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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

***The Piano Lesson of August Wilson as the Representation of the African Cultural Heritage***

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**ABSTRACT**

The heritage of nations has always been a fundamental pillar of the individual's cultural identity. The twentieth century has a great interest in cultural heritage by means of drama, as it articulates political, social, cultural, and even psychological issues under the umbrella of globalization. Afro-American playwrights have focused on cultural identity, which directly leads to their heritage, as what has been done by Wilson, who exploited his talent in dramatizing the Afro-American people's lives. Wilson used his play to demonstrate and defend the values and culture in conflict with American and white culture, as well as to demonstrate that Afro-Americans can produce the finest literary writing to enrich American literature. So, heritage is one of the reasons for preserving individuality, as people have no identity if they do not have cultural heritage. The Piano Lesson is looking for acceptance or recognition that African culture is a part of the world's culture that should be respected. In addition, Wilson encouraged his people to strongly seize their traditions and culture to get their identity as others, and he accomplished his mission.

**KEYWORDS**

The Piano Lesson, heritage, culture, Afro-American culture

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**1. Introduction**

"The Piano Lesson" displays the experience of black people in 1930s America—the time of the Great Depression. It highlights the effects of the Great Migration, which was the main reason that forced blacks to go from the south to the north, where industrial cities like Pittsburgh existed in order to search for jobs. This play displays many aspects of the differences in race relations in the North and the South at that time. It really shows how blacks were treated more fairly in the North than in the South. August Wilson tries to make the Afro-American conscious and satisfied with their history and legacy to change the passive look to his fellow citizens as he states:

"...the glancing manner in which America looks at blacks and the way blacks look at themselves. We have different philosophical ideas and different ways of responding to the world. Different ideas and attitudes, different values, different styles, and different linguistics aesthetics-eve the way we bury our dead is different."  
(Brayer, 2006: 3)

Wilson endeavored to create a conquering nature of the white to accept to see Afro-Americans as equal to them. Afro-Americans are like those having their own life and roots. Wilson's aim was to grant African Americans acknowledgment of these differences and understand their history. As part of his mission, Wilson attempts to point out "the real struggle since an African first set foot on the continent" (Brayer, 2006: 69). His background helped him to build his beliefs, aesthetics, and literary career to represent the identity of the Afro-Americans society. Thus, he tried to adapt the technique to his playwriting as far as structure and composition are concerned in his efforts to construct his drama. For this, he gives meaning to his existence, striving with his arts to create his style in relation to his experience and his understanding of a place with simple recycled material. He seeks to make a personal appearance in his dramas. From these influences, Wilson listened to the words and saw the pictures and statues in his environment,

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which he makes use of and depicts in his dramatic art. He speaks and describes the kind of life he himself has experienced as his characters emerge as symbols of particular dramatic representations.

In Wilson's plays, Wilson used his ability to create an accurate image of black people's struggles every time to illustrate how the white community treated them. Thus, in most of his plays, he uses themes like oppression, slavery, identity, culture, and racism to create different images, and he tries to portray the struggle of black people and the way they were treated and denied the same rights as white people. Wilson skillfully describes how white society treats black society as a second class. According to Harry Justin Elam (2004), August Wilson "sees his own roots within the Black Power movement of the 1960s and identifies himself with black cultural nationalism of that time and the processes of the black revolutionary theatre" (Elam, 2004: 26).

Wilson himself depicted what he observed and experienced in his plays:

"I wanted to place this culture on stage in all its richness and fullness and to demonstrate its ability to sustain us in all areas of human life and endeavor and through profound moments of our history in which the larger society has thought less of us than we have thought of ourselves" (Wilson, 2006: VIII).

August Wilson has stated that his goal in writing is to explore the Afro-American condition as part of the general human condition, and it appears that he has reached that goal since his work has also had a social impact because he "adopted Baraka's revolutionary style" (Page, 2011:473).

