A Cross-Disciplinary Approach to Stage Design

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A Cross-Disciplinary Approach to Stage Design

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
In partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts
 in
Film and Theater
Theater Design

by

Kimberly (Adachi) Pimentel

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In the process of writing this thesis, I lost my father. I’d like to first acknowledge the challenges in writing while experiencing grief, and yet the memories of his encouragement and love sustained me to push through. Ramon Pimentel, this document and my accomplishments are a reflection of your own hard work and sacrifices. Thank you.

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“BY THE GRACE OF GAWDESSES”
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ABSTRACT

When designing for theater, inspiration, and ideas can come from a wide array of resources and play analysis. This thesis includes the combined method of technical lighting and scenic design for the production of Is God Is, by Aleshea Harris. Presented are approaches to script and character analysis, the incorporation of a diverse range of research, the production process, and a post-production analysis. Also included in this paper are theater design theories, visual references, a light plot, a lighting map, ground plan, and insight behind the design choices.

Keywords: lighting, theater design, light plot, ground plan, Is God Is, Aleshea Harris
INTRODUCTION

In this document, I will cover the research and theories I applied to the scenic and lighting design for the 2022 Theater UNO Fall Semester Production of Is God Is, by Aleshea Harris. I have included my process for both roles. I simultaneously designed with lighting and scenic, which have been my introduction to theater production while also learning the technical methods of designing for theater.

This paper will demonstrate the scope of my research, production meeting notes, discussions, and details of my thought process behind my design choices. I have reference writings from Lynne Porter, Peter Brook, Robert Edmond Jones, Lagos Egri, and interviews of the playwright Aleshea Harris and film scholar and writer Frank B. Wilderson III.

Cross-Disciplinary Design

In my work as a photographer and videographer, I established an understanding of light as a foundational tool by which I would express myself creatively. The use of lighting as an element of visual art has been part of my artistic expression for two decades. It is foundational to how we experience any form of art, three-dimensional design, or live performance. As I continued with this medium, I became curious about other ways to utilize this tool as an art form. I decided to further dedicate my time to learning through lighting design, beyond the still and moving image.

My intention in pursuing a Fine Arts degree at The University of New Orleans was to concentrate on the methods and practices of designing light or theater and other
live performance productions. I was inspired by my own experience in the audience as I grew increasingly curious about the world of live performance.

Upon admission, I was allowed to enroll in the Master of Fine Arts program for Film and Theater with an assistantship in technical theater. My roles consisted of learning and implementing fabrication for seasonal productions at the university while participating in and contributing to the production process. The methods and techniques of scenic design inspired my natural curiosity. It further revitalized my interest in design. To the credit of my design professors, I was allowed to pursue my interests in both. I credit these opportunities to Professor Baas and Professor Griffith’s knowledge of my professional background and their encouragement of my growth as a designer.

My requirements as a Graduate Student in Theater Design enlisted me to design for one show per semester. Despite my inability to source my connection to scenic design, I trusted my interests and requested the opportunity to take on the roles of both Scenic and Lighting designs. I worked in both roles for the productions of Eurydice by Sarah Ruhl (Spring 2021), Hoodoo Love by Katori Hall, and Is God Is by Aleshea Harris.

I desired to work through the dual roles in the hopes of understanding my interest in both lighting and scenic design. Through my professional experience and studies at UNO, I have learned that design requires experimentation, failures, grace, research, curiosity, and reflection, to name a few. Designing for theater engaged my cognitive processing and in equal value to my emotional processing merging into my artistic voice.
I documented my process for this particular production and reflected on previous shows. On compiling this document, I dedicated some time to developing a definition for my desire to design in both scenic and lighting. I conclude that I think in shape and feel in light to the best of my understanding.

As a technical theater designer, there is a tethered connection between my visual processes and my emotional responses. They are tied. As I am reading scripts, and connecting to the dramatic action of a play, I visualize the world through shapes and textures and simultaneously connect to the story and characters with lighting in mind.

My process for design is shaped by what the text requests and is then presented through tools that I obtain through research and practice. Through the phases of this production, I utilized the theories and practices I learned during these six semesters and methods in both disciplines. The introductions and education in theater design and this production spurred an artistic ecosystem within my creative output. My production design work for *Is God Is*, has renewed my former education and experiences while enriching me in the present.
DESIGN RESEARCH, THEORY AND DEVELOPMENT

The role of a theater designer is to visually create the dramatic world of the play through its themes and concepts. In Unmasking Theatre Design, Lynne Porter advises that effective stage design achieves a “poetic connection” with the audience (Porter 21). Success requires several steps. Identifying the themes and concepts in a play enriches the design process. Success in designing the dramatic world of a play relies on collaboration, a clear vision from the director, a thorough understanding of the text themes, and the larger cultural context surrounding the play's production.

Six-Step Analysis

One of the regular exercises incorporated into my coursework was the Six-Step Play Analysis, a step-by-step guide for analyzing a script. This worksheet advises that a designer begin their research by reading the play straight through, followed by second and third reading, at minimum, prior to starting the design process. It provides prompts for noting visual and aural themes, research interests, a plan for the design approach, and a design metaphor. After several readings, I used this worksheet to understand the thematic elements of Is God Is. With each subsequent reading, other elements made their way into the forefront. Familiarity with the text allows room to identify more visual design cues, such as symbolism and cultural references. Robert Edmond Jones would advise that a designer “must actually live in it (the play) for a time” (Jones 73).

This exercise is not expected to produce the final ideas and designs for a play. It is, however, a method for initiating language and ideas to jumpstart the work. A bank of sensory terms helps to identify design clues in the text. From this step, curiosity can
form into questions that then spark initial design sketches and concepts. As a designer, there may not be the opportunity to discuss the themes and characters with the playwright. A method of analysis is a great first step to getting to know the world of the play.

**Character’s Bone Structure as the Visual Quality of a Play**

In *The Art of Dramatic Writing*, Lagos Egri provides tools for developing fictional characters in a narrative. The “Bone Structure” is a three-dimensional aspect of a character that details Physiological, Sociological, and Psychological attributes to create a realistic character (Egri 33). I found that the foundations of a character’s “bone structure” also benefit a designer. It assembles a framework of empathy and understanding of a character’s role in the story and can help a designer to understand characters and overarching themes.

Porter explains that “a play exists in two parts: first, we have the characters’ lives in the situations of the play…” the ‘outer reality.’ While the parts that we connect to within the characters’ struggles or triumphs are the “inner reality.” (Porter 12). We identified the Dramatic Action Statement for *Is God Is* during our June 21, 2022, meeting as the characters seeking liberation. We shared what we all identified as the themes of *Is God Is*, specifically Anaia and Racine’s experiences, which were central to the dramatic world of the play. We concluded that this play dealt with themes of internal peace and external violence, denial of pain, and acceptance of rage as a path toward peace. Therefore, the emotional quality of the main characters took precedence as a theme.
I utilized Egri’s “Bone Structure” as a guide to making pragmatic and artistic connections to the dramatic world.

I could identify cues from the text beyond the Six-Step Analysis through the three-dimensional characterization. As a step toward designing, identifying the bone structure of an already developed character formulates a clear picture of the dramatic world. It helped me to understand who I will be creating the environment for.

The script provides insight into the emotional and Physiological characteristics of the twins as they recite details of their burn scars in the third person and learn about their family's dark past. “Racine is the rough one who still got some pretty to her. She only got the scars on her back and a bit creeping up the rear of her neck. You can barely see ‘em.”

“Anaia wasn’t so lucky. Face look like it melted and then froze. Mostly people don’t let their eyes meet hers” (Harris 25).

In their initial meeting with ‘She,’ their mother, the twins were told details of the incident that caused their burn scars and her misfortune of being bedridden. They learned that their father was responsible. We continue to get more insight into the twins and their Psychological space through details of their abandonment, living in the foster care system, and icing their burn scars throughout the play. Applying these cues as “bone structure,” we can identify the emotional and physical traumatic events that affect the twins.

There are three dimensions to the makeup of a fully realized character (Egri 32). Harris helps to illustrate this by weaving clues of “bone structure” within the script. “Me, too. Scar be burnin’ like iss still some fire in there tryna come out. You ever wanna scrape your scars off and see what’s underneath?” “Wouldn’t nothin be underneath but dead “ (Harris 74).
The play also reflects the tight sisterhood bond despite their obstacles. By understanding the nuances of the characters in a play, a designer can collect these details as a visual language for design choices and grasp the playwright's intentions.

*Is God Is* is a narrative that is just one representation of the shared experiences of Black women in America, and, as the playwright states, it is centered on the experience of Black women (Espinoza). The play progresses through the twins’ emotional journey. Despite the setting changes, I imagined that the stage design should visually represent their lived experience, reflecting the Psychological makeup of the twins’ inner reality and the external world through their lens. A designer’s “principal job is to create the visual world - the environment where the dramatic action can unfold in all its complexity” (Porter 13).

Egri defines the third character dimension, Psychological, as a product of a character’s Physiological and Sociological qualities. He explains the Psychological as “a product of the other two. Their combined influence gives life to ambition, frustration, temperament, attitudes, complexes” (Egri 34).

A character's environment should connect to the character's Psychology (Egri 38). After developing the bone structures, I posed some reflection questions to myself: What are some details in a space that would help to identify the character’s environment? How do these attributes connect to the characters’ and three-dimensional sides? How can the dramatic world help validate a character’s journeys and fate?
Considering Historical and Cultural Significance

In the spirit of developing a rich source of clues from the text, designing for the stage may require a designer to consider a play's historical and cultural significance. The historical significance can range from the current social climate during production to the period in which a piece was written. Expanding research for design by extending it to cultural resources relevant to the play was a helpful way to spark inspiration.

As I began to process more of the play's themes, I was reminded of the term “Afro-Pessimism.” This term was co-coined by scholar, writer, and filmmaker Frank B. Wilderson III. In his interview on The Institute of Black Imagination Podcast, Wilderson shares his experience as a student of fiction writing. He explains that the foundational structure taught to creative writers is to conclude their stories with a resolution. Wilderson believes that Black artists and specifically writers, may not end their stories with a resolution. This theory aims to affirm that stories told through the lens of Black writers and artists may reasonably include a pessimistic tone and unresolved ending. He attributes this to the historically racialized and institutional violence and oppression towards Black people and the historical paradox of injustice. He describes the lack of resolve as part of the Black experience. (Calmese (00:14:50)). I found there to be a connection between this theory through the themes of Is God Is. The pessimistic point of view of Anaia and Racine is a consequence of their trauma and abandonment. The generational and confrontations are at the essence of the dramatic action of this play. “I mean we floatin’ we land from time to time and get stepped on but that’s it. Ain’t been nobody around to give us some I don’t know some foundation? No real mama. No real daddy. Nobody.”
“You so mad.” “Ain’t you? I wanna step on somethin’ for once. See what it feel like. Must feel good. You ’member Second Foster Daddy?” (Harris, IS God IS, 71).

Harris shared her perspective as a writer during an interview with Production Dramaturg, Alexandra Espinoza, for The Wilma Theater titled “A Conversation with Is God Is Playwright Aleshea Harris.” Harris stated, “I actually relieve myself of trying to create a message for an audience. I think I try to build an experience, a narrative that disrupts cultural mythologies. I’m always thinking about what it means to center Black women and to think about them with complexity, and allow them complexity and nuance, and allow them their rage. That’s probably as close to a message as I would get” (Espinoza). Despite her stated intentions, Harris provided a rich resource of poetic symbolism. Anaia and Racine are loosely modeled after Cain and Abel brothers in the Bible. Reading about this biblical story as part of my research allowed me to make symbolic cues from the text. In deciphering the connections, I applied the ideas of duplicity and duality as a visual reference.

In the beginning stages of the research, I also began to look for visual references connected to the language and stylized text of the script. In her interview with the Royal Theatre, Harris explains “There’s great attention given to the rhythms of Black speech in this play, just as in hip-hop. And both hip-hop and Afro-punk (which spring from Black ingenuity in spite of difficult circumstances) represent an emancipatory vision of Blackness as unbound by antiquated, racist ideas. Each of these sources allowed me to be liberated in the creation of this world and its characters.” Racine’s unapologetic vengeance and justification of rage propelled the sisters into pro-action, another elemental theme of the play. And as a subculture, Afro-punk
exemplifies a radical form of Black cultural expression, free of conformity in music, art, culture, and intellect (Planet AfroPunk). In my research, I came across a still image of Heavy Metal musicians from the documentary *Queens of Botswana* (2019). I was visually inspired by the joy and softness on the faces of the musicians juxtaposed with their leathery attire and metal accessories. I imagined this as a goal of the twins: arriving to an energetic lightness through embracing their full selves.

While reading *Is God Is*, I was reminded of the music video STFU, by recording artist and performer Rico Nasty. In the video, Rico Nasty is seen alongside a band of women confronting a rival group of men. The women are colorfully dressed and adorned in metal accessories, punk as well as hip-hop-influenced fashion, hair, and makeup. The gritty and dimly lit environment of the video created a visual reference between my play analyses and character bone structure toward the design of the play ("STFU (Official Music Video)" 0:01:56).

Applying this cultural and historical research method to my design process was significant to my design choices. In developing my exploration of the text, I was able to understand that varying my methods of research could help me expand my ideas.

**Design Development Through Collaboration**

Preceding production meetings with the Six-Step Analysis, and bone structure technique benefited my contribution to the production process and as a collaborator. Our own individual investment in analyzing the script proved to be resourceful. We created a bank of terms and sensory words that drove the work forward encouraged productive conversations, and led to actionable steps.
The collaboration framework was consistent in this production process. The initial meetings included a presentation of images and text inspired by the play. This can establish collaboration and create a space for the sharing of ideas. As Porter states, “...after each person does work individually, everyone combines the separate pieces into a seamless whole, a fully realized production” (Porter 7). These discussions can help to broaden one’s perspective, expand on language and find commonality. From my perspective, this practice can set a tone for everyone’s voice and ideas to be considered as an offering. The invitation to present research inspiration encourages a positive experience for the benefit of the work. Establishing a collaborative environment develops a cohesive vision. In addition to the research and meeting notes provided in this paper, a spark of ideas amongst a team can also be possible through casual conversations and gatherings. If the invitation to share outside of the production meeting is consented to between collaborators, there is an opportunity for more inspirational ideas to be shared.

**Supporting the Physical and Dramatic Action**

Working to create a world that embodies a level of poetry in the design while regarding the physical action of the story required a combination of tasks and steps. For example, approaching this production with consideration to the physical needs of the play required planning for the movement of the actors and scenery actor, fight choreography, and the safety of the cast. As violence is a recurring theme in this play I referenced simple and tactical advice that a stage designed for the actor should be designed for them to move and do their work (Jones 150). Therefore the world would
need to allow fight choreography to develop and the stage ample space for the movement of the scenes.

