة البدنية و النفسية علي حد سواء و لكن من وجهة نظر كاتبه فعلي سبيل المثال نري ان الكاتب المسرحي لين نوتج - افريقية الاصل - تعبر في مسرحيتها عن معاناة مجموعه من العمال من اصحاب البشرة السوداء بعد ان تسببت الازمة الاقتصادية في فقدانهم لوظائفهم التي كانت بمثابة الحياة بالنسبة لهم. و قد نجحت نوتج في التعبير عنهم و عن علاقاتهم باصدقاءهم من السود و البيض و المشاكل التي نجمت عن التغير في هويتهم بعد فقدان العمل الذي يعد هو الهوية ذاتها بالنسبة لهم.

و يتحري البحث القاسم المشترك بين الثلاثة اعمال و هو الذات و مشاكلها سواء من الاضطهاد الذاتي و الاحساس بالالام النفسي و الخوف مما يترتب عليه من ارق و الم و مرض و تلك هي المشكله التي عبر عنها شاعر الاعتراف - الذي يعد ايقونة المدرسة الاعترافية و مؤسسها - و هو روبرت لويل الذي اعتبر العرق هو المظهر الخارجي و الاليه الذاتية للجسد للتعبير عن معاناته النفسية و المرضية.

اما كاتبة اللقصة القصيرة زورا هيرستون فقد عبرت عن فكرة الكد و التعب و المعاناة لكسب العيش من خلال زوجة افريقية تعمل كغسالة لملابس الاخرين من ذوي البشرة السوداء لكي

توفر قوت يومها هي وزوجها الذي لم تسلم من تنمرة و مضايقاته و خيانتة لها ورفضه لطبيعة عملها و ما تكابدة من كد و عمل.

لقد تناول البحث تلك الاعمال بالتحليل و النقد الادبي للعديد من قضايا الذات والهوية و الاعتراف و توصل للعديد من النقاط المشتركة بين الثلاثة اعمال ومنها التعبير عن قضايا فقدان الانتماء بأشكاله المختلفة والتي نتج عنها المعاناة و المشاكل النفسية و الجسدية و غيرها من العوامل المشتركة بين الثلاثة اعمال قيد ذلك البحث و لازالت تلك الاعمال ثرية و تحمل في طياتها نقاط قوية للبحث الادبي و اللغوي و النقدي.