Wilson's plays clearly demonstrate the tensions between blacks who want to hold onto their African heritage and those who want to break away from it. Because of being pulled in different directions, violence often breaks out among blacks in Wilson's plays. Wilson devoted his career to dramatizing these tensions within the black community while at the same time upholding the dignity of the individuals as they struggled with their past. His characters are ordinary people whose histories, frustrations, and aspirations are astutely portrayed. He brought out the angry, bitter stories of the poor and marginalized Africans in a fashion that was accepted by the mainstream. His plays were quickly embraced by the theatrical mainstream, particularly the white mainstream, which caused him no little distress and initiated a series of conflicts in which he insisted on the support and development of a black theatre.

## 2. The Theater of August Wilson

"I ain't never found no place for me to fit. Seem like all I do is start over. It ain't nothing to find no starting place in the world. You just start from where you find yourself." (Branch, 1993:349)

August Wilson was an exceptional dramatist of the twentieth century. He has highlighted in his plays the struggle of black Africans in terms of their culture, identity, and legacy. He is regarded as the closest playwright to the problems of the black community, who obviously describes the troubles, dilemmas, and tragedies of not only blacks but all human beings. He brings new themes to the popular American stage that are closely related to the lives of the poor who bravely endure poverty in an injustice-ridden world. In his works, Wilson portrays the sad image of his people, relying on his talented mind and the style adopted in order to express his points of view and philosophy of life. All of his plays have been successful because of his artful description and influence-social, as well as cultural and dramatic. He attempted to change the face of American theater, and the emergence of black writers enabled them to spread their ideas and theatrical works. (Elam, 2006: 89).

Subsequently, Wilson recreates and revalues the choices given to blacks in the past by reflecting them through the lens of the present. In modern theaters, he decides to keep revealing his message throughout his work for as long as he lives. In Wilson's theater, it is very clear to sense his "history cycle reveals an African-American continuum that is always in process, stretching back into Africa" (Menson-Furr, 2013:48).

In his theater, Wilson tried to see the concept of protest through the eyes of his characters. For instance, the characters see bigotry everywhere. The ideas of disappointment and change are clear up front in the text. Wilson passes on a message according to which blacks should reject this sort of prejudice and imbalance. However, some of them may not have the chance to change their circumstances because slaves are being misused and mishandled. Wilson attempts to use the protest voice to encourage black people to have will and power in order to live their lives as human beings. Wilson also focuses on issues related to injustice as "he presents spirituality as something to be denounced because it allows social injustice to endure" (Roman, 2013:4). Also, Harold Bloom states, "the socioeconomic system in America has from the outset weighed on the shoulders of its black citizens, holding them down" (Bloom, 2009:97). In Wilson's plays, he attempts to raise an issue related to self-determination and retaliation for African Americans in the twentieth century as a kind of confirmation of the contrast between different cultures. According to Harris, "Cultural nationalism meant black people working toward self-definition, self-determination; it meant that we had a culture that was valid and that we weren't willing to trade it to participate in the American Dream" (Harris, 1998: 145).

### **3. The Piano Lesson: The Representation of the African Legacy**

The main idea of August Wilson's play, "The Piano Lesson," is the struggle of an African-American family, characterized by Berniece and Boy Willie, to face their past and embrace the future. We see a vivid traditional emphasis on cultural identity and racism from white people toward black people in all black dramas, whether it is a novel, a play, or a film. The writer has an authentic black culture, and he uses and expresses black sensibility. This concentration could be seen in many of Wilson's works, particularly in the play "The Piano Lesson". He uses the personal experiences of normal people who are living their ordinary lives to present the aspects of African American culture. He says, "those who were continuing to live their lives rather than, according to him, what you could get from the history book" (McMahan, 2002:38).