When considering the physical action of the play, the architectural and technical aspects began to form. The director and I regularly communicated about the desired exits and entrances as well as other production needs. Arriving at a consensus on these details sometimes came prior to the design sketches and during the drafting process. Preceding the application of visual elements, establishing these needs of the production as an early-stage task is helpful to the design process, this helped me to establish the boundaries of the physical activity for the actors and provided me with a framework to design. However, I also worked to remain open to discoveries, as Peter Brook defines as an underlying role for the designer, who “thinks of 'his' designs as being all the time in motion, in action…” (Brook 102)

With the awareness that the set would be the initial engagement for the audience, I embraced that my challenge was to give meaning to the set design only through the story's progression. Jones states that “a stage setting has no independent life of its own… in the absence of the actor, it does not exist.” (Jones 68). I utilized this theory when thinking about the breadth of space, shape, and stage structure. This quote helped me to think about my poetic choices and how the stage design would gain meaning as the play unfolded. This theory encouraged me to envision the scenic and lighting as a supportive structure and an incubator for Anaia and Racine’s inner journey. “A lighting designer’s job is to create the environment where those emotions and actions can take place, not to mimic the emotional journey of the characters” (Porter 18, 20).
Design Idea and Design Expression

Porter explains that the design choices (or expressions) begin with a design idea (Porter 24). She categorizes these elements as “The Two Key Elements Of Design inspired “by the director’s thoughts on the play.” Porter lists the tools to consider when working on the design expression. As I began to sketch and continued visual research, I used these tools to define ideas better: Space Levels, Texture, Color, and Scale (Porter 32-33). In her list of scenic design tools, Porter explains that “Space refers to the empty areas on stage that affect the actor flow and “the shape of the space determines entrances and exits, strong acting areas, and conversation areas” (Porter 32).

As reviewed by Alexandra Espinoza for the Wilma Theater “This fiercely modern new play combines the Spaghetti Western, hip-hop, Afro-punk, and Old Testament” (Espinoza). In keeping with the Spaghetti Western inspiration, I took this aspect of the design into account. I primarily applied these references to my visual research for the scenic design of the play.

Applying these elements enabled me to organize my thoughts and pay close attention to the design elements. Implementing these design tools helped me to sort through and organize my visual research. As the text is the source of our work (Porter 12), each design tool provides specific aspects of the world and the playing space. “I like to think of design as the various visual ingredients we manipulate, while I think of Principles of design as how we arrange and compose the Elements into a composition” (Porter 29).

I have experienced that design is non-linear. Finding an inspiring image prompted by the text would then return me to the text. Alternatively, an interview would
lead me to search for imagery using specific keywords. Therefore, in listing the
following steps, it is best to state my discoveries of the design process here, as I would
sketch and take notes on the ideas and inspirations that came to mind. The intention of
the following design elements and tools helped me to categorize my findings and
decipher which visual elements to apply. Porter describes this as a way to “Develop The
Work” (Porter 161-163). This is where she details the flow when a designer will Sort,
Test, and Experiment. “You will be repeating various parts of the process as you narrow
things down. Remember, designing is an ongoing round of reading, analyzing,
researching, developing ideas, and drawing your ideas into visual form” (Porter 165).
THE PRODUCTION PROCESS

When approaching the design for *Is God Is*, I took its use of several genres into consideration. *Is God Is* incorporates different genres, Greek tragedy, Spaghetti Western, and dark comedy (Royal Court). Harris’s style choices in the play’s writing are seminal to the story’s themes. She used the Spaghetti Western subgenre as a treatment for the play, which by design embodies the complex topics of violence and revenge as justice.

The Spaghetti Western is a subgenre different from the Hollywood Western genre and is distinguished by its element of the anti-hero. In *Spaghetti Westerns at the Crossroads: Studies in Relocation, Transition, and Appropriation*, Austin Fisher differentiates the subgenre for the protagonist’s violent revenge as a means to justice (Fisher 276). Considering Harris’ choice to write this play as a version of this subgenre, I incorporated visual attributes of Spaghetti Westerns for my visual research.

Aside from images from my distant childhood memories, I needed to be more familiar with this genre and its characteristics. And so I began researching its origins and overarching themes. This research included the production design of some well-known films in this genre, leading me to Production Designer, Carlo Simi.

Simi designed several Spaghetti Westerns including *Once Upon A Time In The West* and *The Good, The Bad And The Ugly*. In Stelios Polychronakis’ analysis of Simi’s production design for *The Good, The Bad And The Ugly*, he compares the setting of a showdown scene to the architecture of the Ancient Greek amphitheater. He observed the spatial tension created between the characters in the film surrounded by the arena-style landscape (Polychronakis). In *Is God Is* a build-up of a “showdown”
element was written into the self-descriptive title of the play’s scene “Showdown.” I referenced the image research when considering the spatial element of the stage.

**Part 1 Designing the World**

The production process for *Is God Is* began in August of 2022. As we returned at the beginning of the semester, the production team had already established a visual language towards the treatment of the play. In our meeting on June 21, 2022, we discussed the core themes identified as double consciousness, internal conflict, duality, deception, truth, and illusion vs. reality. The director followed up this meeting with a Design Principle or (Design Idea) for surrealism and hyperrealism. Although “some design Ideas are also visual metaphors” (Porter 23), A metaphor came later. However, the director’s prompt was approached as a design idea. Beginning the production process with a Visual Metaphor is an assurance that the results of the design work will be unifiable, and incorporating the Design Idea provided me with a framework for the stage design.

The impromptu discussions that would occur during the pre-production phase were the catalyst for some of the ideas produced, namely the use of projection. At times, these talks would occur outside of our meeting times. I recall having a conversation with the director that revealed our consensus on the desire to incorporate projection into the production. We found that the cinematic references in the play would make this a relevant design choice. She was interested in projecting a cinematic component in support of ‘She’s’ monologue in ‘Before God.’ In my opinion, this was a great element as the monologue was lengthy and heavily descriptive.
Aside from it being a nod to the film genre, my specific interest in incorporating projection was for conceptual purposes. I connected the relevancy to the context of the play I would describe as a fantasy world where Black women are provided the space to act on their rage. I felt this perspective was indicative of the play’s intentions; a space outside of a Black woman’s reality to enlist violence as a reaction to historical trauma, and aggressions. I then began to think about the stage as a cinematic space.

**Proscenium and cinematic frame**

I began by processing the production needs. We had established that the thrust stage would be a bare space for the action. I thought about the horizontal lines as the actions of the play, the vertical lines that would express that could be for scale, and the diagonals that form the sightlines of Nims theater. The scenic opening of the theater provided access to backstage and wings, as well as an approximate two-foot level rise from the thrust. In the beginning, we sought to design for all of the action to take place on the thrust portion of the playing space. However, as rehearsals began, The director decided it would be best to utilize both the scenic opening and the thrust for the acting space. I then chose to extend the stage by 4 feet.

**Image Research**

My original sketches were of scenic flats designed as an old western town. I had begun my visual search by searching for image stills of Old western towns online. I wanted to tie all the locations into the design as a way to minimize the scenic movement. This was in line with the world of the story. A world unchanged for Anaia and
Racine, but rather the plot development to be tethered to the development of these characters. My research produced several references that I incorporated into the design. The following sections will discuss my thought processes behind each scenic element.

**Dusty Metal**

My practice has been foundationally informed by the importance of a visual metaphor considered a consensus and guide for the production team. A metaphor relays the sensory elements of the actions of the play. It allows the creative team to develop the same world of the play through lighting, scenic, and costuming.

Some weeks into the pre-production phase, we had yet to arrive at a metaphor. That would come later. However, I combined visual research and sensory words, which helped me think about a descriptive term that would be thematic to the treatment of the space. I arrived at ‘dusty metal.’ Dusty implies the old western desert backdrop similar to the environment of the West and the aesthetic environment of Spaghetti Western films. Metal related to the sharp edges, resilient exterior and interior of Anaia and Racine, and the South African metal band I had referenced earlier in my Afro-Punk research. I felt the metal as a reference would also speak to the relentlessness of Anaia and Racine’s endurance. I researched “dusty metal” as a keyword search and was drawn to the scratches on the surfaces. I envisioned the confrontation on the surface as a symbol of Anai and Racine’s rage and fight for survival and their choice of vengeance over complacency. I also incorporated dust as texture, producing a great aural element in the final production.
My other visual research produced a concept on portals. At first, I had considered the images as fragmented dimensions of reality that I wanted to experiment with. This was in reference to keyword search terms ‘yellow house, portal, and dimension”. As the director worked through the blocking, it was instead decided that the actors would solely utilize the proscenium opening spaces for entrances and exits.

When we arrived at a metaphor, we worked through some terms, sensory words, and visual research and we agreed that it was important at this phase to develop a metaphor. This metaphor encompassed the internal and dual battle of the twins and connected to their struggle for peace.

Anaia and Racine were on the same mission but on opposite sides of the journey. Anaia was the sister who was timid and sought to avoid confrontation, while Racine was enlivened by vengeance. Anaia argues against her sister’s thirst for violence. Anaia is pulled to defend her sister and ultimately surrenders to her own rage. As this battle pursued amongst the sisters, the plot intensified, and the pacing increased. Their emotional journey was compared to that of a speeding train, and their climactic fight was like “the battle over the train lever.”

**Crossed Tracks on the raked floor**

At this stage of our process, I had arrived that the general treatment for the floor would be a sandy brown train road like in *Once Upon A Time In The West*. The disruption of the crossed tracks felt symbolic of the internal conflicts of Black women, much like Harris intended to portray. It reflected the inner tension of choosing passivity over action as a means of survival and overcoming internalized repression tied very well
to this metaphor. I arrived at the conclusion that the relationship between ‘dusty metal’
and ‘the battle for the train lever’ would marry well. I decided that the rake would be
designed to look like crossing railroad tracks while still maintaining the old western
urban planks I had originally referenced.

**Portals and Duality**

The concept of this ‘battle’ also lent well to the themes of confrontation, struggle,
passivity, and aggression, themes that Harris addresses in this play. The thematic
elements include the twins’ conflict with the other characters, the conflict between the
two of them, and the inner conflict of Anaia.

The writing connects Anaia’s human capacity to existing in duality. With the
knowledge of their father’s transgressions, the sister’s mission was set and the world
became more impartial and became biased. I sketched out two portals which also
served as entrances and exits. In my model, these portals were given the same
rendered treatment. This idea stemmed from Anaia’s uncertainty about the mission.
Following these former discussions and the literary cues from the plays, this theme of
opposition began to solidify and visually connect.

“We on a mission from ‘God’” (Harris, *Is God Is 102*). This cue from the script
proclaimed the ‘side’ the twins were on. The twins embarked on this mission at their
mother’s dying request. Once they accepted the mission their allegiance was
established. This is reminiscent of the partiality in The Bible text, “He who is not with me
is against me” (Mathew 12:30).
In coinciding with the religious themes of this play, and the director’s vision, I decided to incorporate the portals as opposing in hue. The portal from where man’s world emerged was a warm and hot hue. A fiery red. The portal from which they first met their mother was a cool/icy blue and elements of silver to symbolize God and heaven. All of these details were also treated with the rough exterior textured of a Western desert.

**Shaping the World**

The proscenium shape created the boundaries of the playing space. As I referenced previously, its shape was akin to the boundaries of a film frame. The upper level was then tied into the Western genre aesthetic. What I found interesting was the similarity to vertical and horizontal shapes that resembled Mission architecture and sections of a Christian Cross as the play also contains Biblical themes like God, Cain and Abel, Good vs. Bad.

This visual element was an accidental discovery during my design process.

And so as the twins accepted the vengeful mission from God I became curious about how dividing the space with a duality could support the dramatic actions of the play. I had chosen the diagonal orientation in regard to the diagonal sight lines of Nims Theater. I felt this also aided in creating a more visually dynamic approach. These portals would also double as space for scenery to be moved on and off stage. I based the measurements of the portal openings on the measurement of Chuck Hall's desk. It was sized at 5’-0 to accommodate the space.
In reference to the shapes I had found in my research, I wanted to tie in the framing of the proscenium to the framing of the portal doorways. A world within a world, my original sketch did not include this idea, but was something that was developed down the line.

The Raked Thrust

One of the first builds was the rake. The decision to use a rake was a symbolic connection to the physical action and written cues within the play. “Up the Hill” and “Yellow House on the Hill” encompassed some visual themes I found to be recurring in the play. As a concept, I interpreted this as a physical manifestation of the uphill battle for Black women in America. As the twins travel “Up the Hill” they become increasingly tired of the climb and stop to take a rest and reflect on their circumstances. “We been killt.” “Whatchoo mean? We breathin.” “But what we breathin if it ain’t been nobody around to tell us we got mouths and lungs and that make us people like everybody else, you know? Naw, I don’t I mean we floatin. We land from time to time and get stepped on but thas it. Ain’t been nobody around to give us some I don’t know some foundation?” (Harris Is God IS 70-71).

This visual reference felt intentional by the author and I also felt it was important as a visual aspect of the design. I combined the horizontal perspective with these physical settings and decided to transform the thrust stage into a hill. The decision for the Rake also came from the reference to a play on perspective, referenced from Carlo Simi’s production designs.

This was my first time designing a raked floor. It became a learning experience as I was taught the engineering and construction of the floor. In discussion with my
design professors, we were able to determine the maximum height based on the
distance from the downstage of the trust to where it would reach the downstage of the
extended stage. The maximum regulatory height of the rake reached about 6” below the
extended stage, which left a six inch drop. The director and I discussed the ledge, a
distinguishable break between the hill and the scenic stage.

To simulate the railroad planks I decided that the rake should be made up of
rectangular pieces, laid in several different directions. The decision to use cardboard for
the worn look came from my scenic design professor. We chalk-lined areas based on
my drawings and labeled them with lettering. This was a long process that required
measuring and cutting piece by piece. The pieces were secured by gluing the pieces to
roofing paper laid underneath. We then painted and applied the texture of sand and
other organic material.

**Yellow House vs. Twin’s Apartment**

In the script it's indicated that the opening scene is set in Anaia and Racine's
apartment in the northeast, “New York or Hampshire or Jersey.” “or something like that
Somewhere that don’t feel right” (Harris Is God Is 24). I envisioned their apartment as a
dark space, symbolic of their unknown past and family history. The space was mostly
bare aside from a chair and props. Man’s yellow house was distinctively different. The
attribute of yellow, In my perspective, was to indicate a different reality than that of the
twins and God. Man was able to escape the consequences of his violence against God
and his daughters. I interpreted yellow as a symbol of an ‘easy life’ and prosperity that
followed despite his transgressions and dark past or possibly a denial of the past and illusion.

“Yellow House On the Hill” is set in Harris’ former city of Castaic, California, a suburban middle-class city located in the hills. (Wilma Theater) I researched houses in Castaic for aesthetic and design ideas for the yellow house. I had an idea to design a suspended roof similar to the triangle shapes of the house images generated during my search. I had originally considered combining the triangle shapes of roofs far upstage that could serve as a backdrop resembling mountains and hills in the distance. However, as the proscenium and the portals began to solidify the boundary of the world, this idea faded away.

I felt it would be impactful for the yellow house to stand out against the rough texture of the gritty and dusty metal environment. With that, the director and I discussed and agreed on committing to the detail in the script and creating an elevated platform on the proscenium stage. This would place Angie’s bedroom on an upper level in the house, as was denoted in the script, and therefore apply the levels written into the text.

I became interested in this as a method to also symbolize the middle-class status of this family. In the images generated for my visual research on Castaic, CA I thought the use of siding would be a good representation of a middle-class suburban home.

