



Sweat (TCG Edition)

Lynn Nottage

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No stranger to dramas both heart-felt and heart-wrenching, Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Lynn Nottage has written one of her most exquisitely devastating tragedies to date. Set in one of the poorest cities in America, Reading, PA, a group of down-and-out factory workers struggle to keep their present lives in balance, tragically ignorant of the financial devastation looming in their futures.

Sweat (TCG Edition) Details

Date : Published May 22nd 2017 by Theatre Communications Group

ISBN :

Author : Lynn Nottage

Format : Kindle Edition 144 pages

Genre : Plays, Drama, Theatre, Fiction

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Jennifer says

A quick, gripping read about the consequences for working-class people when longtime jobs disappear. I have a special interest in this one, because the setting (Reading, PA) is 5 minutes away from where I grew up. Nottage hits on something really important when she shows how racial resentment creeps into communities the moment the going gets tough, even if it never made much of an appearance before. This is a story of the moment (and of the last few decades), and definitely worth your time.

Brina says

As I return from vacation, my personal Pulitzer reading challenge has resumed. This year's Pulitzer winner for drama is *Sweat* by Lynn Nottage. Nottage is the first woman to win the award for playwrights twice and has won multiple awards for her work. Set near her hometown of Reading, Pennsylvania, *Sweat* details the life of a close knit group of friends who have been affected by their factory closing, ending the only way of life the town has known for generations.

Nottage has the drama play out over eight years. Leading into each scene she includes the political and social climate of the day in order to get a feel for what blue collar workers are going through. Most of the protagonists work at Olstead's plant as line workers, gaining employment out of high school just as their parents and grandparents had before them. Working at Olsteads is a rite of passage as marrying someone who one meets on the job. Despite the dangers of working in such conditions, it is still the best job for someone with a high school education, and parents working the lines continue to pull for their teenage kids to get into the factory.

We encounter the group at a bar after work, the same bar they have been going to for the past twenty five years. It is 2000 and despite the tensions of an election year, no one seems to care who wins; ditto the fact their basketball team could win the championship. The main protagonists Cynthia, Tracey, and Jessie have the sole focus of earning a paycheck and having enough to pay the bills. Cynthia and Tracey have both applied for a management job and this has caused some friction between the old friends as well as between their sons Chris and Jason. Both Cynthia and Chris have motivation to leave the factory, whereas Tracey and Jason are content with their station in life.

Nottage plays the race card as she has Cynthia who is African American earn the promotion over Tracey who is Caucasian. Even though Cynthia has rightfully earned her job, it is still a sore point for Tracey. Meanwhile with NAFTA becoming a reality, Olstead would like to move the jobs to Mexico. Workers strike and Oscar, an American born Hispanic crosses lines and earns employment in the interim. He is hard working as he also works at the bar and the women glare at him as a spic traitor on a nightly basis. Oscar is as American as the others yet the women who have sweated on the job as third generation employees resent him taking their pay.

Sweat is a microcosm of a community and how jobs moving overseas have affected Americans from all walks of life. The drama was filled with tension and many talking points. I appreciated hearing about the political and social situations so I knew what the protagonists were dealing with on a daily basis. Lynn Nottage has created a masterful play that I am sure would be powerful to see performed on stage. She is

deserving of her accolades and awards and I am excited to see what she will produce next.

Kat says

I can understand why Nottage has won the Pulitzer Prize. The writing in this play is exquisite - sparse enough to allow productions creative license to make it their own, yet detailed enough for a reader to imagine everything that is going on. "Sweat" brings to life a small slice of Americana that has largely been ignored - the plight of blue-collar factory workers being screwed over by the fat-cat owners. However, the most poignant part of this play is the way Nottage focuses on the dire outcomes that come from the down-and-out being pitted against each other. The owners and administration of the factory do not appear in this play, but their back-handed dealings and manipulations of the community are the catalysts that move the story forward, creating an unseen, all-powerful character pulling the strings of everyone that is seen on stage. It is both heart-breaking and brilliant. I would love to see a production of this play.

Jasia says

So fantastic that I bought the play immediately after seeing it and almost immediately sat down to give it a close read. A very important play for America in the year 2017. Required reading and viewing.

Trish says

Lynn Nottage's Pulitzer-winning play *Sweat*, is set in a bar in Reading, Pennsylvania, and shines a light on the once-unionized manufacturing base of America's industrial engine, once corporations moved operations abroad. The play closed on Broadway in June 2017 after a successful run off-Broadway and around the country.

Reading, Pennsylvania, I read somewhere, had one of the fastest de-industrializations and became one of the poorest cities in America. Factories did not give advance notice of their closings, but overnight moved equipment overseas and locked their doors. Workers *and* management--with mortgages, loans, lives--were just plum out of luck.

