

SLAVE NARRATIVES RECOLLECTION OF CULTURE USING SYMBOL IN AUGUST WILSON'S THE PIANO LESSON

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Abstract

August Wilson explores the African-American experience throughout each decade of the twentieth century in his renowned series of plays. One notable work within this series is The Piano Lesson. The impacts of his work possess a greater thematic significance rather than a just theatrical one. The plays exhibit a wealth of various personalities and conflicts, along with the subsequent resolutions to these conflicts. However, underlying the varied elements within the dramatic structure of this play there is a rationale. This idea is that the current state of relationships for African Americans has been consistently influenced by a historical context characterized by instances of racial injustice, including the theft of opportunities and the fracturing of relationships. In Wilson's theatrical works, it has been customary for the protagonist's individual history to serve as the perspective through which the current circumstances are perceived. The Piano Lesson delves into the intricate historical complexities that span three generations within the family. Wilson traces these problems back to an episode rooted in their ancestral history of slavery. This tragedy continues to influence the family's present reality, not just on a personal level but also within their community and familial context, even after the passage of seventy-five years.

Keywords-*African Americans, Racial Injustice, Ancestral History, Opportunities, Slavery.*

Introduction

A main disagreement over the best way to employ history as a mythical framework with iconic symbols forces the play's storyline. The piano as a symbol of the past history serves as the main source of dispute. Boy Willie, the son of the slave whose artwork is on the piano, has come to Pittsburgh to claim fifty percent of the musical instrument. His sister, Berniece, is now in charge of the piano. The man in question can be described as a criminal who sees that the money he will receive from the sale of the piano is the best chance for him to break free from the economic and social oppression that has befallen the men of his family since the days of slavery. However, Berniece's unwillingness to give up an object that has great meaning as a reminder of their family's history of making sacrifices prevent the protagonist's desire to escape his present situation. According to Pereira, the piano plays an important part in the play as a point of reference for opposing viewpoints on historical events. A recurring issue in Wilson's previous plays, the emotional suffering brought on by the weight of historical events has been redefined as a result of his work. With this reinterpretation, Wilson argues that the emphasis is now on figuring out how best to use the past. The piano, the heritage, is the true problem.

Boy Willie, a character in August Wilson's play *The Piano Lesson*, encounters several challenges in his attempt to take charge of his narrative. The symbolic meaning ascribed to the piano in the story always informs his actions, which are intended to help him escape the terrible

inheritance he has inherited. The protagonist is forced to find freedom and self-discovery in the realm of emotions rather than finances when his last attempt to challenge the established narrative and unlawfully acquire the piano is prevented. Instead of obtaining Sutter's property, he does this by confronting the ghost of Sutter. Wilson claims that to justify Boy Willie's metaphorical slave story, the audience must understand the deep meaning of the slave narrative as it is played on the piano. Moreover, since their relationship is sequential, it becomes necessary to deconstruct the family myth or alter his own story to create a new one.

Wilson divides *The Piano Lesson* into three levels, to provide a thorough and multidimensional method of studying black history. The author first creates a complex theatrical device by explaining a story about slavery that is elaborately fixed into the play's main object, an old piano, and then repeated by the many characters inside the play. Additionally, based on the call-and-response tradition seen in African traditional culture, the author uses the piano and the story it tells as a haunting presence. Boy Willie must respond to this symbolic call to achieve personal fulfillment and realize his dreams.

Slave Narratives

The main purpose of the historical slave narrative was to assist the former slaves in remembering and documenting the events and situations from which they had learned to free themselves. A deep psychological empowerment that promotes the formation of self-identity is ingrained in each of these stories. Regarding the repressive institution of slavery, this provides a way for former slaves to provide a defense or explanation for their uniqueness. Former slaves are allowed to repair and regain their psychological health by participating in this procedure. There don't seem to be many people in greater need of psychiatric rehabilitation than Boy Willie. He may be described as an outlaw, often called a "survivor," who has learned to steal, lie, and be dishonest from the experience of living under unfavorable conditions. Right now, he sees a chance to escape the pattern that has so cruelly taken the lives of many male relatives, a history he would rather not repeat.