The second yellow house set decoration was the kitchen area. I wanted to streamline the furniture with what this family symbolized for Anaia and Racine. The idea was to have the furniture feel modern, but still cozy and comfortable, in contrast to their uncomfortable bare living space.
The costume designer and I discussed the color themes. We knew that a hue of yellow was an obvious choice. The color worlds for Angie, Scott, and Riley (the twin sons) would live in the same tones as the house. I worked with the costume color themes to then decide on the yellow paint treatment for the siding. The potted plant positioned on the kitchen table was teal, which I decided would be a light maple wood treatment, and the chairs were sourced from the UNO Theater storage, also a soft yellow hue. The table was built based on my rendered design, which was in a midcentury style, to indicate the family’s class.

Chuck Hall’s office

Chuck Hall’s office was scripted with details about his desk. I picked an office desk that was conveniently already on wheels and could be easily transported onto the stage through the stage right portal. His chair, also sourced from the Theater UNO stock, was also wooden, swiveled, and fit the aesthetic of a vintage-style office chair. We painted the desk to match an oak treatment as was described by Chuck Hall in the script.

Convertible Motorbike and Train car seat

Early in the process, I went back and forth about using a single piece of scenic furniture that would convert into another. This approach was largely due to the limited amount of space backstage. I allowed myself some time, as well as consulted with my design professors about the possibilities of creating a convertible piece. The intention
was to allow for quick scenic changes as well as to reduce the footprint in the wings off-stage.

I eventually chose to pursue a mechanism that was befitting to the action of the play; the transformation of a motorcycle into a train car seat. During our meeting on September 9, 2022, we brainstormed some ideas on how the twins would travel. One idea that unanimously excited the room was Professor Baas' idea of a motorcycle. Because their mode of transportation was not specified in the script, the director was able to take creative reign. Anaia and Racine would travel by motorcycle, train, walking, and set in rest spots. To reduce space backstage I applied the idea of making a convertible scenic element and designed the motorcycle and train seat in a single scenic element. In Practicum I (Fall 2022) we began to sketch how the motorcycle could convert to a train seat or vice-versa.

PART 2 EXPRESSING WITH LIGHTING

In the Dramatic Imagination, Robert Edmond Jones states that the artistic quality of stage design "seeks to give expression to the essential quality of a play rather than to its outward characteristics. As I previously discussed, Is God Is is multi genres. Approaching the design with regard to these themes was a great tool for which to consider the lighting design elements. As I previously shared in this paper, the design qualities of this play rest within a Spaghetti Western story of the anti-hero, the bone structure of the characters, and the historical and political world they exist in. I utilized the multi genre aspect as a guide for the lighting and programming choices to support the story.
Highlighting Black women’s perspectives and voices as a method of lighting

Early in my design process I wanted to approach the lighting for *Is God Is* with the intention of ‘tighter’ focused lighting on Anaia and Racine. My theory for this approach was to isolate the twins during their most personal moments and as a symbol of their “us against the world” rapport.

My reasoning behind this was to reflect the intentions of the playwright. The valiant approach to writing a story that focuses on this marginalized demographic requires certain intention and craft. This approach in storytelling requires a very intentional focus on dialogue, making impactful points within what is written and not written. I approached the lighting by paying close attention to the importance of certain scenes and dialogue between the sisters. In particular scenes like “Up the Hill,” where I felt a hyper-focus on the voice of the twins conceptually to illuminate the experience of Black women and to magnify their story. By approaching the lighting this way, the use of isolation was conceptual. I believe it served the playwright’s intentions for this play. Many of the choices I made were in regard to how I imagined that the twins viewed the world they lived in and their place in it.

Silhouetting

To refer back to the director’s Design Idea for surrealism and hyperrealism, I utilized the lighting design to serve this design approach. Some of my earlier visual research included the use of silhouetting on stage. This idea was to serve the hyperrealistic aspect of the production. On the projection screen, fitted under the proscenium and between the portals, were silhouettes of Man during Chuck Hall and
She’s monologues. Their haunting recants of this menacing character was larger than life, a goliath figure in the minds of Anaia and Racine. Chuck Hall’s office and She’s nursing home bed bookend the projection screen, on either side at the portals. In this way, the screen served as multi-use, to project the filming for the production and for casting exaggerated shadows. This silhouette as a recurring visual theme was referenced from the script, where Man is discussed in epic descriptions by all of the characters before we are introduced to him.

With regard to the violent treatment, the director provided a list of the scenes with her plan for their physical activity. They were a combination of live action and silhouettes as well as the incorporation of stage blood as special effects. The murder of Chuck Hall was silhouetted as a way to visually dramatize the scene. She decided that the intermission break would directly follow, to allow the audience to process and prepare for Act II. Racine and Anaia dragged Chuck Hall’s body behind the screen, where his murder would be staged. During the tech rehearsals, I worked with the actors and director on the blocking to achieve the desired effect. Anaia was positioned stage left of the other two actors where her silhouette would show her visceral reaction to the murder. Hall was positioned about one foot upstage of Racine and where she would slam her prop weapon on the stage floor for simulation. I requested Hall be diagonal from the light and exaggerate his body movements by lifting his head and knees so that it would appear realistic from the audience’s point of view. In my perspective, this approach intensified the darkness that violence encapsulates as opposed to being a glorified element. I believe it is important as theater makers to move forward on these themes with caution. The thriller genre in film can be seen as an element of
entertainment value. However, I believe the route taken by the director was carefully presented as the horrific moments that they were intended to be. The placements of the stage blood, the aural effects of the blood pouches, and the physical impact of the fight choreography were intended to elicit a visceral response from the audience. This outcome may have also been achieved by an alternative method by the writer. However, it is my opinion that the audience's possible embrace of the violence in the story was not necessarily a response to the encouragement of violence, but the power of that storytelling to elicit empathy for even the anti-hero. The concept of the anti-hero in fiction, applies to different rules, at times finding ourselves cheering on the side of the aggressor, and sympathizing with revenge justice.

I began to experiment with silhouetting in my home, with my proximity to light and the shadow cast on my wall. The further I was from the source of the light, the smaller my shadow was, and vice versa. This led me to take note of working with the Director to facilitate the blocking behind the screen so that the shadows would vary in scale. I instructed Man to position himself close to the screen and therefore further away from the light source. In this way, he cast a larger-than-life shadow. We discovered that as he would move off the stage and toward the light source at a diagonal, the size of his shadow decreased.

The Apartment

In the production meetings, we discussed where Ania and Racine started and where they ended in the story. Anaia lived to collect the treasures from their travels, requested by She as evidence of their journey. The play concluded with what seemed
like an unfinished ending. In the final scene of “Again Before God,” Anaia raised her hand in the air with her weapon in hand before a blackout. This would leave the audience to conclude that she struck her mother, and potentially to death. One can interpret this in line with the themes of the play. I analyzed the aggression of the sisters as a symbolic representation of these two young Black women “killing off” generational barriers that have historically been direct forms of aggression and violence against Black women. They killed off their father (domestic violence), they killed off their brothers (incest and domestic sexual violence as well as the pedestal given to Black sons over the well-being of Black daughters); Angie (Black respectability), and Chuck Hall (a biased judicial system that sides with patriarchal figures or often does little to hold men accountable for their violence and sexual violence against Black women and girls). She as a symbol to the twin sisters takes the role of their long lost protector at the beginning of the play, whom they risk their safety for in the name of avenging her suffering and death. In allegiance to She, their acceptance of the mission to kill Man could also be seen as their own personal revenge. Throughout the play, they discuss the hardship they received as a result of the burning, from physical abuse in foster care, and the loss of a foundational home. Although they accepted this mission from their mother, it presented us with a grander theme to take into account— the nature of the mission as one that maybe Anaia needed in order to embrace her hurt and anger as a method to release it and ultimately be able to achieve peace. With the killing of the characters, I was led to question why Anaia would kill her mother in the end. We concluded that She’s death would be symbolic of Anaia, taking matters into her own hands (a repeated theme in the play). By killing her mother, Anaia was symbolically
releasing the generational hurt that she became burdened with through the violence she participated in. With the knowledge of her unborn child as a symbol of a future and hope, this last act may have been necessary as Anaia's last mission. By killing her mother, Anaia could release herself from passing the burdens onto her child.

In this journey of the twins, my analysis of the play begins with them in the unknowing. The equilibrium of the start of their story begins in their apartment. In the direct actions of the play, the more Anaia and Racine learn about the scars on their body, their father, and his new life, the more vengeful their mission becomes. In our meeting, we described the overall moral as a journey from repressed hurt and pain toward the desired goal of peace. As I thought about how to present this visually I interpreted this as a journey from darkness (unknowing, hurt, pain) to peace (light). Therefore, the apartment would be staged in limited lighting, not with ambient details of an apartment, but with focused dim lighting to represent the twins living as a representation of the ignorance of the truth ‘living in the dark.’ I projected a still image on the screen as a setting in my search for dark apartments. This was an evening detail from inside a dark apartment window. The highlight appears to be a mountain in the distance, which felt appropriate as a foreshadowing of the twins eventually traveling west. This way the image presented something less literal and more representational to the story and the world.

**Going West**

The Assistant stage managers aided in searching for images to project for the Traveling West scenes that would coincide with the methods of travel incorporated by
the director. We looked over some of the images and videos they researched and we narrowed them down, which were included as part of some of the scenery elements listed in the Appendix.

I was able to source an image of a large yellow suburban home on a grass hill. It was in line with the exterior detail of the upstairs bedroom (yellow siding) and span of the space I would imagine as the stark opposite of the home spaces Anaia and Racine had lived in their whole lives. A home that would impress a symbol of comfort and prosperity, which enraged the sisters.

The motorcycle was converted into a train seat and the inside of a train car was projected. Anaia and Racine’s train seat was blocked to face the audience, and the train seats in the video were facing each other. I decided to crop the video so that only the windows and foliage brushing by, could be seen on the projection.

In the motorcycle transition, a projected video was incorporated to elicit motion in the background. The moving image was similar to the image provided during our earlier production meetings. I regretted not finding a nighttime image as I decided to add a headlight as a light special for the motorcycle. A bright headlight would imply that the motorcycle is being ridden at night, however, the projected video was set in the daytime.

The Light Plot

My process for drawing a light plot and designing lighting has shifted with every show I have been tasked to design at UNO. My comfort level in my choices remains impacted by the vast number of instruments and possibilities. I had managed over the course of my time at UNO, in working with the instruments in inventory to help me
understand their purpose and uses, by instrument type. Since beginning this MFA Program, I have had opportunities to work with different lighting systems, though not expansive, however, beneficial to my education. To note, I continue to work on my paperwork process and so this method reflects my process during the Designer Runs up through tech rehearsals.

During the designer run, I marked down the acting spaces and then the letter Q next to where I believe there should be a light cue change. In preparation for the Design run, I planned ahead by drawing the zones on the ground plan. This helped me to quickly jot down where actors are standing and moving and place corresponding zone numbers by the cue lines in the script. Following the run, I went through the script again to pick up on any ideas or notes and additional ideas for specials. I first developed a plot to provide a general wash of the stage. I then selected lighting instruments to cover the zones I made from the blocking, other additional instruments and accessories for the specials, and then lighting positions for color washes and gels.

4-point lighting

I wanted to better grasp the techniques of lighting in a thrust stage configuration. For my lighting plot for Is God Is I researched the method of a four-point lighting system. This technique supports the various angles when lighting in a thrust theater configuration. It is important that there be a light source for an actor as they change their orientation. With the inventory available I was able to decipher which lighting instruments could accommodate this. I decided to incorporate this for the first time in my position as a lighting designer at UNO with this production. I also understood that this
would be pertinent as the rake and diagonal movement made this especially important. In regards to the scenic opening, I incorporated a three-point system, two front high sides, and one diagonal backlight for each area/zone.

**Gels**

*Is God Is* was my second opportunity to light a Black cast and I was also interested, as part of my thesis, to learn lighting for brown skin tones. I was inspired by the lighting design on the HBO series *Insecure*. The Director of Photography, Ava Berkofsky spoke with Megan Collie for Fashion Magazine, about her experience filming the series. She shared her challenges of having to learn appropriate lighting choices for darker skin tones, despite her Masters education in film, and shared her camera filters and work with makeup to create the reflective elements on the actors’ skin (Collie). I was inspired by Berkofsky’s uses of cyan and lavender as I felt it gave a beautiful compliment to the skin tones of the actors. I looked further into the uses of filter colors on stage and came across a video by Lee Filters titled, “Lighting Skin Tones.” Through visual examples, the video offers suggestions for using lavenders as a cool and warm effect. When complementing a lavender with a cool filter it will appear warm, when complementing it with a warm filter, the lavender will appear cool ("Lighting Skin Tones" 0:02:07)).

This affirmed my decision to incorporate lavender. I began to look through our inventory of lighting gels to narrow down my selections by combining soft lavender, pale blue, a pale cyan, and a neutral warm (R54, R33, R73, and R51).
Specials

The headlight was originally created with a wide flood lamp casing, a small flashlight inserted, and wired to a rechargeable 12v battery pack. Later we decided to use a headlight sourced from a motorcycle and then gelled with Rosco-08. For the bedroom platform in the yellow house, Angie's monologue took place as she was preparing to run away from her family. In the house was a stool, where she would be changing into running shoes, and hooks for the twins to change into in the following scene. To provide a better illusion of this being a room in the house, I wanted to include a cool window silhouette to simulate moonlight peering through an unseen window. I placed a gobo in an ERS fixture with a cool gel R60 and gobo. The gobo was a prison bar gate that was placed horizontally and I shuttered in the edges to appear as blinds on a window.

At the end of “Showdown,” Racine was to set the characters on the rake on fire. My original plan was to purchase a special effect Halloween light, that I could cue in to give the simulation of fire. However, I was unsuccessful in obtaining one. My order was canceled after the superstore brand informed me that despite their website implying it was in stock, they were in fact sold out of this item. I should mention here that the days leading up to the show were Holloween and an oversight on my part. As an improvisation, I experimented with the moving lights we had available and alternated their spread and rotation speed to simulate the fire. Although this did not create the effect I envisioned, I was pleased that it was believed by the audience, as I was told. This was a lesson for me about preparation, but also the way that limitations of a situation such as this can push some creativity forward. Although, perhaps not the most ideal.
God vs. Man

In keeping with the theme of duality, the costume designer had assigned Man the colors red and black for his costume. The lighting source for ‘Man’ was programmed to be a saturated red. As I detailed previously about silhouetting Man, the lighting choice from this was mainly in the perspective of what his character represented in a world of good and evil, devil and god.

As I designed the world through the perspective of Racine and Anaia and the conflict of duality, ‘She’s’ lighting was symbolic of her ‘God’ status. The lighting was cool in tone by using white lighting. ‘She’s’ hospital bed sheet was also a blue blanket covering a white hospital sheet. I discovered that the white sheet reflected the lighting and helped to create an illuminating effect on her skin. This was a case of a happy but welcomed accident that I will take as a note for when another design calls for it. Nonetheless, it was a great effect.