Nottage shows us a period of eight years at the beginning of the new century when rumors swirled about closing down some lines—like they perennially did. But the management team was still hiring, and even pulled an African American woman up from the line to give a visual--some sense of upward momentum and overlap between the workers and the higher ups.

Then came the screws: shorter hours, lower pay—a forty percent pay cut—or nothing. Advertisements written in Spanish lured strike breakers while the union held firm.

Eight years later everything has changed. The factory has closed and the workers we'd seen at the start are battling various addictions—alcohol and opioids...the usual. The woman who had moved into management had several menial jobs, altogether not paying what she'd made before.

I especially liked the way Nottage placed familiar points of view or attitudes in the mouths of her characters.

The bartender Stan asks a question many have asked: Why don't you leave this beat-up town where you have only a history and no future?

“Sometimes I think we forget that we're meant to pick up and go when the well runs dry. Our ancestors knew that. You stay put for too long, you get weighed down by things, things you don't need...Then your life becomes the pathetic accumulation of stuff. Emotional and physical junk....

The level of confusion and desperation in this work turns the screws on viewers very effectively, but Nottage gets the rough language and behaviors exactly right. A kind of desperate race rage, though never spoken, is palpable. Then there is the open spoken rage against the corporation, against the machine, against the scabs...against the bartender, or anyone, anything in the way. A young immigrant *does* get in the way...

A poem by Langston Hughes is epigraph to this play, and it seems especially appropriate in these times:

“O, yes
I say it plain,
America never was America to me,
And yet I swear this—
America will be!

Out of the rack and ruin of our gangster death
The rape and rot of graft, and stealth, and lies,
We, the people, must redeem
The land, the mines, the plants, the rivers,
The mountains and the endless plain—
All, all the stretch of these great green states—
And make America again!
—*Langston Hughes*

Note Hughes does not say Make America Great Again, but just make it again, live up to the principles upon which it was founded. It is less than that now.

Nottage previously won a Pulitzer for *Ruined*, a play originally conceived as a Bertolt Brecht *Mother Courage* adaptation and set in a brothel-bar in the Congo. Both sides of Congo's post-colonialist civil war, soldiers and rebels, choose their night's pleasure from among the same prostitutes. The more Nottage understood through interviews the horrors of what happened there, the less she could apply the Brecht template and instead created a wholly original work.

Pick up, or better yet, go see one of her plays--she is among our finest artists at work today.

Jon says

So easy to see why this won the Pulitzer, *Sweat* captures the cultural zeitgeist of our country right now. If you want to understand why the election turned out the way it did or the cultural-racial divide of our country, this is the play to read.

Harry McDonald says

Yeah. I get why this won the Pulitzer. Dealing with socio- economic- political- ISSUES in contemporary America, in a sort of square play (not a bad thing necessarily.) I mean, it's really good. I wish it was slightly more playful with form, but it's really solid. Great ensemble piece.

Scott says

Dialogue so real it hurts. This is a biting and fierce account of working-class America and how they survive.

Elizabeth? says

I read this play for a seminar I am taking this summer. This play won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama 2017.

Set in 2000/2008 in Reading, PA, the play deals with tension among the factory workers. The play is set in a bar where the friends commiserate and discuss what is happening with their jobs including pay, promotions and management.

I read this in one sitting, but this one will definitely stick with me for some time. I wouldn't mind teaching this one. I think it is quite timely.

Mallory says

This play is certainly of its time; the scenes open with news-like recaps of what is going on socially and politically in America during the early 2000s. However, the themes of the play are, tragically, timeless, and ones that have followed and will follow American history for years. This play is about a group of working class friends who are hit with the recession, and how, when the potential of poverty is in sight, allow racial discriminations to break them apart. The main setting, a bar, invites the audience into the play by presenting a welcoming atmosphere, and friendly banter and birthday parties gives the beginning of the play a familiar feel. Nottage doesn't shy away from the uncomfortable or the realistic, however, and Sweat is littered with moments of foreshadowing and buildup. It's worth a read if you love reading plays that are just as entertaining on the page as they are in person. (I'm assuming, I haven't seen it live).

Doug says

I've read and/or seen three earlier Nottage plays (Las Meninas, her first Pulitzer winner Ruined, and Meet Vera Stark), and enjoyed them all, so was excited to tackle her latest. Despite it winning ANOTHER Pulitzer, I found it somewhat of a disappointment - I mean, it's competent, but there is really none of the freshness in plot, subject, character or execution exemplified in her earlier work. It seemed derivative - kind of an amalgamation of Lindsay-Abaire's 'Good People' and 'Norma Rae'. And after reading it, I had no particular desire ever to see it performed, which is a bad sign in a play. I'm glad the astonishing 'Oslo'

prevailed over it at the Tony Awards for Best Play this year.