Wilson explained that blacks are the most capable of narrating, writing, and staging their own experiences and cultural identity. He seems to be concerned with the black population's existence in America, so he involves himself in the struggle and survival of the Charles family (Bissiri, 1996: 167). He seeks to recognize his sense of identity as that of the African American identity, as well as accept the fact that there should be a link between the acknowledgments of Africans and Americans. Therein, in "The Piano Lesson", one can observe his total denial that slavery may exterminate any part of the African culture since he also says, "from the first African captives, through the Years of slavery, and into the present century, black Americans kept alive important strands of consciousness and verbal art in their humor, songs, dance, speech, tales, folk beliefs and aphorisms" (Levine, 2007: 444).

Afro-Americans have been separated from their land for a long time, causing them to struggle in their lives; however, this does not cause them to forget their history, and there is still African responsiveness among African-Americans. He intentionally tries to "merge their responsiveness and all else that stalks from African Culture" (Al-ghanimi, 2012: 173). In addition, Wilson uses his play to explain the complex concept of the past. At the time, Africans believed that black Americans would one day have a sense of identity and respect and that the rest of the world would recognize who they were. In the past, Americans were united with each other to protect themselves and their existence, yet this idealism has diminished over time. In this respect, Wilson states:

"When we left [the South], we left people back. There... [the] connection is broken, that sense of standing in your father's shoes ...what I'm trying to do with my plays [is to] make the Connection. Because I think it's vital. Having shared a common past, we have a common Past and a common future." (Biggsby, 2000: 303)

Wilson shows that the connection between Africans broke up when they migrated from the south to the north through the character of Boy Willie, who comes from the south to the north to avoid the founding of Negro slavery in the South (Al-ghanimi, 2012: 174). Additionally, the diminishing of these values and a true sense of Africans is also visible through the conflict over selling or keeping the piano between Boy Willie and his sister Berniece due to evoking the present and the future. So Boy Willie wants to achieve his father's dream of buying this land from Sutter, so he thinks of this as having symbolic significance, especially since his father would want him to buy that land from his white owner (Al-ghanimi, 2012: 174). "Boy Willie: Sutter's brother selling the land. He says, "[sic] he gonna sell it to me. That is why I come up here. I got one part of it" (Wilson, 1990:9). The piano represents the Charles family, their legacy, and the history of their slavery since it has pictures and pictures of events that happened with them. Many Charles families consider the piano as the soul of their families, especially when Robert Sutter, the former white master, sold a few members of Charles' family to buy this piano (Al-ghanimi, 2012: 175). Therefore, then Boy Willie died, and then they started stealing the piano in an attempt to preserve the history of his family. Their legacy causes the problems lies in "the problematic role of inheritance in African American history and culture" (Allred,2010:142) because "[Negroes are unable] to distinguish between mine and thin.... How to distinguish, when for two hundred years' mine. Did not even exist for them?" (Bassett, 2013:325).

White people consider black people unable to own anything. They believe that being a hiver is inherently a white thing, while blacks are just people owned by whites. Berniece and Boy Willie, on the other hand, believe the piano is theirs and represents their ancestors' inheritance, even though they have different plans for it (Bissiri, 1996: 168). So, Boy Willie considers that he owns half of the piano, and therefore he wants to sell it in order to buy the land where his ancestors worked as slaves and fag to death back in the south.

Boy Willie knows that his father dreamed of buying this land from Sutter as this land represented his culture and history of black society. He has other personal economic goals, so he prefers to sell the piano and benefit from its worldly value to "see how it is polished? My mama used to polish it every day. See all them Pictures carved on it? That's what I was talking about. You can get a nice Price for that piano" (Hussein, 2012:81). Boy Willie is an unemployed man who just sells watermelon, and this job is hard enough to support him. It is impossible for him to support a family himself. Boy Willie considers himself to be the bearer of the "torch of redemption for his fathers." No one seems to require psychological reconstruction through material means more than Boy Willie" (Boan, 1998: 265). He also tries to make his father's dream come true by buying this land, and he will not continue working on others' land like his father, as he states, "If my daddy had seen where he could have traded that piano in for some land

of his own, it wouldn't be sitting here now. He spent his whole life farming on somebody Else's land. I ain't gonna do that" (Wilson, 1990: 46).