The production process was developed from research and applied theory detailed in the previous chapter. In some cases, there were trials and errors made that culminated in solutions. Overall, I am pleased with the outcome and my commitment to returning to the text as the ultimate reference. Despite the success of my designs, I found the lessons learned of high value to my education. In the following portion of this paper, I will reflect upon my experiences and takeaways.
POST-PRODUCTION ANALYSIS

Notes on Projection

Although there was no specific concentration on projection as a design element, I had a professional goal to understand the uses of projection, purpose, and intention, as an element for scenic and lighting. As the emergence of technology has continued to influence live performance, I wanted to better understand projection and its uses, both for lighting and scenic design. The consensus I shared with the director to utilize projection in this production provided me the opportunity to learn this implementation as a tool for design expression. I considered the challenges in taking this specific charge since I had intended to design the lighting and the scenery for this production. In my opinion, the intention of including projection was successful, however, it would have been best if we were able to assign this aspect to a designer as their focus. This, I believe, limited the potential of the projections as it became an element I felt obligated to see through, rather than one that was an ultimate success. The experience and the detail it required provided me with great insight. I was successful in my goal by obtaining some basic knowledge of the mechanics of a projector in a theatrical production, although it was at a limited capacity.

I learned that rear projection limits the intensity of the image, depending on the material, the distance from the projector to the surface, and approaches to lighting that would inhibit projected images. I was advised by James Lanius, a local projection designer, that side lighting is the ideal angle when lighting characters during the screening of a projected image. I did not implement this. The combination of the rear
projection and not plotting for side lighting the projection’s brightness and intensity were compromised.

Notes on Scenic

One of my personal enjoyments with art is its ability to elicit different experiences between viewers and to make connections between concepts and ideas that may not have been originally intended by the artist. As I experienced the production as an audience member, I encountered elements that were unconscious of my process. Furthering my appreciation for theater as a collaborative art form is the way in which the many design elements and performances can come together to create something beyond the consciousness of its makers. In other words, the combined decisions work to create a piece that makes a life of its own. In this case, the play is its own living entity, though ephemeral.

I felt the success in my role as a designer supporting what Porter defines as the “internal world” and the “external world.” Anaia and Racine’s existence and connection were the focus of the internal world. And the environment and design of the world they developed were supported by the external world and created to express their internal struggles with the outside world. This was a big takeaway for my analysis of the show. It’s an approach to design I had not considered as extensively until the charge to create it.

Notes on the Rake
The Rake was another major takeaway from my process. As a design student, I have valued all the opportunities to learn methods of design and construction, when my overall professional experience, was new to me. This production was my first encounter with the steps towards calculating and engineering a raked floor. I was pleased with the results, and I would say that for as many renditions or directions as the design could have taken, the raked stage would be the one element I would not see this production doing without.

**Notes on the Cinematic Perspective**

In the Spring of 2022, I was enrolled in FTA 6550 Cinematography. Through this class, I was able to make connections reaching back to my undergraduate studies in Documentary Video Production at The University of the Arts. The cinematography curriculum emphasized the relationships between lighting for the camera, but most influential to my studies, were the lessons on the relationship between lighting design expressions and production design. These connections aligned with the relationship between scenic design and lighting for theater. My only wish is that I had implemented more of these theories into the design for *Is God Is*. If given the chance again I would have applied the additive and subtractive methods to the lighting and scenic, as a conceptual approach to the cinematic elements of this production. This would have been initiated by furthering my research into the correlations between film and theater. On a personal note to my professional experience in film and photography, this could have been a deeper full circle moment.
CONCLUSION

In my three years of studies at the University of New Orleans, I have learned the most essential technical skills like technical lighting, terminologies, and electrical work; prepping for technical rehearsals and generating paperwork; drafting, fabrication, and construction skills. All are pertinent to my career. In addition, the theoretical knowledge and design tools to put the technical skills into practice have been at the forefront of my education and therefore my process for this production.

With no prior experience in technical theater design, I had no knowledge of the formative steps toward designing. I also did not have the breadth of vocabulary and terminology I have today. This experience has developed me as a theater maker by first teaching me useful steps towards working with the first and most important material, the text.

I have learned the stages of conceptualizing an idea and how to collaborate with a director and design team, to achieve a cohesive vision and production. The opportunity to put my learned skills into immediate practice has helped me to build my confidence and feel prepared to move forward as a theater designer and collaborator.

I have learned the tools to formulate my ideas and put them into visual form. Understanding how tools like shape, texture, scale, and others are available as a resource and guide for fully realizing design ideas. I have learned methods of research and their importance to the design process. In addition to visual research, delving into other relevant resources like history and cultural and political references help to deepen my understanding of the text and the relevance of my work as a theatermaker. I will take
with me the privilege of having studied under a collaborative model. Whether it is something I will experience again in the future or not, I look forward to applying my skills as part of a creative team and offering the collaborative model to the best of my ability.
Appendices

Six Step Play Analysis

Steps for Play Analysis

The key to successful theatre making is the ability to unlock a playwright’s text and convey her or his message to an audience. We do this by developing a clear, unique point of view that is supported by the play.

Use this methodology to read a play and record your thoughts and impressions, and it will help you develop a strong point of view.

Step 1: Sensory Associations

Read the play once through, without stopping if possible. As you read, make a list of sensory associations. Sensory associations are thoughts, memories, or impressions that deal with your five senses: touch, taste, smell, sight, and sound. These associations may seem to have very little to do with the play. That’s fine! Just make your list. When your mind wanders away from the play, note what it is that you’re thinking about and write it down. These ideas may become important later on in your journey with the play.

Step 2: Three Sentences of Action

Now that you’ve been through the play once, you should compose three sentences that describe the action of the play. What actually happens in the play from start to finish? These sentences should not discuss thematic issues or character analysis, only action. And they must be grammatically correct.

Step 3: Recurring Visual and Aural Patterns

On your second read through the play, make a list of recurring visual and aural patterns. What visual and aural patterns keep repeating in the play? For example, what color does the playwright reference over and over again? Are there repeated references to birds chirping? Does a certain character repeat a word or phrase throughout the play? Are there several references to sunsets in the play? Whatever you see or hear repeating as you read the play, write it down on your list.

Step 4: Recurring Themes

The third time you read the play, identify the themes that continually resurface. You may generate a substantial list of themes for the play, but consolidate that list down to three or four that recur and/or are related.
Still From “STFU”
Still from Queens of Botswana (2019)
**Production Meeting Notes**

Name of Production: Is God Is  
Director: R'Myni Watson  
Scenic & Lighting Design: Adachi Pimentel  
Costume & Hair/Makeup Design: Aaron Brewer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Production Meeting # 1</strong></th>
<th><strong>Start Time:</strong> 9:30 am</th>
<th><strong>End Time:</strong> 10:40 am</th>
<th><strong>Date:</strong> 5-25-22</th>
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**General:** Great discussion about overall tone, theme, and premise of play.  
**Dramatic Action Statement:** To seek liberation. The commonality of liberation within each character is that they are becoming free from the inner conflict of the double-consciousness that they face.  
SM’s are Adrianne and Ash.  
Call Brent to discuss show. James Roe has potential students for sound design/composition.  
Still need to identify: Sound Designer/Composer, Fight Choreographer, Props Manager,  
Talked about use of film projection in show; R'Myni suggests Yoshaya who did the promo video for Maxwell plays.  
Will create a designing principle in the weeks to come.  
Adachi needs design deadlines (can R'Myni also have this to create rehearsal calendar?)

| **Scenery & Lights:** Talked about all action being played on the thrust and the back prosenium being used for scenic and fantastical elements along with using scrim for silhouettes and projections. What is the twin’s mode of transportation? All love idea of motorcycle.  
Talked about how this show feels like depth of field, rack focus, isolation of moments and lighting, moving through membranes and barriers. | **Props:** Aaron will have a hand in creating the rock in a sock along with props master since these elements overlap. Need to think about blood recipe.  
Talked about use of mirrors/reflection as prop or scenic elements.  
Need to think about burns and blood. |

| **Costumes:** Future meetings will share more ideas for costumes, makeup, wigs, etc. | **Sound:** Decided that composing and designing feels right for this play. Listened to Hip-Hop remix of the Good, the Bad, the Ugly theme song, and Rico Nasty STFU |

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**Word Association**

- Double consciousness  
- Duality  
- High-energy  
- Dishheartening  
- Dark  
- Mysterious  
- Delirious  
- Disoriented  
- Sobering  
- Enlivening  
- Traveling  
- Focus  
- Concentrating  
- Isolation  
- Hot  
- Clear  
- Dept of field  
- Rack focus  
- Retribution  
- Redemption  
- Justice  
- Cycles  
- Curses  
- Rage  
- Anger  
- Bound  
- Bound  
- Confined  
- Blood  
- Hate  
- Biblical  
- Magenta  
- Cyan  
- Red  
- Yellow  
- Mint Green  
- Tan  
- Brown  
- Teal  
- Rose Pink  
- Hills  
- Valley  
- Truth  
- Lies  
- God  
- The Devil  
- Fire  
- Ice  
- Birth  
- Death  
- Ugly  
- Tainted  
- Peace  
- Disharmony  
- Revenge

RDKW
Carlo Simi Production design and Spaghetti Western references

Stelios Polychronakis' Comparison to *The Good The Bad And The Ugly* and *The Ancient Greek Arena*
Reference for Perspective and Portal

Once Upon A Time In The West
Texture and color References for Raked floor

![Image of a raked floor scene from a Western movie with wooden planks and a train in the background.](image1)

![Image of a raked floor scene from a Western movie with wooden buildings and mountains in the background.](image2)
Shape References for Portals and Proscenium
Dusty Metal Research Reference
Yellow house References
Lighting Inspiration and Research
Gelling Inspiration

Still from HBO's *Insecure*
Silhouette inspiration

And show an audience here's
a world that could be,

Stills from my home tests of silhouette and shadows
Railroad Track Reference
Inspiration for Projections

“Going West”

“A Letter” Projection
“Up To The Hills” Projection
Thumbnail sketch Example
Model Sketch
Ground plan
Lighting Zones:
Light Plot
The Rake Build
False Proscenium and Portals
Production Shots

“Before God”
Projection “Before God”
“Going West”

Motorcycle
“The Weapon”
“Up The Hill”
“The House On The Hill”
Racine and Angie “In the Road”
All Fall Down
“Showdown”
Is God Is

Cast
Catherine
Ani
She
Chuck Hall
Riley
Scotch
Angie
Man

Creative Team
Playwright
Director
Scenic Designer
Costume Designer
Lighting Designer
Sound Designer
Fight Director
Hair and Wig Designer
Props Designer
Production Stage Manager
Assistant Stage Manager

Dame-Jasmine Hughes
Allie Fuller
Jessica Frances Dukes
Michael Genev
Anthony Cason
Caleb Eberhardt
Mbahala deGannes
Teagle F. Bougere
Alesha Harris
Taibi Magar
Adam Rigg
Montana Levi Blanco
Matthew Richards
Jeremy Toussaint-Baptiste
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Samantha Shoffner
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Development Consultants
PUBLIC RELATIONS
CREATIVE DIRECTOR/GRAPHIC DESIGN
SEASON ILLUSTRATION
GALA PRODUCER
INSURANCE
LEGAL COUNSEL

Architect
Auditor
This epic takes its cues from the ancient, the modern, the tragic, the Spaghetti Western, hip-hop and Afropunk.

This text also includes adventures in typography.
SPECIAL THANKS

To Douglas Kearney, Brian Carbine,
Heather L. Jones and Mona Heinze
for taking the time to read and give feedback.

To Rachel Kaufer Nalebuff for patience,
belief and a remarkable commitment to new work.
Introduction

What my mother was taught about the story of Cain and Abel, and what she believes, is that the “mark of Cain” is not only a curse but also the raced black body itself. She is eager to point out that the suffering of black people is Biblical prophecy, immutable damnation. This flawed exegesis is not her own, of course, but instead on loan from the minister at her church who taught Bible study many years ago. It's heavy to me that black people themselves can find solace in this rendition of human history in which God, rather than humans of their own accord, with their own agency, created black misery. It makes the history and condition of black life not merely a result of human barbarism, but analogous to the legend of the Wandering Jew, endlessly cursed with displacement until the Second Coming.

A locked door. What's one to do?

Certainly, the story of two brothers—one good, one murderous. However allegorical Harris's play might be, it does not purport to put forth any prophecy related to the "curse" of the raced body. Instead, we are made acutely aware of the universal struggle within and against that which looks a lot like evil. This struggle is not exceptional, but is a condition of human life. A complicated stickiness inside each of us.

Our cultural insistence on the presumption of the singular self is disrupted in this life by irredeemable violence. Violence, like other traumas, fragments the self and removes the ground from below us. We are left floating and piecemeal in the wake of violence. Before the script even begins, our protagonists' bodies are set on fire. Out of flames, the mutant twins Racine and Anaela, fractured by the gap
between the burdened body and the recognizable self, narrate their movements as if from the outside looking in. Racine says, "Racine is the rough one who still gets some pretty to her." The characters function both as narrator and subject, standing inside the body and outside of it, begging the question of whether the condition of dual consciousness is a condition of black human existence a la W.E.B. DuBois's oft-cited claim. Harris seems to want to tie a tethers between the human history of brutality on the planet and the raced body itself. We are left to wonder whether the black body, in particular, is always already a site of violence, and thus a split self from the moment it takes its first breath.

I cannot help but think, as well, of Adrienne Kennedy's phenomenal one-act play, Funnshouse of a Negro, which premiered off Broadway in 1964. In it, the protagonist Sarah, who struggles with her bicaucasiality, is split into several selves—so much so that the other characters are each "one of themselves." Sarah courts her European ancestry and is haunted by her African ancestry, creating a figure of insistence that catalyzes a kind of madness. The violence of the attack on the twins and their mother in Harris's play catapults a similar madhouse of splintered identity.

... 

A cross of protection hangs dumbly by my mother's bedroom door.
To make my contempt parenthetical feels safer.
Crevices that countenance the actual.
Special conditions arise when placing the head in the lion's mouth.
Are we ever safe?
Unanswerable questions abound. Comfort in fiction. To be comfortable to is to cut off a portion of experience and live in bracketed space. It requires delusion.

... 

What is the form in which something wants to be said? Why the devotion to rigid boundaries of genre? Aleshea Harris's Is God Is defies genre categories and reaches toward a productive oblivion. This oblivion is evident in the texture of the surreal narrative, itself an incarnation of the brutalizations of black women's bodies. No one is redeemed in Harris's narrative. No one is simply "good" while another simply "evil." To the contrary, and unlike the dichotomous Cain and Abel, the brutal spreads throughout Harris's genre-defying play like a chemical weapon, poisoning everything in its path.

No easy answers. No fictional safeties. What Harris's work undertakes instead of fictional safeties and causalities are the problems of utterance, transgressions, and violence as a gendered category well large into cultural space. There will be a moment when reading, when you will root for our twins, when you will be on their side as they seek what appears initially to be a repulsive justice, but this moment will disintegrate and splinter into the gasping air. Typography indicates these glaring elisions, foregrounding instead registers of speech or feelings that are not usually visible in the genre itself but are imposed in the interpretation or the staging. It is here that we feel relief, in that formal exploration that usurps our ordinary ideas about what a play does and what kinds of knowledge discoveries it can make. Aleshea Harris's Is God Is is a rigorous work, a new wave of blakc exploration that unearthed our deepest fears about humanity and who we think we are in relation to ourselves and the divine.

