

Good essay about short stories

[Art & Culture](#), [Symbolism](#)



In her 1926 short story “Sweat”, Zora Neale Hurston tells a sad story of the abusive relationship in a poor household, where Delia has to wash people’s clothes to earn money that her unemployed, lazy, cheating and abusive husband freely spends on his lover Bertha. The story is full of symbols that are used to enhance the reader’s understanding of Delia’s sufferings and struggle of a kind, hard-working and honest woman with evil for fifteen years before her liberation caused by the evil’s, her husband’s, death.

The first of the two connected symbols is the snake that in Christianity is a symbol of the original evil and of Satan. The reader encounters with this evil at the beginning of the story, when Sykes scares Delia with a bull whip, forcing her into thinking it is a snake (Muller 149). This action could be deemed as a joke if not for the Sykes attitude. The man did so intentionally, as he knew Delia was scared to death by snakes and even earth worms. However, used to abusing the woman since the second month of their marriage, he did not care about her feelings and was happy to start a fight with her anytime (Muller 151). The second appearance of the snake as a symbol of evil happens when Sykes decides to bring a rattlesnake into the house and deliberately puts the box with it in the place where Delia can vividly see it. As he boasts to be a snake charmer, he claims that the creature is not going to bite him. Twice Delia brings up the topic of Devil in regards to Sykes, his deeds in general and his snakes episodes. After the first encounter with the symbol of snake, Delia says, “Oh well, whatever goes over the Devil’s back, is got to come under his belly. Sometime or ruther, Sykes, like everybody else, is gointer reap his sowing” (Muller 151). After the second encounter with the animal, she returns home from the

Sunday church and is looking for the reptile, asking “ Whut’s de mattah, ol’ Satan, you ain’t kickin’ up yo’ racket?” (Muller 155). As a result, Sykes gets what he deserved for his hatred and attitude and is being unexpectedly killed by his own recklessness toward the animal and toward his life, as he fails to refill the stocks of matches and cannot light the fire to see the snake, who eventually bites him.

The second biblical symbol of the story is the day the story starts, which is Sunday. The passions of Christ began on Sunday, and as the story unveils, the reader learns that Delia is an innocent woman, who suffers from an evil man, but still has hope for him, as she attempts to be friendly with him, although her attempts ultimately fail (Muller 153). The analogy of Delia’s sufferings with the passions of Christ can be also traced in the last part of the story that says, “ Delia’s work-worn knees crawled over the earth in Gethsemane and up the rocksof Calvary many, many times during these months” (Muller 153). In this episode, the woman has been suffering for months trying to bear all hardships coming her way, but one of the last drops before her “ resurrection” was Bertha’s visit to her home asking for Sykes, her husband. At the same time, unlike the passions of Christ, Delia’s sufferings did not end on Saturday, as the woman made a conscious choice not to try and save her husband, but let him die. Thus, one of her passions has come to an end, but still being a human being, she could not be resurrected and had to continue her life and face the rest of her human passions.

The story is full of Christian symbolism, as religion and attendance of Sunday churches has been a relief for Southern black people for a long time. The

incorporation of the biblical themes into the story of life of a simple faithful woman, who, despite her sufferings, did not stop praying to God, was a good choice for Hurston, as it helped deliver the depth of Delia's struggles and release.

Works Cited

Muller, Gilbert H. Ways In: Approaches To Reading and Writing about Literature and Film. 2nd ed. New York: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2003. Print.