Therefore, Willie is using the piano, the legacy of his father, to build his future. On the other hand, Berniece's viewpoint is very different from her brother's. Berniece is doing everything to protect and preserve this piano since she sees it as a symbol of her ancestors' cultural identity. She played on the piano for her mother, who heard her husband's voice in her daughter's music, but she vowed never to touch it again afterward, thinking this would keep her ancestor's spirits at peace. Berniece sees the ebony and ivory keys of the piano as a representation of black and white people (Al-ghanimi, 2012: 176). She wants to protect the piano from her brother's Boy Willie and the Sutter's ghost, the white owner, in order to keep history out of the hands of men. These events relate Charles (the wife and her son) to Sutter's wife. Since Sutter sold the two slaves, Miss Ophelia has started to miss them. So Sutter commissions his granddaddy, Willie Boy, to carve the faces of two slaves with their history on the legs of the piano, which the two slaves have been sold (Al-ghanimi, 2012: 177). According to Doaker, "when Miss Ophelia saw it...She got Excited. Now she had her piano and her Niggers too. She took back to playing it and played on it right up until the day she died" (Wilson, 1990: 44). As a result, Berniece refused to sell the piano, believing it to have spiritual significance and to be a valuable record of her ancestor's history as "money can't buy that piano cost. You can't sell your soul for money" (Wilson 1990: 50).

However, Boy Willie deals with the piano in another way. He thinks if he sells the piano, he will achieve his identity and be the owner of that land in the south. Both Berniece and Boy Willie have deep emotions toward the piano as a legacy from their father, and they want to use it to immortalize their father's memory. As a result, Berniece wants to keep it as a souvenir of her father's death, while Boy Willie has a plan to sell it and buy the Sutter's land (Al-ghanimi, 2012: 177). Therefore, he believed, according to his idea, that he could immortalize his father.

Avery is a black man who loves Berniece, and he has a dream to gain financial security in the north. Avery has big ambitions to live in the north, like constructing a church, compiling a congregation, and leading them, as well as marrying his beloved Berniece. To his neighbors, he appears to be looking for financial support rather than spiritual accomplishments. Boy thinks that "Ain't nothing wrong with being a Preacher, you got the preacher on the one hand and the gambler on the other. Sometimes there ain't too much difference in them" (Wilson, 1990:30). Wining Boy, Boy Willie's uncle, has a once dreamed of being a professional musician, and so he earlier left the south to achieve his dream and look for his pleasure in the north, but he could not achieve his goal. It must be a prominent lesson for Lymon that Wining Boy came with a goal to the north, which he failed to attain and lost his black identity. Actually, Wining Boy becomes a drunkard at fifty-six after realizing that he cannot achieve his dream or find happiness here in the north, so he becomes a disappointed man, spending his time in bars and gambling joints because his wife, Cleotha, threw him out. Wilson notes that he seems restless, and "he is a man who is looking back over his life and continues to live it with an odd mixture of zest and sorrow" (Wilson, 1990:28).

Consequently, Wining Boy did not take intelligence and memory in the north as he had never forgotten the attitudes of whites towards blacks in the Deep South. Then the four black characters, Boy Willie, Lymon, Wining Boy, and Avery, represent different approaches that black men, in general, had adopted to manage some kind of acceptable life in the north. Lymon comes to the north to enjoy a good life instead of suffering from the hard labor in the south. The miserable Wining Boy comes to the north, hoping to achieve his dream of being a famous musician and escape the hardships of the south. Because of his luck, he became an alcoholic and a gambler, a gambler wandering the streets with no goal. For this, Boy Willie wants to invest the family legacy in the north, such as selling the piano to buy Sutter's land in the north.