—Dawn Lundy Martin

Marfa, Texas
Characters

RACINE African-American. A woman of twenty-one years. Identical twin sister to ANAIA. Has burn scars on her arms, back and neck but a face of considerable beauty.

ANAIA Has burn scars on her arms, face and neck. Hard to look at. Wears a wig.

SHE African-American. Mother to RACINE and ANAIA. Has burn scars over her entire body.


ANGIE African-American. Mother to RILEY and SCOTCH.

Scenes
A LETTER
BEFORE GOD
GOING WEST
THE WEAPON
IN THE VALLEY
UP TO THE HILLS
THE HOUSE ON THE HILL
IN THE ROAD
TWINS & TWINS
DRESSING
THE TEASE
ALL FALL DOWN
SHOWDOWN
TWIN?
AGAIN BEFORE GOD

A Letter

(A blazing inferno. Out of the fire step ANAIA and RACINE.)

A studio apartment in the Northeast.

ANAIA rolls the scar on RACINE's back with ice as the fire subsides.

Music intro - Q!

Annunc. Enter: QA

RACINE & ANAIA
Twins.

RACINE
Burnin'
Them burnin twins
at home in their apartment
in the Northeast
New York or Hampshire
or Jersey

ANAIA
or
Something like that
Somewhere that don't feel right

RACINE & ANAIA
Twins

RACINE
Racine is the rough one who still got some pretty
to her. She only got the scars on her back and a bit
creeping up the rear of her neck. You can barely
see 'em.
ANAIA
Anaia wasn't so lucky. Face look-like it melted
and then froze. Mostly people don't let their eyes
meet hers.

RACINE
'Cine used the handle of a rake to shut Tommy
Danson up in the seventh grade when he called
'Naia a bad name. Thas the kinda roughness she got.

ANAIA
'Naia is trapped in a prison of sweetness. Girl so
ugly don't get to be mean.

RACINE
'Cine does though. She got both their mean.
(to ANAIA) Got somethin' today.

ANAIA
'Naia's too tired for this.
She work in a warehouse packing cold things into
boxes all day.
She's too tired for this—

RACINE
In the mail. Got somethin', News.

ANAIA
'Naia keep her head down out of habit.
O, yeah? I got news, too.

RACINE
This big, thin,
Got a letter with some news in it. Big news.

ANAIA
Letter from who?
RACINE
You gettin all worked up. Switch.
(ANAIA sits. RACINE rubs ice on ANAIA's neck.)
She wanna see us. She been in a place. A place for
sick people who old.

ANAIA
Uh- old folks' home?

RACINE
I think so.
(Takes an envelope from her pocket. Reads.)
"Folsom Rest Home for the Weary. 1319 Fluckum Drive
Oscarville, MS/AL/FL/TN/AR/KY
Dirty South 325-5337560849"

ANAIA
That's where she at?

RACINE
Eyup.

ANAIA
Damn. That's where she been at?

RACINE
Seem like it.

ANAIA
Damn.

RACINE
Hey Twin.

ANAIA
Yeah?
RACINE
Eyup. Says so in the letter.

ANAIA
Damn, 'Cine.

RACINE
I know it.

ANAIA
She only wrote to you? She ain't write me?

RACINE
Ain't but my name on the envelope, but she talk
about you.

ANAIA
Why she ain't write me?

RACINE
Maybe 'cause she knew you'd be all emotional.

ANAIA
Me?

RACINE
Yeah, you. Even though she ain't been around us
she prolly got uh intuition about it. Mamas be
knowin bout stuff like that. She can prolly sense
how you be gettin all emotional, all sad-sack-y—

ANAIA
I don't be.

RACINE
You do.

ANAIA
Don't.

RACINE
Do. You cried about that kitten we couldn't get
outta the engine. The one that died?

ANAIA
It died 'cause you wasn't patient enough to
goax it out.

RACINE
Had to get to work. You cried. 'Member?
All emotional.

ANAIA
...chyeahhhhh I guess that true. I do be all
emotional sometimes—

RACINE
Like a lil punk.

ANAIA
Yeah, yeah, ha ha—

RACINE
Like a lil bish

ANAIA
Now you takin it too far.

RACINE
I'm playin.

ANAIA
I got stuff to do, though. I gotta meet up with Ellis
and tell him about something—
RACINE
Ellis who?

O. him.

ANAIA
Yeah. We sposed to meet up.

RACINE
'Cine sigh and roll her eyes like,
“Here we go again
bout that man she met online.”

(to ANAIA) What you gott meet up with him for?

ANAIA
We sposed to meet up and talk about the future.

RACINE
Cine bite her tongue.

(to ANAIA) Mhmm.
Switch.

(They switch positions and ANAIA is now applying ice to RACINE's scars.)
You love him?

ANAIA
No. But I don't want him to leave.

RACINE
Then do what you gotta do to keep him.

ANAIA
He don't like me to look at him when we doin' it.

RACINE
So don't look at him. Put your pride away.
Some of us don't get to have pride.

ANAIA
True.

RACINE
So, let him get it from behind. If you look at him you might start to catch feelins.

ANAIA
True, true.

RACINE
And we ain't got time for bein' weak with feelins for no man, Naia. We got things to do.
She waitin' on us.

ANAIA
She finna go, huh?
Go die, huh?

RACINE
Eyup. She finna go so we gotta go.

ANAIA
damn.

RACINE
I know.

ANAIA
We'll
I guess I'll catch him later—
RACINE
That right. You can catch ol' dude later.
We need to look good since this kinda like
our first and last time seein' her, don't you think?
I'm finna dress up. I'm wearin' lipstick and all.

NAIA
Ima put me on some too.

RACINE
And a dress.

ANAIA
You don't never wear dresses. You be on that
"boho, I'm so pretty I ain't gotta try" shit.

RACINE
Yeah, but this is Mama
we talkin' bout.

ANAIA
I feel ya.
(They are both gettin' pretty-fad)
That lipstick real red.

RACINE
Eyup.

ANAIA
Like how it feel to know she comin' and goin'.

ANAIA & RACINE
You look good. Thanks.
Think she'll like it?
Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

***

Achea Harris
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Before God

(The TWINS stand before an immense door) → 14:20

RACINE
We in. This is it. Folsom Rest Home for the Weary.
2115 Pluckum Drive
Owensville, MO/FL/TX/TN/AN/XY
Dirty South 99952376580849
Room 418B
And a sign with our names on it. → sign
She musta did that so we'd know
we was in the right place.

ANAIA
My name ain't spelt right.

RACINE
O, come on, 'Naia.

ANAIA
You think she still alive?

RACINE
Only one way to find out.

ANAIA
My mascara runnin'?

RACINE
A little.

ANAIA
It's hot.

34

In God Is

...
RACINE
Yeah. Dirty South stay hot.

ANAIA
You ready?

RACINE
To see God?

ANAIA
God?

RACINE
Well, she made us, didn't she?

ANAIA
You got' moved down.

SHE
Ain't been in.
(They look at each other.)
That y'all?

ANAIA
You go on in.

RACINE
You first.

SHE
I can feel y'all out there.

ANAIA
First born is the first one in.

RACINE
That stupid.

SHE
You're wasn't you're wasn't
time.
(SHE is wheezing. SHE lies on her deathbed. SHE
truss, coughs and struggles to breathe. Her voice
came out in hoarse rasp.)

I'm
so glad
you
could make it.

Had the nurse
put the sign out by my door
a sign with your names on it

see it?

RACINE
Yes, mama.
We, We
We really liked that sign.
We seen it.

ANAIA
My name isn't quite right.

SHE
Good. Lemme look at y'all.
(They step closer)
Okay, I see.
Anaia and Racine,
Used to put y'all in opposite clothes so I could tell
you apart.

Whit is the sign outside the door?
Anaia you was always in tropical colors and
Racine I had you in pastels. No matchy-matchy
for my girls.

Racine
This nice. Now I like tropical and 'Naia like
pastels.

Anaia
This a lie.

Racine
Shut up.
So, How you been?

She (laughs)
O, you know.
Dyin.

Racine
Yeah, yeah. I see you got them tubes in you.
We came soon as we could. Had to take off work
but we here.
I work as a daycare and 'Naia work in a warehouse.
She got a boyfriend.

Anaia
This a lie.

She
She got something else, too.

Racine
Ma'am?

She
Nothin. She quiet.

--

Anaia
hi mama.

She
I ain't wrote you, 'Naia
'cause you be gettin all emotional. Been that way
since you was little. I know.
I ain't wanna upset you.

Anaia
I
I know.

She
Thank you.

She
My girls.

Racine
Yeah.

She
My baby girls.

Racine
Eysup. Thas us.

She
Y'all are lookin at The Last Days
I keep tellin myself,
"Ruby, this might be your last Thursday
your last time wakin up in this bed
your last time thinkin on your last time"
(She laughs. TWINS join, nervously)
Y'all done got so big.

Anaia
Yeah. Been eighteen years.
SHE
Eyup.

ANAIA
We thought you was dead.

SHE
That's what I wanted y'all to think.
Who want a mama
with a body
like uh alligator?

ANAIA
Why
why you got a body like uh alligator?

SHE
'Cause what he did.

ANAIA
He who?

SHE
They ain't told y'all.

RACINE
Naw, they just said you was dead.

ANAIA
So we a little confused 'cause you alive but you ain't write us
or nothin.

RACINE
But we ain't really worried about all that—

ANAIA
Eighteen years. Been eighteen years.
(An awkward pause)

SHE
Was that
an awkward pause?

(SHE laughs. RACINE joins, nervously)

All you know is it was a fire and your mama was
gone, huh?

RACINE
That pretty much
what we been told.

ANAIA
Yeah.

SHE
Well
I'm 'on tell you
there's more.

Had it all sealed up
so you could walk without shame
but iss more and you need to know it
so you understand your mama ain't just
up and leave you
iss more to it than that.

ANAIA
What more?

SHE
I'll tell you.
I had took y'all to daycare
and went to work. Regular day.
Got off work, get y'all and came home,
a baby in each arm. Y'all was three.
We get home and I put y'all in the kitchen
at the table with some apple slices—a stuck
while I made dinner.
I had just chopped the onions at the counter
I'll never forget it
just chopped the onions when I heard the
window in the bathroom shut.
(A kind of flashback. SHE retreats into the past,
hearing the window; suspicious.)
Hello?
The T.V. Cartoons—loud
Hello?
The curtains in the kitchen—breathin,
The onion on the cutting board—waitin.
I rinse my hands and wipe 'em on my dress,
iss an old dress.
Hello! I pat your baby-heads, go down the hall
Maybe just a branch against the window
Hello?
Only, ain't no trees near our windows
Hello?
Down the hall. Bathroom door wide open.
Dark in there.
The mirror showing my scared silhouette.
Nothin in here but a bone-tired woman.
(SHE laughs)
My hand goes to the light switch
just to be, just to be sure, you know?
Can't be too careful
He said he was gon come back, so
Just to be sure
And the green light flashes on
and iss a hand on the shower curtain
O god

The fear like an ax to the middle of my chest
O no
His hand, he pull the curtain aside
 kinda sweet-like and
it reminds me of why I fell in love with him
he do get a tender side
he pull the curtain aside and just stands there
No smile or nothin. No frown, neither.
Face as plain as a slice of wheat bread.

"Hey"
He says, like we on the street or somethin
like he ain't just break into my bathroom
like it wasn't no restraining order
I couldn't even scream or nothin
Just
"Hey. You back."
A nod.
My mouth is twitching and my guts is on fire

"The kids are in the kitchen. I was just making
dinner—"
And in like a train runs into my throat
He grips
hard.
That same plain face right up next to mine,
barely sweatin
and even lookin at me a tender way

(Sound of a liquid being poured and MAN whistlin.)
When I come to I smell it.
Liquor. Issa sickly sweet smell.
Soaked in it.
Good thing this dress is old
It wouldn't never come out.

And he's whistling like a little bird while he do it.
His boots step all in it. He's whistling and pouring
Not rushing, just easy. He's gonna kill me easy.
Then the boots are still. Here go. Here go.
I close my eyes

but nothin' happens.
A full minute passes—all I hear is my breath
and you two in the kitchen
giggling like how babies giggle
like they got the sue in they mouth

And the boots move toward y'all in the kitchen
And I can't talk 'cause he took the wind outta my mouth
but in my throat is a rattle like:

"Don't you fucking touch
my babies!!!"

But he already bringin' y'all,
'Clue, I think he was holding you.
'Naia, you was walking. One of y'all was sayin'
"Daddy where you been?" And he sayin'
"on the Moon"

"the moonooom?"

"Yep. With the aliens."
And by now y'all in the bathroom standing over me.
And 'Clue, you wasn't scared. You said to him
"Daddy...whassat wrong with Mommy? What she on the ground for?"

And he said, "Mommy's sleepy and she want
us to wake her up. You gonna help me wake
her up, Anala?"
And 'Naia, you was always the emotional one, you
could tell somethin was off and you was scared.
You say,

"I wanna go back and watch
Scooby Doo."
"Just a minute. Let's wake Mommy up.

"How?"

"Like this."

(A sound like a thousand matches being struck
simultaneously)

And 'Naia went to whining.
"Daddy...I don't like this."
And then he musta dropped that little bit of fire
on me 'cause it was all on me gettin' bigger,
that quick
exthin' me 'til my brain was smart enough
to turn off.

Thabwasit — Q 21 (projection-off

RACINE
Darn.
Mama. Dame.
7 We was we was watchin?" SHE
Well
You was there.
You was there. He put you down and left.

In God is
ANAIA
Thought: I thought you was dead.
SHE
Yeah, on the ground like that. I thought it was
down a sewer. That's why I went over there. When you don't see her on the ground
with the feet up you think she is dead.

SHE
Shh. Quit cryin', Baby. No need to cry.

RACINE
She's sorry, Mama. She just...you know.

SHE
Iis somethin' I need y'all to do but I don't think
y'all gon' be able to do it if she's steady cryin'.

RACINE
We can do it. We can. We're strong. Ain't we
strong, 'Naia?

ANAIA
Yeah.

RACINE
We're strong. We can do anything.

SHE
Good.

ANAIA
Get yore head right together.

RACINE
Good.

SHE
And everything around him, but you can destroy, no
thinking he got some heart.
Kill his spirit, then the body

Make him dead, real dead
And bring me back some treasures from it

Still don't quit, no. My body ready to go
We on a time crunch.

All the way dead
(A silence)

RACINE
Uh uh uh uh
uhhh

RACINE & ANAIA
Uh uh uh uh
uh
uh uh

RACINE
Mama
we respect that you dyin and all, but uh
this seems a little crazy—

SHE
Not as crazy as settin a woman on fire in front of her own kids, then abandoning them to go off and start another life like nothin ever happened.

RACINE
Okay, You got a point. But uh uhhnn don't you think that since you dyin you might wanna just forgive and forget? Die in a peaceful state?

SHE
Peace will come when he go.

