

THE HISTORICAL LEGACY OF THE PAST IN AUGUST WILSON'S *GEM OF THE OCEAN*

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Abstract

Gem of the Ocean explores fundamental issues of the African American life of the contemporary time. The play is set in 1904 when many African Americans were migrated from the South to the North in order to escape from the tyranny and harassment of the Southern white landowners. Although, they have freedom from Slavery, the Southern white feudalists do not allow them to enjoy their natural freedom. Therefore, the exodus of the African Americans come to Pittsburgh to find new opportunities in the industrial sector. The migrated generation of the African Americans was also in cultural and religious dilemma. They want emancipation from their sin. Citizen Barlow also comes from the South to wash soul from Aunt Ester who is 287 years African American matriarch who lives in Pittsburgh. Although many African Americans come to Pittsburgh, they have to face many routine problems in the city.

Introduction

The core concerns of African Americans living in the modern day are examined in *Gem of the Ocean*. The drama takes place in 1904, when a large number of African Americans fled the oppression and persecution of the white landlords in the South by migrating to the North. Even if they are liberated from slavery, the white feudalists in the South prevent them from using their inherent freedom. As a result, African Americans flee to Pittsburgh for better prospects in the industrial sector. African Americans in the migrating generation also faced religious and cultural challenges. They want to be set free from their sin. To cleanse the spirit of Aunt Ester, a 287-year-old African American grandmother who resides in Pittsburgh, Citizen Barlow also travels from the South. Even though a lot of African Americans visit Pittsburgh, they still have to deal with a lot of everyday issues there. Housekeeper Black Mary mentions migrated Citizen Barlow. He most likely slept under the Brady Street Bridge. A large number of individuals are sleeping down there. In the Northern cities, the migrant population struggled from a lack of employment, food, and housing. Amidst the African American upheaval, the *Gem of the Ocean* emerged.

Gem of the Ocean (1900s) marks the start of August Wilson's century-long cycle of black American life. The first generations of Black Americans to be released from slavery is confused by the fall of the old slave system and are ill-prepared for the reaction of white people to their newfound freedom. Many people who go north wind themselves at the mercy of relatives who are struggling to make ends meet. Some people most in need of recovery wind up at Aunt Ester's



door. Citizen Barlow does precisely that in the first scene of *Gem of the Ocean*. Many African Americans moved to the North in pursuit of their spiritual salvation as well as fresh employment opportunities.

The same issue of African American existence is explored in Wilson's *Gem of the Ocean*. The most important part of the play's historical context is Solly Two King's portrayal. Many African Americans were assisted in leaving the South by Solly, a former social leader in the Underground Railroad Movement. He managed to get away from the exploitation, but he did not reach his sister, who remains in the South. She tries to get Solly to go by writing her a letter. Her letter is read by Black Mary.

Eliza Jackson, Solly's sister, accurately depicts the plight and abuse of the African Americans who stayed in the South. However, the brutal white people inflicted hardship on the families and relatives of those who went to the North. *Gem of the Ocean* transports viewers to the early 1900s when Black people were having difficulty "navigating" the shifting laws that prevented them from fully engaging in society, as Bellamy Lou notes. The drama reveals how white people have taken advantage of black people despite their legal liberation from slavery.

Wilsonian dramaturgy is distinguished by a variety of symbolism and significance. The most important element of his theatrical art is the character names. Due to his involvement in the Underground Railroad Movement and the government's desire to capture him, Solly Two King was renamed to avoid the fear of the white people. In addition, the name represents Solly's independence.

Wilson provides the name's meaning to increase the impact and potency of his dramaturgy. He draws readers' the attention to the spiritual and mythological realm of the African American ethnic minority in the United States. The Dramatist employs the pivotal role of Aunt Ester, who is 287 years old, to examine the African American mythological and spiritual traditions. The main factor influencing the play's readers' interest is Aunt Ester's age. Aunt Ester is well-versed in African American history. She is the play's most devout character and aids in the African Americans' spiritual cleansing.

Wilson clarifies that Aunt Ester is a collection of women who have been handed down through the years. Although she was not born Ester Tyler, the lady we meet in *Gem* has sworn never to use her birth name again. Instead, with a determined concentration, she assumes Aunt Ester's tasks. African Americans' oral history is passed down from one generation to the next; Aunt Ester is a symbol of their rich heritage. Her knowledge of African Americans is 287 years old, even if her real age is not 287.

The complicated relationships between African American men and women are shown in Wilson's dramaturgy. According to Citizen, an African American guy, a woman must have a male in order to satisfy her desires. Black Mary, an African American woman, on the other hand, feels that men merely want women to satisfy their desires, and after they have done so, they want to exclude her from their social circle. Black Mary and Citizen's strong convictions embody the modern African American way of life.

The main focus of the Gem of the Ocean is Wilson's depiction of the religious and spiritual life of African Americans. August Wilson presents the idea of sin and how it might be cleansed by a religious path dramatically. An African American guy named Citizen Barlow takes a bucket's nail. But when someone else is harmed by it and kills himself, Citizen Barlow starts to think he is a sinner. He relocates to the home of Aunt Ester, a 287-year-old African American matriarch who is skilled in cleansing people's souls, to cleanse his own. She leads the citizens to go on the City of the Bones trip to cleanse the citizens' souls.

The encounter between a citizen and a person who die as a result of the citizen's error is the most magical part of the trip through the city of Bones. The entrance city of Bones opens for him to enter once the Citizen tells him the truth, and the Citizen cleanses his soul. The most basic foundation of Gem of the Ocean is the holy path of soul cleansing. It is predicated on acknowledging one's transgressions. The citizen confesses his fault, and God cleanses his soul. According to Saraha Ballemmy, Citizen Barlow's journey to the city of the Bones serves as a rite of cleansing before beginning a life of service. Before being admitted, he must make amends for his transgression.

CONCLUSION

The city of Bones is regarded with respect; it is sacred and searched. It requires washing before one may enter. Gem of the Ocean examines the African Americans' religious beliefs throughout. Even though African Americans were forced to embrace other cultures and religions, they managed to retain their legacy and tradition. The fact that Aunt Ester's home is located at 1839 Wylie Avenue is a testament to their heritage. The year 1839 represents the African American people's journey. Saraha Bellemy observes that "it will be necessary to travel back to a point of origin in order to arrive at 1839 Wylie Avenue." According to Wilson, the city of Bones is a significant location for African Americans who were born in the New World.

Gem of the Ocean examines the socioeconomic and cultural context of African Americans in the United States throughout the 1900's. Every character in the play suffers as a result of American social and political trends. Their religious and cultural life is also more disrupted due to the large-scale migration from the South to the North. The persecution and situation of these individuals are artistically included by Wilson in Gem of the Ocean.

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