Doaker was employed as a permanent railroad chef, which was the best-paying available job as well as the most reliable for black men in the 1930s. He is a member of the Pullman porters, who are an honorable group of black men. They worked on railroads and serviced much of that period. Many African-Americans think that:

"The Pullman Company as a way up and a way out of poverty. Many men say it was the only game in town, and it was a relatively prestigious game. As one porter remembers it, it was a good job for a black man." (Santino, 1991:7)

Doaker does not own his home because he has a transient nature, so he stays with his girlfriend, Berniece. Additionally, he plays the role of a judge between the brother and sister, Berniece and Boy Willie. In contrast to Wining Boy, his brother, Doaker, is satisfied with the way he has led his life, and he is always trying to make Boy Willie aware that everything in that time becomes racialized, even land sales. Boy Willie believes that defining himself in terms of white standards of privilege will give him some advantages while living in a society that devalues black musicality. Doaker believes "that land [Sutter's land] ain't worth nothing no more. The smart white man's up here in these cities. He cut the land loose and step back and watch you and the dumb white man argue over it" (Barton and McGregor, 2014:444).

Whereas Boy Willie justifies that his father would understand this kind of masculinity assurance, which can only be gained by selling the piano and buying Sutter's land, "Now, the kind of man my daddy was, he would have understood that" (Wilson, 1990: 51). Through the whole play, Doaker finds himself in the middle of the fight between Boy Willie and Berniece (Al-ghanimi, 2012: 180). This conflict has two main reasons: the first is a struggle over the piano to sell or keep, and the second is due to Berniece's accusations to her brother, through blaming and accusing him, that he is the reason behind her husband's death, Crawley. But Berniece refuses to accept that her husband was also guilty, despite the fact that Doaker and Boy Willie tried to convince her that her husband was assisting Boy Willie in stealing wood, but he was gunned down by the sheriff in Mississippi while Willie and Lymon escaped (Triestino, 2013: 88). Whenever she thinks of her stand, a painful loss for her husband, she remembers her mother's loss of her husband, papa Boy Charles, over the piano. Eventually, Berniece decides to migrate to the north to avoid more losses.

Hazel Carby explains how African American women live in a state of fragmentation and being left-handed and how such events become, by time and repetition, very associated with the experience of the black migration. In this respect, Elam states:

"Migration for women often meant being left behind: "Bye Bye Baby "and "Sorry I can't take you" were common refrains of male blues. In women's blues, the response is complex: regret and pain expressed as "My sweet man did go and left me dead, "or "My daddy left me standing in the door, "or " The sound of the train fills my heart with misery." (Elam,2009:103)

different blues singers and black women who lamented being left. Carby identifies that Berniece will not express the sadness of her loss, just as after the death of her mother, she refuses to play the family's piano anymore. Additionally, she reproves her brother and the men of her relatives:

"I look at you and you all the same. You, papa Charles. Wining Boy. Doaker, Crawley....you are all alike, and what does it lead to? More killing and more thieving. I ain't never seen it come to nothing. People are getting burned up. People are getting shot. People are falling down their wells. It doesn't ever stop." (Wilson, 1990:52)

Furthermore, Berniece feels sorry that her mother lived sad for seventeen years, enduring the loss of her husband for "A piece of wood" (Wilson, 1990:52). It is essential to understand that both political contestation and cultural formation are the main reasons behind racial differentiation. Thus, the Charles family and the history of the piano are inextricably linked to each other's, as Doaker Charles reveals, depending on his being the storyteller of the family's radicalized history. In his monologue, Doaker narrates events in the history of the piano and reveals how the original slave owner of Willie Boy, Robert Sutter, sought to buy the piano from Mr. Nolander and give him one and one-half slaves:

"Only thing with him [Robert Sutter]....he ain't had no money. However, he had some niggers. So he asked Mr. Nolander to see if maybe he could trade off some of his niggers for the piano. Told him he would give him one and one half niggers for it." (Wilson, 1990: 42)