RACINE
But Mama—

SHE
When he go

ANAIA
We ain't killers—

SHE
Anaia, pull this sheet offa me.
(ANAIA does so. A moment during which the TWINS are aghast. Their mother's body is a hideous thing on the sheets.)

No peace 'til I know he gone.
You gonna do this for your mother? This one thing 'fore I die?

RACINE
We'll do it.

SHE

And bring me back a piece.
ANAIA
I don't think—

RACINE
Just tell us how to find him.

SHE
I don't know where he at but The Lawyer is out in Californ-ay near the City of Angels. Chuck Hall—I'll never forget the name. Chuck Hall, He in the Valley. He got know where your Daddy's at. Go find him and make him tell you.

He a slippery motherfucker, so be careful.

Dead, real dead. Lotsa blood is fine.

... Q-transition to exit
A tells walk at SR Pacific

Going West

(The Twins are traveling west throughout the following)

RACINE
Hey Twin.

ANAIA
Yeah.

RACINE
You ain't sick to your stomach no more?

ANAIA
No.

RACINE
Good. Well. She is our mama.

ANAIA
But she ain't never came for us, never asked for us—

RACINE
I'm sure she kept track of where we was at—

ANAIA
It ain't the same.

RACINE
How was she goin come see us lookin like that?

ANAIA
Like what?

Be God it
RACINE
Like scary. You know good and well you
woulda shit yourself when you was twelve if
she'da come see you lookin like that talkin' bout
"I'm your long lost Mama."

ANAIA
I guess you right.

RACINE
Iss just one thing she want us to do before
she die.

ANAIA
Yeah. But we ain't killers.

RACINE
I am.

ANAIA
No, you ain't. Who you done killed?

RACINE
Don't worry 'bout all that.

ANAIA
Damn. Cine. I mean. She our mama.

RACINE
Right.

ANAIA
And she made us, so she kinda like God,
like you said—

RACINE
Eyup, eyup—

ANAIA
And he ain't even like us

RACINE
Nope. So. So you ready?

ANAIA
...Eyup.

RACINE
Good. We gon do this. We gon do it right.
They travel in silence for a bit.

ANAIA
I favor her.

RACINE
Who. God?

ANAIA
Eyup. The scars I got on my face
she got on her whole self.

RACINE
Yeah.

ANAIA
I'm glad I favor somebody.

RACINE
Yeah. It do look like she spit you out.
Wonder who spit me out.

ANAIA
You prolly a combo between both of 'em.
RACINE
I'm know. Whatchoo think he look like?

ANAIA
Like a skunk or a snake,
Or a giant with a smelly beard.
He prolly got a beer belly.

RACINE
How we gonna kill him?

ANAIA
I don't know.

RACINE
A gun?

ANAIA
Where we go get a gun?

RACINE
Steal one or something.

ANAIA
That ain't no good plan.
We should just poison him.

RACINE
With what?

ANAIA
Strychnine, Arsenic.

RACINE
That seem old-fashioned.

ANAIA
At least he'll be dead and we ain't gotta really get
no blood on us. I don't like blood.

RACINE
But God said lotsa blood is okay.

ANAIA
Still.

RACINE
Poison
is a punk ass bitch ass way to kill somebody.
I think we should a hammer to him.

ANAIA
You sick.

RACINE
I could do it. Be just like bustin open an egg.

ANAIA
Nasty.

RACINE
Or stab him?

ANAIA
Eugh.
The sound of his body gettin stabbed like meat.
I'ma be sick.

RACINE
I know! We'll push him off a building.

ANAIA
What building?
RACINE
We'll find one. We'll get him there close to the edge and push him.

ANAIA
What if he grab one of us on the way down?

RACINE
What if we knock him out then throw him off the building?

ANAIA
How hard do you have to hit someone to knock them out? I don't like it.

RACINE
You don't like any of it.

ANAIA
I've know, I've know about this. 'Cuse, we ain't killers-

RACINE
How you figure that? We come from a man who tried to kill our mama and a mama who wants to kill that man. Jeez, in the blood.

ANAIA
I'ma be sick, I bet he just look like an ordinary man. I used to dream about a lady in a fine and I didn't know why.

---

The Weapon

(The outskirts of the City of Angels. RACINE picks up a sizable rock.)

RACINE
Take your sock off.
(ANAIA does so. RACINE places the rock in the sock and ties a knot. Ha.)

ANAIA
That for what I think it's for?

RACINE
Eyup. Feels right. Like Cain and Abel or something.

ANAIA
She got her blood. I guess.
(They walk on.)
In The Valley

(The Twins stand before the door of a law office in The Valley)

RACINE
Just follow my lead.
(RACINE knocks on the door. They're very suddenly inside of the office. HALL sits at a desk.)

HALL
A Mister Chuck Wendell Hall sits at an immense desk in a North Hollywood office building.
The desk was his grandfather's.
Pure Oak very recently refurbished.
The kind of desk that makes a statement.
He sits behind the heavy desk, sweating.
It is the dead of summer. Sweating rivers and rivers.
He wears a shirt with a collar. Expensive. And a necktie, loosened. Also expensive. If one were to look
below the desk, one would see that he's wearing Bermuda shorts—not terribly expensive. Orangeish.
No shoes or socks on his feet.
Dead of summer.

He belches. There is tequila warming
in a glass somewhere nearby.
A fat black fly perched on the edge of the glass
contemplates a swim. His hand shaking, he takes
a bottle of pills from his Bermuda shorts pocket

He tries again, pressing down. The cap opens
and he pours the entire contents of the bottle
onto the desk:

One, two, three...
placing the pills side by side—a pill parade:

four, five, six, seven...
He reaches for the glass of tequila and the fly
buzzes angrily away. Gulp. It barely burns he's
been drinking for hours.

eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen...
He talks to the pills:

I'm going to follow you all straight home
I'm going to follow you home, take me there
fourteen, fifteen, seventeen

it is hard to count, three hours he's been drinking

eighteen, nineteen

Okay, okay. Here we go!
And he swallows one—

(A knock at the door)
I'm not here. I'm out to lunch. I'm retired go away.
(Another knock)
I'm gone! Another pill.
(A loud bang. He goes to the door and opens it.
The Twins are standing there.)

God in
ANAIA

Who the eff are you?

RACINE

Are you Mr. Hall?

HALL

I'm not here.

(Trying to slam the door in their face, he stumble.

Oh. Shit.

ANAIA

He's drunk.

HALL

Are you Hall?:

RACINE

Why should I tell you anything? I work for Carnegie.

ANAIA

That's his name on the door.

RACINE

But he's drunk as a skunk.

HALL

What the hell?

(Continues to walk through the floor.)

ANAIA

Shut up.

RACINE

Definitely him.

HALL

Goldman, right.

RACINE

Sidewalk.

HALL

But not because you tell me. I'm sitting down because that's what I wanna do.
RACINE
Sure.

ANAIA
Stinks in here.

HALL
That's cause Luna's been shitting everywhere
with no regard for anyone but herself.

RACINE
Who's Luna?

HALL
My receptionist. Just kidding. The cat.
It was my receptionist's cat but she left it behind
when she left me. Ha ha ha but your face, though.
You thought it was a human I was talking about.
Can you imagine some lady squatting
in the corner to drop a deuce? Ha ha ha

ANAIA
You're disgusting.

HALL
I know that you think I don't know that.
It's what she said all the time before she left.

(Imitating a female voice)

"Why don't you shave the back of your
neck? You feel like a woolly mammoth.
It's disgusting"

With so much hate. She said it with so much Like she
couldn't stand the very ground I was walking on.
How'd that happen? We had been in love it had been
love I tell you the first time I saw her—

RACINE
Shut up!

ANAIA
Don't.

RACINE
We need to ask you some things, Mr. Hall.

HALL
Do I know you?

RACINE
Yes.

ANAIA
No.

RACINE
We might know some people in common.

HALL
Like who?

RACINE
A man from a long time ago. Tried to kill his wife.
Ring a bell?

HALL
Lotta bells in the world Church bells, wedding
bells We didn't get married in a church We went
right on down to the courthouse and got it done
She was a yellow sundress with—

RACINE
Sir, we need you to focus.

ANAIA
Yes. Please focus.
HALL
I am focused. I'm focused. Hell, I won Most
Focused once. Irving Middle School Choir—

RACINE
O, my god—

HALL
I did! Don't talk to me about focus.

ANAIA
Alright, fine. Sir, we really need to find him soon.
We on a time crunch. A man who tried to kill his
wife eighteen years ago. He was a client of yours.
Think about it.

HALL
Thinking, thinking.
Mmmmmmmope. Nothing. Don't know who that is.

RACINE
You're lyin.

HALL
Imagine that.
(RACINE raises the rock/rock.)

HALL
What's that for?
(She holds it up higher)

ANAIA
Cine.

RACINE
I'm gonna have to pop your fat head if you
don't quit playin.

HALL
With that?

RACINE
What else?

HALL
Is that a rock in there?
You're gonna hit me to death with
a sock?

(RACINE swings the rock. He dodges)

ANAIA
'Cine! Don't—

HALL
Missed me!
(RACINE swings again. Again HALL dodges)

ANAIA
Just give him a chance to tell us—
(RACINE swings and HALL dodges. He laughs to beat
the band)

HALL
Okay. No. But seriously, I'm already on my way
out. You almost missed me.

Look it here.
(Holds up the pill bottle and laughs some more.)

ANAIA
What's that?

HALL
Pills!
to dispatch myself!
Soft and hard and soft
I took 'em I took 'em I took 'em
So Glory is coming! You're too late!
I am bathed in Glory—

RACINE
What's he talking about?

HALL
You see these shorts? Glory.
Got them in Bermuda.
Lotsa people have Bermuda shorts they
didn't actually get in Bermuda—

ANAIA
I think he's sayin he done already took some pills
to kill himself so he don't care about that rock.

HALL
That is precisely what he's saying. I've
already taken a few of these. One is enough
to do the magic. Two is enough to have me
dance my way to hell. What do you think
I'll get for a few? I dunno, is it five by now?
(HALL swallows a few more pills. RACINE lowers
the rock.)

ANAIA
He ain't gonna tell us nothin. He ain't scared to
die. Guess we gotta go.

RACINE
We ain't done with this fool.
We gotta find out where—

ANAIA
C'mon, Cine—

RACINE
We got to!

ANAIA
Let's just look around. He's got files and things—

RACINE
It'll take forever to go through all these
files! God's finna die!
(Notices that HALL is nodding off)

Shit. He's falling asleep—
Hey. Hey. You can't fall asleep yet.

HALL
Why

Not!

(Nodding off)

ANAIA
Please stay awake! God's finna die and we gotta
find out where he at so we can go see him before
She do.

HALL
The man you're looking for is your dad.
ANAIA
Sort of. He fathered us.

HALL
Tall man. Dark man. Lit a lady on fire about twenty years ago

RACINE
Yeah, that's the one!

HALL
He lied about it real good could tell he was lying
but I honestly wasn't scared of him, I just pretended.

RACINE
What happened?

HALL
In court he said she lit herself on fire
and we presented old suicide notes she wrote when they broke up.
Bastard had them in his pocket when he came to see me, before they could even arrest him.

RACINE
Where he go after y'all won the court case?

HALL
Up into the hills.

ANAIA
Beverly Hills?

HALL
Castaic. Just up the 5. Little yellow house on the highest hill.
Teal shutters.
Went there for dinner once.
 Didn't want to. But.

RACINE
He livin' in a yellow house?

ANAIA
With a dog?

HALL
Last I saw him.

ANAIA
What he look like?

HALL
Like the he are all the casuists and...

(HALL falls asleep. ANAIA shakes him)

ANAIA
Mister? Mister?

(HALL is very suddenly awake again)
HALL
And he must have a special kind of jazz
'cause he had more
two others boys twinzzzz

ANAIA
Twins?
He got another set of twins?

HALL
All the same.
(And he succumbs to the pills. They stare at his body a moment)

RACINE
God said to bring treasure. I see treasure here.

(She raises the rock and hits the body. ANAIA runs away. The lights dim. Sound of rock hitting flesh and ANAIA retching)

Up to the Hills

(RACINE and ANAIA are climbing a steep hill)

HALL
4 x 4 down

RACINE
Twin?
Why you slowin down?

ANAIA
Just got a buzzin in my side.

RACINE
You wanna take a rest?
We shouldn't be walking all this way, anyhow.
Iss far. Maybe we can thumb a ride or somethin.
(ANAIA sits in the dust)

Sun's going down. We can just sleep out here.
It'll be like camping.

ANAIA
'cept we done go kill somebody.
(ANAIA sings softly to herself)

RACINE
We been kill.

ANAIA
What's mean? We breathe.

RACINE
But what we breathin if it ain't been nobody around to tell us we got mouths and lungs

Is God In
and that make us people like everybody else, you know?

ANAIA
Naw, I don't.

RACINE
Mean, we moost
We never start no time and get stopped
But then it
Ain't been nobody around to give us some
I don't know
Some foundation
No real mama. No real daddy. Nobody

ANAIA
So to me.

RACINE
Ain't you? I wanna step on somethin for
Once, See what it feel like. But no you?
You 'member Second Foster Daddy?

ANAIA
Mmm hmm. With his fat ass.

RACINE
'Member how he used to snap the belt at us?

ANAIA
Wasn't no "us", that was you. 'Cause you laughed
every time he came down the stairs, so you
always got a whuppin.

RACINE
Eyup, eyup.

ANAIA
And you used to call for Her. For God. I'd hear you
callin for her from the next room when he was
hittin you—

RACINE
For Mama?

ANAIA
Eyup. You'd be cryin out for Her.

RACINE
That's a lie.

ANAIA
No it ain't. I heard you. Ear against the wall—

RACINE
You ain't heard me cry. I never cried one
time when he was hittin me. Thas why
he wouldn't stop. Fat motherfucking fat bish ass
motherfucker. He the first person I kill.

ANAIA
You ain't killed him. He had a heart attack.

RACINE
He had it cause he kept whuppin me.
He kept whuppin me 'cause I kept doin
stuff to make him whup me
'cause I knew it would kill his fat ass.
Fat fuckin ass.

ANAIA
Damn.

RACINE
Yeah.
ANAIA
Twin?

RACINE
Yeah?

ANAIA
Damn.

RACINE
I know.

ANAIA
You in a room getting switched, God laying up with
killer ants in the wall. We got three cats
and he in a yellow house
with teal shutters
and a dog and twins.

RACINE
Eyup.

ANAIA
New pair. Fresh pair uh twins.

RACINE
Don't I know it.
I know it. I know.

ANAIA
I like my ugly.

RACINE
You ain't ugly.

ANAIA
I am and I like it.

RACINE
Stop that.

ANAIA
Car tell. It keeps me safe. Ain't got to talk to
many stupid people. They just stay outta my way.
Don't nobody ever hard me go down on a street
corner. Let like a super power
Damp, I'd burn it.

RACINE
My man, wear the bureau in order still somebody
there tryin' come. I said you ever wanna scrape your scars off and see
what's underneath.

ANAIA
Wouldn't nothin' be underneath but dead.

RACINE
Might be somethin else under there.
I dunno. You might look. Different.
You ever wonder?

ANAIA
No point. What we gonna do about them other
twins, Twin?