Brian McCann says

Glad I finished this Pulitzer Prize-winning play on Thanksgiving morning. Outstanding in its construction, raw in its characters, brutally honest in depicting a working-class demographic gone awry after the millennium. So glad I saw it on Broadway this spring; just as powerful to read.

Ivan says

FIRST LINE REVIEW: "So, you got a job?" Jobs are at the heart of this newest Pulitzer-winning drama. More specifically, the loss of jobs in 21st C. America. And the impact of job loss on the people struggling to transition from what they had to what they no longer have. I loved Nottage's last Pulitzer-winning play, "Ruined." LOVED it! Edgy, humorous, important, deeply moving. This new one? Not so much, I'm afraid. I was frustrated with the characters' lack of empathy and stubbornness. The quickness with which they could turn on life-long friends and the rather predictable ending. But what do I know? This play has racked up performances, garnered critical praise and awards. Mine languish in a drawer.

Tina says

Oh, my! I sobbed as I finished reading the play - I can only imagine what it would feel like as an audience member...especially one who calls Berks County home, lived in Reading for the first 8 yrs of my life, and has family and friends who were affected by NAFTA and economic changes within the time period the play spans.

What is more interesting to ponder is to fast-forward 9 years from 2008, to our current year and circumstances. When you read this, especially if you are a native to the area, consider Oscar and his 2008 situation, his 2000 situation, and what, most likely, those like Oscar dwelling in Reading experience in 2017. Some of what the white and African American characters represented in this play experienced in 2000-2008 has equally hit the Hispanic population in this area since then.

Even more remarkable is that, from my experience, this play easily may be transplanted to any of outskirts of Reading in 2017. Whereas my work experience has been relatively unfazed over these years, I know many others who are still experiencing the effects of economic recession and the effects of NAFTA to this area. My "setting" isn't a bar - I "tend" a public library. The community where I live and work has many transient people dwelling here. The same frequenters of the bar setting in the play during the day descend upon our public service locale. One block away from where I work and catercornered to where I live is a former hotel, once a place of grandeur in this community, which houses those who are transient and indigent. Down the road a-piece is a correctional facility meant to reintegrate those who have been incarcerated, giving them a second chance at life and not one of recidivism. Many of the experiences of the characters play out in 2017 in our Berks' suburbs, which are no longer insulated from what residents of Reading have experienced.

This play has made a profound impact on me. It forces me to recognize the ills of this area (which could be in any former industry-laden, now drug-infested/crime-ridden/employment-devastated area of the country),

in an historic sphere as well as a current-day perspective. Sometimes, even though we go through the motions of living in this arena day-in/day-out, we forget or ignore what is right in front of us. And, that is "Sweat".

It's unlikely I will see Nottage's "This is Reading" which is playing over the next three weekends at the train station in Reading. However, I hope those who go look to what they see as something worth fighting for and reversing the trend of depression to one of hope. And, to those of us who are fortunate enough to attend who live in the outskirts/suburbs/idyllic farm communities, please deeply weigh how much we may do to assist in reversing this trend. After all, it is for the benefit of all of us living in Berks.

Ashley *Hufflepuff Kitten* says

I broke down just reading this; I can imagine what it's like to see it performed. The anger, the resentment, the confusion, the bitterness are all so tangible. And so fresh in my mind. This play jumps between 2000 and 2008, mostly centered in a bar in Reading, PA, from just before W won the election into everything going to hell when the recession hit. The stage directions at the top of each scene are helpful in placing the reader in what's going on in the world, giving national and local headlines.

Some personal background: I graduated high school in 2007. Went to college for four years, the latter two of which I was working full time alongside going to school full time. By the end of that last year of school, on top of a ton of things I was so burnt out. Still haven't graduated, but that's a different story. Those two years were also spent working in a factory here in NE Ohio, so while I was getting said well-rounded education I also saw firsthand what it was like for people who've held the same job for 20+ years. We had temps roll in. I don't remember many of the old guard heading out when that happened, but I know those temps wanted to stay with us bad because it was a job. Our factory wasn't union, or if it was I didn't belong to it. I split in 2011 and have held two different jobs since then.

My point with the origin story is this: by the time I got into the full-time job market, the recession was already here. The anger and the bitterness, especially toward big business and immigrants trying to find work, is all I've really known from coworkers. This play provided me the look into how it was, maybe how it was always supposed to be -- what, as children, we were told it would be when we graduated and went to college and graduated again and figured out a "career". And I know that the people coming into the US weren't, and aren't, "stealing" anyone's jobs, that that's a complete myth that deserves no credence. But I also know how people are when they're suddenly desperate. Everyone wants to and has to blame something and someone. Doesn't make it right whatsoever. That's just the mentality.

And this play brings it all into full, raw being. It's really well-crafted. The dialogue is natural and you can feel the tension in the pages.