This is made clear by the person's enthusiastic denunciation of any responsibility for Crawley's death, even in light of Berniece's accusations. But the accusations remind Boy Willie of how far he has come with his family's tradition and how close he has come to breaking free from it via the piano. The fact that he now needs the piano is concrete evidence of his ancestry since it is similar to that of his forebears.

The last sign that his search has been accomplished, engraved into the wood itself, is a contradictory example of the unbreakable connection between his own identity and historical occurrences, whether that bond is good or bad. But Boy Willie discovers that his sense of himself can no longer be preserved by only hearing tales of his family's valor in protecting this emblem. The challenge for the individual in issue is to create their narrative of servitude, even if it is symbolic. The goal of this effort is to tell a story that emphasizes how black people may prosper despite the restrictions and laws imposed by a mostly white society, which is a similar impact that Doaker's story has had on the other members of the family.

The piano and its mythical connection to the past no longer serve to authenticate the individual's own life. The only explanation he offers for keeping the piano is that Berniece must utilize it for something constructive, like teaching. If there is no outside help available, the person in issue is personally motivated to use it. However, the identity of the person is no longer based on the symbolic story it represents. Consequently, the myth no longer requires Boy Willie to own a piano. Rather, the tale now stresses the value of following its tradition and demonstrating a resolute mindset to succeed, much like the people who made, stored, and eventually stole the piano for the family.

The opposing traits of Boy Willie and Berniece are one of the important distinctions Wilson makes in the drama. The cosmos is seen differently by each person, reflecting a unique sense of grandeur. But their understanding of one another's viewpoints is so limited that it seems as if they have not completely assimilated into a shared cultural heritage. They have certainly arrived at different spiritual destinations for a variety of reasons. In slave tales, the distinction between the experiences of men and women is often inadequate. One may argue that Berniece's tale, which shows her attempt to protect her family's heritage from a brother who plans to sell it, could have served as the main subject of the play *The Piano Lesson*. These plots authenticity is enhanced by some validation techniques, including complex storytelling, the appearance of spirits that seem to support the events, and the plot is engrossing, almost legendary elements. Given that black literature often uses a legendary aspect to illustrate the interaction between modern people and their ancestors, this could have led to a closer connection between the play and Afro-American history.

One example that may be mentioned is the belief that supernatural beings called the Ghosts of the Yellow Dog are responsible for the unintentional death of white men. It is quite likely that the explanations offered in the play for the death do not correspond with the viewpoints that the surviving relatives of the victims would have expressed. Despite being fanciful, these explanations are essential to confirming the existence of the departed who have become ghosts. In the same vein, Boy Willie looks for approval by wanting to purchase Sutter's property. The fact that the piano was considered precious enough for black men to give their lives for and valuable enough for white men to use violence further validates the value of the instrument itself. The magical powers of the piano are something Berniece believes in, and she sees it as a way to connect with her ancient heritage. This explains why she is so hesitant to sell the product. It was a serious enough issue to justify the sacrifice of life. The result is an acknowledgment of the mutually reinforcing relationship between the current generation and the generations who came before it, in which both sides gain or suffer, as in the African ancestor rituals that formed the basis of the original story.

When her family encounters the ghost of Sutter in the play's conclusion, the protagonist turns to her ancestry for comfort. The empowerment of the community and family, when the truth is obscured, is what defines the story of *The Piano Lesson*. Wining Boy's retelling of the Yellow Dog legend serves as an illustration of this powerful effect. A similar sense of power is evoked by Doaker's account of the piano myth. Internal evidence in Doaker's story points to a

degree of inauthenticity that may not be immediately obvious. According to Doaker's account of the family tree, Old Berniece, her son Doaker, and Charles's father were traded in exchange for a piano that was purchased from a slave owner "down in Georgia."