RACINE
God said to destroy everything around him—

ANAIA
She said we could. She said we could destroy
everything around him.
The House on the Hill

(A modest house in the sleepy desert city of Casaic, CA. Sound of the family dog barking. RILEY, SCOTCH and ANGIE are home.)

RILEY
The eldest brother by two minutes, Riley is watering the succulents on the balcony.

SCOTCH
The younger brother, Scotch, yes, after the liquor, is in his bedroom writing the best fucking poetry you've ever heard. If anyone asks, he'll say it's for school but really it's for him. Them words.

ANGIE
Their mother, Angela, is in the driveway unloading the car of a week's worth of groceries. You boys eat like freaking cows! The least you could do is come and help me unload.

RILEY
Coming.

SCOTCH
Coming.

ANGIE
Neither is actually coming. Angie stands in the driveway, the trunk of her car open. Two cartons of eggs, blueberries, frozen waffles mostly for them.
Sweat on her neck she will NOT be carrying these bags in herself
It's bad enough she had to go to the store and make sure make sure make sure she got the right brand of bacon and the correct level of milk fat
It's bad enough the clerk wouldn't accept the coupon for the peanut butter.
It's bad enough she stepped in gum and it won't come off the bottom of her shoe no matter what she does it won't come off—come off! It won't come and get these bags I won't bring them in.
She won't, either. They can sit in this driveway and melt and churn and spoil.
She won't do it.
I'll leave them here!
She will too but not really. She'd hate for all of this stuff to go to waste and the time it took to get them and anyway, she'd end up looking crazy to the neighbors who were probably already looking.
peeking up the hill at the house
The top of this hill feels like being in a fishbowl.
Not a great neighborhood for being black in.
Riley? Scotch?

RILEY & SCOTCH
Coming.

RILEY
Riley's all about the succulents, they don't really need much water but it's an excuse.
She's embarrassing, down there yelling and dowdy with all of her groceries.
So effing housewife, it's embarrassing. So why not water the succulents or pretend to? Hey, Bruh.
You should go help Mom.

SCOTCH
Scotch's poetry is dopiness that he refuses to stop writing.
I mean, the piece uses barbeque as a metaphor for love.
Barbeque as a metaphor for love—chyeah!
Brilliance I can't. Bruh. I'm writing!

RILEY
He can't effing write.
ANGIE
Her bunion hurts. She has a bunion. God.

RILEY
His metaphors are always clunky.

ANGIE
There are black birds circling above. Maybe they know about the bunion.

RILEY
Dead of summer.

ANGIE
Mom, Scotch is gonna come help you.

SCOTCH
Scotch recipes:
*And Girl, if the sauce gets too dry on our road to love, Girl*
*If the sauce gets too dry from the length of time speak on the hot coals of life...*

This sh*t so dope!

ANGIE
Angie hates her life.
The man occasionally walks into a room and gives her a look like he wishes she'd disappear already.
The kids won't let her touch them.
And she bunion. Frig. She can't cuss. Hasn't had a
good cuss since the kids.
Your father will be home soon and when He sees
these groceries out here He's going to be very angry.

RILEY & SCOTCH & ANGIE
Who's she kidding?

ANGIE
Tired and pissed does not equal fool. She will put
the groceries away.
The man is not the sort...
She will put the groceries away. Frig.

RILEY
Go help Mom.

SCOTCH
Shit so dope!

RILEY
Dang.
[He looks over the railing of the balcony.
Her mom jeans are extra mom-y today. Sucks teeth.
I got it. Mom. I got it.

RACINE
A few yards away hiding behind a neighbor's
minivan.

ANAIA
She's pretty.

RACINE
So?

ANAIA
Just sayin' she's pretty.

RACINE
Don't.

RILEY (carrying groceries)
You got everything, huh?

ANGIE
What took you so long to come help me?

RILEY
Sorry. Was watering the plants.
(RILEY and ANGIE make their way inside)

ANAIA
Has your father called?

RILEY
Nope.

ANGIE
Probably working late tonight.

SCOTCH
What's for dinner?

ANGIE
You can eat anything you helped me carry inside.

SCOTCH
Aw, man. Mom, don't be mad. I'm writing.

ANGIE
Angie refuses to be another tired, middle-aged
woman. She refuses. Going out tonight.
SCOTCH
Yeah, Clayton and I were thinking of hitting up a spot—

ANGIE
No. I'm going out tonight. Me.

RILEY
You?

(As the twins look at their mother)

SCOTCH
With Dad?  

ANGIE
With Mrs. Orson.

SCOTCH
What, y'all going to a tea party or something?
Ha ha

ANGIE
That's really funny. No. It's a party, just a regular one.

SCOTCH
You gonna make dinner before you go?

RILEY
Don't listen to him, Mom.

ANGIE
I'm not.

RILEY
Such a spoiled brat.

SCOTCH
What? Y'all need to stop oppressing me for being so committed to my writing process. I'm trying to make us all rich.

RILEY
Yeah, yeah.

SCOTCH
What are you making for dinner?

RILEY
Probably do an arugula salad. It's coniferous. Detoxifying.

SCOTCH
It's almost like you're trying to be the laziest person you can possibly be.

ANGIE
Upstairs in the master bedroom, the eyeliner pencil is slippery.
It is the dead of summer and the boys don't know what she's planning.
No one knows, not even Mrs. Orson, about the suitcase packed in the trunk ready to take her to Yuca Valley where she'll hide out with a friend and then take the bus to Vegas where she'll gamble no less than three hundred of the seven grand she's been saving before taking the train up to Connecticut, where a new name and job are waiting for her.
He doesn't hit. He's never done that, but

but
That look He gave her when she asked about what happened with His ex-wife

in God Is
(RILEY knocks on the door)

RILEY
Mom?

ANGIE
What is it, Riley? I'm getting dressed.

RILEY
Do you want some salad for the road? Arugula?

ANGIE
Had this come from her body? No, Son. I'm fine. I'll eat out.

RILEY
Okay. Mom?

ANGIE
Son?

RILEY
I love you.

ANGIE
Had this come from her body? I know, Son.

(ANGIE opens the door to the room and touches RILEY's face.)

I love you, too.

(ANGIE makes her way down the stairs and out the front door.)

Tell your father I'll be back later on. Keep the door closed. We aren't cooling the neighborhood. Scotch—clean your ears. They're dripping, God. Don't you feel that?

SCOTCH
All of my feeling goes into my work.

ANGIE
Take care. 

SCOTCH & RILEY
Bye, Mom.

(As soon as the closes the door, SCOTCH turns up the radio. It is incredibly loud. RILEY puts in headphones and makes dinner. SCOTCH may thrust to his music.)

ANGIE steps outside and closes the front door. She gives the house a good, long look and then the finger. She gets into the car and drives a bit but doesn't get very far. The TWINS are sitting in the middle of the road. ANAIA sings softly to herself, looking away. RAGNE turns directly at ANGIE.)
In the Road

ANGIE
Hello? Hello? Excuse me?
Uh. Hi! Can you hear me? Helliilooooooool

RACINE
We just gon ask her where he at. Thas it. Thas it,

ANGIE
HELLOOOO

ANAIA
Ain't you gonna say somethin?

RACINE
She gotta come to us.

ANGIE

RACINE
Who this bitch think she shoo'in?

(ANGIE takes the keys out of the ignition, climbs
out of the car, walking toward the Twins)

ANGIE
Excuse me, but I've got to be somewhere
and are you two okay? Is everything alright?

RACINE
We fine.

ANGIE
She doesn't look well.

RACINE
She's fine. You know us?

ANGIE
Know you? Uh, No. Should I?

RACINE
We're his first ones.

ANGIE
Who?

ANAIA
His first kids. We're the ones he had first.

ANGIE
O.

RACINE
You're alive?

ANAIA
Naw, we're zombies.

ANGIE
He said
He said
you died in some kind of fire and He didn't have to
pay child support.
Are you here for child support?
(She takes off her pearl necklace, coming closer)
Real Japanese Akoya.

RACINE
Don't nobody want your pearls.
ANGIE
Well, this what I’ve got to offer.

RACINE
You got more to offer.

ANGIE
I need the car.

RACINE
You ain’t in no position to be tellin us what you need.
You know what your mama’s been doin while you been layin up in your big yellow house with them teal shutters?

ANAIA
Our mama been up in a bed wastin away. He burnt up most of her body. She a crisp.

RACINE
Eyup. He tried to kill her.
And us, too. See? Fire bit me on my back and arms and Naia on her face.

ANGIE
I’m so sorry. That is unfortunate. But I hope you understand that they lied to me—

RACINE
You knew he was lyin.

ANAIA
‘Cine—

ANGIE
I didn’t.

RACINE
Yeah, you did.

ANGIE
I did not.

RACINE
‘Naia, who this heffa think she foolin?
Can’t even lie straight.

ANAIA
I don’t know, ‘Cine. She could be tellin the truth—

RACINE
You was sitin up in a yellow house with teal shutters while Daddy number three was makin us wash his drawers and make him macaroni outa box and lickin his lips anytime I came in the room with my shoulders showin—

ANAIA
Let’s just let her go—

RACINE
You was sitin up in a blood house, a house he got to put a mask on what he done to us.
You ain’t ask no questions?

(ANGIE tries to walk back to the car but RACINE blocks her path.)

ANGIE
Please, I’ve got to get away.

RACINE
We couldn’t get away. Ain’t never worn no pearls. You, ‘Naia?
ANAIA
Never even held none.

RACINE
I like that car. It's a fair reward for all we been through, I think.

ANGIE
It's mine.

RACINE
Iss ours. He never gave us nothin. He gave you a lot. And somma what he gave you shoulda been ours.

ANGIE
I'm sorry that he—

RACINE
Gimme them keys.

ANGIE
No.

RACINE
What? Is you stupid?

(RACINE tries to grab the keys from ANGIE, but ANGIE resists. They struggle a bit.)

RACINE
Gimme the keys, bitches! Give 'em to me!

ANGIE
They're mine!

(RACINE manages to wrench the keys from ANGIE's hand. She holds them up, gleefully.)

ANGIE

RACINE
Got 'em.

ANGIE
They don't belong to you!

RACINE
Than what you much say! Look at her. Naia. She ain't used to not getting what she wants.

ANGIE
That's just
That's just mean.

RACINE
‘That's just
That's just mean.' Ha ha ha HA ha!

ANGIE
You...you pair of animals. You're going to come and steal from me because of something he did?

ANAIA
We ain't animals. We in a mission. From God.

ANGIE
God?

RACINE
God is our mama.

ANGIE
O, that's right. Your 'mama'.
RACINE
I don't like the way you sayin "Mama"
like that.

ANGIE
Well, I don't like having my property stolen
by a couple of thieves!

ANAIA
We ain't thieves.

ANGIE
Yes you ARE! I just wanna get away
I just wanna
I've earned it
I planned for months
IF He comes home
and I tell Him the car's been stolen do
you know do you know what He'll...
goddamn it Angie you really thought you'd get away, didn't
you really thought you really did...

RACINE
Our mama ain't never had a shot like the one you
got. Sherid. You ain't special.

ANGIE
..It's not my fault
your weak, ghetto trashy "mama"
got burned up!
She should've left Him!

ANAIA & RACINE & ANGIE

ANAIA
...uh...umm

RACINE
uh huh, uh umm

ANAIA & RACINE
uh um ummm

ANAIA
...Bitch...

RACINE
...hold up hold up hold up...this Bitch,

ANAIA
"Weak"?
"Ghetto trashy"?

RACINE
Bitch, where you get all that from?

ANAIA
This bitch done called God "ghetto trashy"!

ANGIE
Each of us is responsible for how our lives turn
out! If you were educated, you'd understand that—

RACINE has ANGIE in the face with the sock.

RACINE
We educated.

ANGIE
—you hit me...
ANAIA
Twin, don't--

RACINE
We educated, Bitch! Say it. Say we educated!

ANGIE
animal

(RACINE hits ANGIE again.)

ANAIA
Racine!

ANGIE
--ow...hard--

(RACINE hits ANGIE a few times. 
ANAIA hides her face.)

ANGIE
s i t.

(ANGIE is dead. ANAIA whimpers.)

RACINE
Twin.

ANAIA
Yeah?

RACINE
You gonna be sick?

ANAIA
I don't think so.
Twins & Twins

(Inside the house, SCOTCH and RILEY seated for a dinner of arugula, piled impossibly high.

SCOTCH
I hate you. You're the worst person alive.

RILEY
There's plenty of other food.

SCOTCH
Where do you think she really went?

RILEY
Don't know. Mexico?

SCOTCH
Dad's gonna find her.

RILEY
Yeah.

SCOTCH
Wanna hear a poem I wrote for her?

RILEY
No. Really. no.

SCOTCH
It's short.

RILEY
God. Please. No.

SCOTCH
It's not.

RILEY
No. It's not.

SCOTCH
Can I have the food?

RILEY
Sure.

SCOTCH
Thank you.

RILEY
You're welcome.

SCOTCH
I'm dead.

RILEY
Jealous.

SCOTCH
Get it. I ordered pizza.

RILEY
(another knock at the door)

SCOTCH
I know you?

ANAIA and RACINE stand before him.

SCOTCH
Who is it?

SCOTCH
Not pizza. Wait, Wait. Our birthday isn't for a couple of weeks but...

(RILEY comes to the door.)
RILEY
I didn't actually order pizza...Who's this?

RACINE
I'm Racine.

ANAI A
Anaia.

RILEY, SCOTCH, ANAIA & RACINE
Twins.

SCOTCH
O shit.
O shit.
O shit!

RILEY
What?

SCOTCH
Dad did this, I think.

RACINE
He definitely did.

SCOTCH
Come on in, girls! You can change upstairs.
O shit O shit!

RILEY
Wait--what are you doing?

SCOTCH
Dad hired them!

RILEY
How do we know that?

SCOTCH
Look at them, Riley! Twins! Stripper twins!

RILEY
They don't look like--

SCOTCH
I should call Michael and Tyrell--

RACINE
Don't call anyone else. Private show.

SCOTCH
Okay. Whatever you say, Cutie. Go on up.
Second door on the left.

(ANAIA and RACINE head upstairs.)

SCOTCH
Oh my god. Stripper Twins! Dad's a genius!

RILEY
This just doesn't seem like something he'd do.
Let me just call him and make sure he really
sent them.

SCOTCH (imitating RILEY)
"Let me just call him..." Do you wake up in the
morning and stroke your chin thinking of ways
to be the lamest motherfucker ever?

Damn.

RILEY
I just--
SCOTCH
It's our birthday.

RILEY
In two weeks.

SCOTCH
He always surprises us. Remember the turtles?

RILEY
Yes. In our beds while we slept.

SCOTCH
Twin fucking turtles we woke up to on our tenth birthday like it was muchfuckin Christmas!

RILEY
They stank.

SCOTCH
Muchfuckin Turtle Christmas!

RILEY
Kinda creepy if you ask me.

SCOTCH
Get excited with me, Bro! Twins! We're about to get a striptease from a pair of TWINS! I gotta go get fresh. I call the pretty one. Ay ay ay! Twins!

(SCOTCH turns up the radio)

...
(ANAIA continues out the door)

You just a lil punk!

ANAIA
I ain't no punk! Just ain't all hardened like you!

RACINE
"Hardened"? The fuck that mean?

ANAIA
Means you ain't got no soul or compassion!

RACINE
I got soul and compassion for GOD!
Who's finna die!

ANAIA
But you ain't got none for nobody else.

RACINE
"But you ain't got none for nobody else."
No, I don't!
And why should I?
Huh? Who you see around this motherfucker I should be havin soul
and compassion for, huh?

ANAIA
Okay, fine, fine, fine. Shit. But you gotta promise
me it ain't no more blood but his.

RACINE
I promise.

ANAIA
You gotta swear to God.

RACINE
Fine. I swear to God and to God and I put that
on everything. No more blood but his.

ANAIA
If you go back on it, I'm just gon walk away. Twin.
Naw, I'm not gon walk. Ima run.
You on your own.

RACINE
Let's just get ready.

ANAIA
I will.
Don't see why we gotta tease them like we
stripers, tho.
Seem weird. They're our brothers—

RACINE
Don't you even say that or it becomes true.
They ain't nothin to us and we ain't nothin to
them. We on a mission. From God.

ANAIA
Twin?

RACINE
Yeah.

ANAIA
How you felt about killin that lady?

RACINE
Nothin.
Don't look at me like that. I didn't feel nothin.
She wasn't a nice lady. And she kinda stole from
us. I don't feel nothin for her. All my feelings is
for God.
ANAIA
F'real?

RACINE
Eyup. God. In between them sheets with her skin flakin off. God prolly ain't been touched by a man since he did it.

ANAIA
Nope.

RACINE
And what she say? "Ghetto trashy"?

ANAIA
I believe thas what she said.

RACINE
Now eberybody know talkin shit about God will get you kill.

ANAIA
Eyup.

RACINE
Struck down.

ANAIA
Right.

RACINE
We ain't nothin but the hand of God doin Her bidding.

ANAIA
Right. You right.

The Tease

(ANAIA and RACINE come down the stairs, dressed to strip. The radio plays stripping music. RILEY is nearby, watching but not participating.)

SCOTCH
Alright ladies! Let's see what you got!

(The women dance. RACINE is much more free with her movement than ANAIA. RACINE gives SCOTCH a fell on lap dance.)


Riley! Twins, Riley! Twins! Hey you (points to ANAIA)

I want you behind me. Put those titties on my neck.

(ANAIA goes near to him, awkwardly dancing.)

Wait, wait, wait. Get behind me. Behind. I want this one in the front.

Riley? You better get in on this, Bro. He did it for both of us.

RILEY
I'm alright.
SCOTCH
No you're not. You. Go dance with my brother.
(He's pointing at ANAIA, who looks at RILEY)

RILEY
No, she doesn't need to do that. That's all you, Scotch.

SCOTCH
No, Broh. That's all you. I got the pretty one.
That one's yours.

(ANAIA isn't sure where to go. She and RACINE look
at one another. ANAIA exits the house.)

RILEY
Where's she goin'? This isn't over yet. How long did
he pay for? Riley?

RACINE
My sister ain't ugly.

SCOTCH
No, no. I guess, all god's children are beautiful,
or whatever. Sure.

All Fall Down

(Outside. RILEY follows ANAIA)

RILEY
Hey. Sorry I don't. I just don't think.
It's not because of your face or anything. I'm just.
This is more Scotch's thing.
You want some water or something?

ANAIA
No.

RILEY
Okay. Want a coat? Someone might drive by and.
Never mind. So, how long did he pay for?

ANAIA
Who?

RILEY
My dad.

ANAIA
He didn't.

RILEY
He didn't?

ANAIA
No.
RILEY
I knew it. I knew you weren't strippers. You just
don't have the—
Something just didn't add up. So, what are you really?

ANAIA
Sick. I'm a little sick to my stomach.

RILEY
O, Anything I can do for you? You want some-
ting to eat? We've got apples.

ANAIA
That alright.

RILEY
You sound like you're from somewhere in the south.

ANAIA
Eyup.

RILEY
My dad is, too.

ANAIA
—He ever talk about it?

RILEY
Not a lot. When he does it's usually to say some-
thing about how f*cked up everyone down there
is. How they enjoy swimming in their own misery.

ANAIA
Hm.

RILEY
I've never really been to the south. Well, Texas
once. Austin. Band trip.

ANAIA
How old are you?

RILEY
We'll be seventeen in thirteen days.

ANAIA
Oh. Bet you got you a girlfriend.

RILEY
No.

ANAIA
Cute little kid like you?

RILEY
There's
there's this guy I like.

ANAIA
Oh. My bad.

RILEY
I hope you don't mind my asking—
What happened to your face?

ANAIA
That's a secret.

(A scream from within the house)

RILEY
You hear that?

ANAIA
Yeah. Seems like they're havin a good time.

(Another scream)

[End of page]
RILEY
No No
That sounded bad.

ANAIA
They're fine. My sister, she just gets a little wet.

RILEY
Maybe I should—

ANAIA
It was a fire. Someone set a fire and it crawled onto my face and left me like this.

RILEY
O, wow. That sucks. Why would anyone do something like that?

ANAIA
That's what I keep askin myself. How could he?

RILEY
He? You know who did it?

(Another scream as SCOTCH runs out of the house.)

SCOTCH
Riley!!
The pretty one tried to to—

(SCOTCH falls to the ground, crawling. We can see a knife stuck in his back.)

RILEY
Scotch! Scotch! There's a knife in you!

SCOTCH
Is that what that is?

(RILEY tries to pull the knife from his brother's back.)

No
hurts
no

RILEY
O
my god
O my god
what

O my god
How O my god

(RACINE appears from inside of the house, less dressed than when we last saw her and bloody. She holds the sock. RILEY tries to stop the blood pouring out of his brother with his hands.)

SCOTCH
I

RILEY
Don't.
DON'T!

SCOTCH
aah hahah a me...

(SCOTCH is gone.)
RILEY
Ha ha ha ha ha
ha ha ha ha ha
HAHA
Ha ha ha ha ha
Scotch is
Scotch is twin dead!
Scotch is my twin is
Ha aha hAHaha ha ha Ha Haaaaaaa
He's dead His blood is He's gone
My twin gone
This is funyyyy
ha ha HAHA ha ha ha
h a ha haaa ha HHHHA
Ha ha HAA HA HA HA ha ha ha he's bleeding
arugula arugula on his SHIRT ha ha ha Ha
And and and and he HATES arugula
Ha ha ha!

RACINE
Look like he done went crazy.

ANAIA
Yeah, yeah.

RACINE
He called you ugly. I didn't plan to do it, but he called you ugly.

ANAIA
I am, though.

RACINE
If we don't do the other one, he's gonna tell.

ANAIA
What? No.

RACINE
You don't have to watch. You can go inside.

ANAIA
You said...you said...

RACINE
He'll talk. He might even blame you even though you didn't do it—

ANAIA
We talked. Me and him.

RACINE
What that mean?

ANAIA
Mean we can't.

(RACINE goes to approach RILEY but ANAIA stands in her way)

RACINE
You keep doin it. You said we'd just do him and not them but—

RACINE
I'm doin what's best for us—
ANAIA
You a lie.

RACINE
Get the fuck outta my way, Twin—
(RACINE tries to pass ANAIA, but ANAIA
shoves her.)

Girrrr
(ANAIA shoves her sister again.)

Punk ass.
Punk ass bitch!
Say it. Say I'm a punk ass weak ass bitch—

ANAIA
Stop.

RACINE
If you start cryin, I swear to god—

ANAIA
Twin—

RACINE
You in my way. God gon be mad when I tell Her—

RILEY
Why are you doing this?

ANAIA
Because your daddy is our daddy and he—

RACINE
Don't talk to him!

RILEY
My dad is...?
RILEY


(ANAIA has hit RILEY as hard as she can on the back of his head with the sock. She hits him again and again until he gurgles, twitches, and is still. ANAIA goes to RACINE, shaking her)

ANAIA

O- Cine-he's gone--I did it--he--


(Sound of a car approaching. She looks in the direction it's coming—up the driveway. She shakes RACINE again)

ANAIA

Get up. Somebody's comin.

(The car stops. ANAIA lifts her sister, dragging her out of view. She waits. A car door opens and closes and MAN gets out. We hear hard-soled shoes on the ground. He stops near RILEY's body for a moment. He continues, stepping at SCOTCH's body. He walks near the bushes, very close to where ANAIA is hiding. He turns again towards the car.

In the driveway he takes off his shoes and socks, slowly, methodically. He removes his suit jacket and tie. He rolls up his pants legs, whistling. Finally, he takes off his hat and we see his face for the first time.)

MAN

This slope continues right on up just behind the house. Pretty easy climb if you're in decent shape. Meet me at the top.

Or. You could just stay in those bushes and wonder.

(MAN climbs the aforementioned hill. ANAIA emerges from the bushes, laying her sister down on the ground carefully)

ANAIA

Twin, she's here. I'm gonna... I got the sock. I got it.

(Shes follows MAN up the hill.)

...
Showdown

(ANAIA and MAN stand on opposite sides of the hill.)

MAN
You still kinda pretty. Kinda. You ain't a complete monster, I was worried.
ANAIA
Huhwhat?
MAN
Well, maybe just plain "pretty" in general is a stretch. You're prettier than I left her, that's for sure. Well. You want to ask me some questions, I imagine.
ANAIA
Huhwhat?
MAN
How about if I ask one and then you ask one. You first.
ANAIA
I I I don't know—
MAN
Yes, you do.
ANAIA
I
Why did you set her on fire?

MAN
Because she wouldn't let me hold her.
ANAIA
You set—wait, what does that—
MAN
My turn. Who'd you kill first?
ANAIA
I didn't kill nobody. Not really, 'cept in self defense. Cine was the one—
MAN
Who first?
ANAIA
Your wife.
MAN
Angie?
ANAIA
That her name? Yeah.
MAN
Wow.
ANAIA
My turn. What does that mean 'she wouldn't let me hold her'? Huh? You were mad 'cause she didn't want you to touch her so you set her on fire?
MAN
It's more nuanced than that, but yes.
MAN
You're not a killer.

ANAIA
What am I gonna tell the baby 'bout all of this?

MAN
Put that thing down. You can tell it you made a few mistakes when you were young. Like I did.

ANAIA
How am I gonna tell it 'bout God and 'Cine and you?
'Bout how you tried to kill us all.

MAN
"Kill us all?"
I didn't try to kill you all. Just her. You think I set my own babies on fire?
She did that. She screamed and grabbed aloft of you two.
I couldn't get her to let go. That's when I ran out.
That's why I stood on that bridge and nearly let myself fall in.
You think I tried to kill my own babies? Is that what she told you?

ANAIA
...

MAN
I didn't. She lied.

ANAIA
I promised God I'd bring back a piece of you.
MAN
That older one, the smart one, he was gonna be somebody.
If you weren't pregnant I'd cut your eyes out and make you eat them.
(He kicks her and she tumbles down the hill)
Go back to that h

I'd do it all again if I could

(ANAIA struggles to stand. MAN places the bodies of his sons near to one another. He takes a flask from his coat pocket and pours it on them.
ANAIA has gotten to her feet. MAN eyeballs her)

ANAIA
Whoa, Calcanth. I'm about to ride my bike.

MAN
You ain't nothin', now

ANAIA
Yeah
Yeah
Nothin'

ANAIA
Either you or me or somebody got to go today. World can't hold us both.

MAN
Suit yourself.
(He moves toward her but RACINE jumps on his back.)

ANAIA
'Cine!

MAN
Get off me!
(MAN is swinging around, trying to get RACINE off)

RACINE
Kill him, Naia!
(ANAIA hits MAN in the belly with the rock as hard as she can. He keels over. The Twins descend on his fallen frame, kicking and stomping him. RACINE takes the rock from her sister and brings it down on him repeatedly)

RACINE
You ain't nothin', now

ANAIA
Yeah

Manie Harris
RACINE

Just sound your
to a soft spot on the
You
can't hit nobody can't HIT no body no more
can't set nobody on fire can't marry some prissy hillbilly
can't go have no new babies can't hurt God you nothin

ANAIA & RACINE

What you goin do you ain't got nothin' go back your feet up

(RACINE takes the liquor and pours it all over MAN's battered face. She takes his matches from the ground and strikes one.)

MAN

Wait wait wait

RACINE

He ul

Eyup.

(RACINE drops the match, setting MAN ablaze. He burns, writhes and screams.)

ANAIA

'Cine?

(RACINE cannot shake him off, though she fights hard. He pulls her closer. The flame engulfs her. She falls to the ground.)

'Naia help get him off me 'Naia!

(ANAIA takes a few steps back)

'Naia

(ANAIA takes a few more steps back)

ANAIA

I can't, 'Naia

RACINE

Get burnin Get Twin burnin
him Twin him issa issa

(anaia 75+9)

Fire

Anaia

It God is
ANAIA

RACINE


(ANAIA runs and hides as her sister screams. The fire burns until everything is ash.)

... A bullet... out of whack

Twin?

(ANAIA makes her way from her hiding place.)

ANAIA

(ANAIA looks out at us.)

Them burnin

Twin

She lowers her head out of habit.

(She leaves.)

... That's transition
Again Before God

(ANAIA stands before her mother, whose breath is coming in loose gasps. She is dwindling.)

SHE
Well?

ANAIA
He’s gone.

SHE
And your sister?

ANAIA
Her too.

(ANAIA places the pieces of each of those killed before SHE—an ear, a manicured nail, MAN’S hat, etc.)

SHE
One, two, three, four, five.
Well, well. You did it.
I ain’t tryna be funny, but I didn’t think you’d be the one.

ANAIA
Yeah.

SHE
Reason you got burnt up worst is you was the one they tried hardest to save me.
Guess that shoulda tol’ me something ‘bout how dedicated you are.

ANAIA
Yeah

SHE
You alright, Baby?

ANAIA
C’mon.
C’mon died
and
and
you ain’t even you ain’t e’en
she dead, Mama. Dead.
He said….he told me you was the one...

SHE
What’s that?

ANAIA
I got a baby comin. Ima name it Enica. Thas almost Racine spelled backwards.
Whatchoo think?

SHE
Clever.

(ANAIA raises the sock/rock above her mother’s head. SHE cannot see it.)

ANAIA
Mama
Mama
we cursed? Feel like it.

SHE
Hard to say.
ANAIA
Mama
You feel like you can die in peace, now?

SHE

She

Eyp. Iss real quiet now.

ANAIA

Funny
I still hear noise.

(The almost imperceptible sound of a lullaby.
ANAIA lowers the rock/rock.

End.)
ALESHEA HARRIS's play Is God Is (Soho Rep) won the 2016 Relentless Award, an OBIE Award for playwriting in 2017, was a finalist for the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize and made The Kilroys' List of "the most recommended and underproduced plays by trans and female authors of color" for 2017. What to Send Up When It Goes Down, a play-pageant-ritual response to anti-blackness, had its critically-acclaimed world premiere in 2018, was featured in the April 2019 issue of American Theatre Magazine and was nominated for a Drama Desk award.

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Bibliography


*Queens of Botswana.* Directed by Sarah Vianney, Kleinalstede Vianney, 2019.


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