By carving their likenesses and a large section of the family's history into the piano, the first Boy Willie, Doaker's grandpa, showed his sadness over their departure as well as the white mistress's grief over the death of her favorite enslaved person. The distance between Doaker's and Charles's father's home in Georgia and the site of the sculptural carvings is one possible problem with this lineage. It is quite unlikely that their father would have been aware of the sculptures or any information about them. Nevertheless, Doaker describes how his father, Charles, becomes so obsessed with the piano that he chooses to steal it from the Sutter property. His premature death is the final result of this foolish decision.

Past combined with present

The fact that Berniece's behaviors are still influenced by the narrative of the piano shows how timeless it is. Ultimately, the disagreement over the piano is resolved because of this story. It is important to note, nevertheless, that Berniece treats the myth with discriminating respect throughout the play. The person in issue has shown a consistent aversion to playing the piano, a tendency that has continued since her mother passed away. The purpose of this intentional avoidance is to stifle recollections of the past and make it impossible for ghosts to move around the home while exhibiting respect for the house's sacredness. Similar to this, the main character first denies the existence of the Ghosts of the Yellow Dog but is ultimately forced to acknowledge both the historical occurrences and the supernatural beings to reaffirm her faith in the tale. This happens when she plays the piano and fiercely calls upon her ancestors to help Boy Willie face the spirit of Sutter in the end. Both Boy Willie and Berniece struggle with the choice of accepting their past or planning for the future, and this last meeting is a turning point in their lives. One of the most important and uniting events in the family's history occurs. Boy Willie and Berniece both get what they've been looking for by accepting the shared mythos. Boy Willie's original quest is consistent with Berniece's reawakening of the piano's usefulness in the story. Accordingly, Boy Willie triumphs over the Sutter spirit's persistent power, which had afflicted the family for a long time.

Furthermore, Doaker, a man without a clear function in his career, has given up his personal claim to the piano, symbolically renouncing any ownership of his identity, even if it were based on a verified narrative like the piano. In the end, Boy Willie's search for freedom is not validated by the piano. The piano is immobile when someone tries to move it, take possession of it, or exert authority over it. As a result, he is forced to confront the force that could control his narrative, Sutter's Ghost. The conclusion that Boy Willie must overcome this last obstacle to achieve liberation is ultimately based on the question of whether Sutter's death was caused by Boy Willie, as Berniece is adamantly convinced, or if Sutter's presence represents the entire white community impeding Boy Willie's progress.

Conclusion

At this point, the play comes to its initial climax, with Boy Willie facing the ghosts of the past and overcoming the challenge that forced him to sell the piano. In the African American community, the phenomenon of dealing with historical ghosts is a real experience, and the ambiguity of the repercussions that follow is a reflective depiction of reality. Boy Willie returns from the battle with a renewed readiness to accept the importance of the past while also appreciating its usefulness in the present after achieving the long-desired feeling of self-identity upon reaching the summit of the mountain. Insinuating that he and Sutter could come back, he cautions Martha and the others about the possible repercussions of not playing the piano. Except for the money he makes from the watermelons he carries with him, Boy Willie does not become wealthy while he is in Pittsburgh, but he does come away from the experience wiser. He no longer completely despises the customs that his forefathers upheld and no longer has whole faith in his endeavors.

Ultimately, it may be deduced that the previously listed facts result in the conclusion that the author skillfully frames Boy Willie's quest as an extension of his enslaved ancestors' by drawing comparisons between their endeavors. As a consequence, both the drama and Boy Willie's tale serve as a symbolic slave narrative. As thus, the novel creates a history of Black America marked by a continuous link between the living and the dead. At first, the piano's usefulness takes precedence over the family's slave story, reorienting the narrative to the present and future instead of the past. On the other hand, after seeing how important it is to respect the family's history, Boy Willie turns his focus to a more powerful and sophisticated but unchanged vision of his future. He achieves a higher degree of self-awareness and advances the family's understanding of their common slave story to its last and universal level via his battle with the ghosts of the past. Both Boy Willie and Bemiece may now continue the story without needing or requesting any more confirmation of its veracity.

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