Berniece, Charles, and her brother, who were traded for the piano, are the great-grandmother and grandfather of Boy Willie and Berniece. So, according to Doaker's story, this argument separated the members of the Charles family and sent the wife and her son away from their father; thus, they became Mr. Nolander's property, and Willie Boy stayed in Sutter's ownership. Sutter used offensive language; "one and one half niggers for a piano, and his sentence covers simultaneity of disparate items in a grammatical series" (Spillers. 2003: 226). Hence, the language is used when referring to slaves places those human beings in the same "grammatical series as the inanimate objects. As Doaker retells, Now she [Miss Ophelia] had her piano and her niggers too" (Wilson, 1990:45). Mrs. Sutter asked Willie Boy to carve his wife and son's faces on the piano for Miss Ophelia, and she was satisfied with replacing her real slaves with the wooden images. So, so according to Saidiya Hartman, for a description of the desire that Miss Ophelia received from the imprinted portraits on the piano. Saidiya V. Hartman describes how the blacks are:

"Envisioned fundamentally as vehicles for white enjoyment ...forced to dance on the decks of slave ships crossing the middle passage, [to] step it up lively on the auction block and [to] amuse the master and his friends were seen [ by white] as the purveyors of pleasure." (Hartman 1997:23).

Boy Willie carves the faces of Miss Ophelia and her slaves on the legs of the piano to represent their personal history and to display the features of agony, fight, and grief of the Charles family. However, Miss Ophelia did not see anything but happiness in these facts. Decisively, Wilson portrays the legs of the piano and how they are "carved in the manner of African sculpture" with the "mask-like figures resembling totems" (Wilson, 1990: 44). Through their artistic craftsmanship, they connect all the members of their family in a solid piece of ebony. Similarly, Willie Boy carves his family's faces and history on the piano and transforms it into a family album. Then, this artistic process is used to redefine his family's relationship to the piano, as well as condemn the ownership

and property of slavery. Through this act, after all these carvings, the piano and its music belong to the Charles family since the act of carving can be called and used as a "stealing away" according to Saidiya V. Hartman "Stealing away involved unlicensed movement, collective assembly and an abrogation of the terms of subjection in acts as simple as sneaking off to laugh and talk with friends or making nocturnal visits to loved ones" (Hartman, 1997:67).

This carving and stealing of the piano may be a small achievement, but it is still considered an act of resistance to slavery and white power and proclaims disobedience to the chief and the whole system. So to prevent black people of their rights and look at them as property "through stealing away, denied the sanctity or legitimacy of property rights in a double gesture that played on the meaning of theft" (Hartman, 1997:69). Hence, Willie Boy has stolen away the piano by carving on it as well as asserting his subjectivity. Boy Willie did not make this "theft" (Wilson, 1990:45) intentionally, but it actually paved the way for the Charles family to really steal the piano after some years, as Doaker mentioned while narrating the story.

Doaker explains how the Sutter's possession of the piano by Charles' family. Wilson intended to capture some traditional African history in his plays, as he tells us about the piano as historical details. Thus, African history is implied in many historical settings and details of the play, especially when narrating the oral history of the piano by Doaker, who is telling the story through his revelation of the Charles family's struggle with Sutter over the ownership of the piano. His revelation can be considered an authentic historical record of slavery by whites with multiple meanings and symbols. Doaker is one of the members of the "men of memory" who facilitates his oral histories since "the communal oral historians of the Luba, known as the men of memory, sculpture concave boards (Lukasa) implanted with a design of cowries and beads to help them accurately retain the lineage history and to recall major historical events" (Nadel, 1993:107).

Doaker mentioned the black community, including his family members (Wining Boy and Boy Willie), in his participation in delivering this oral history:

"Sutter called him [Willie Boy] up the house and told him to carve my grandmother and my daddy's picture on the piano for Miss Ophelia. And he took and carved this...See that right there? That's my grandmother, Berniece. She looked just like that. And he put a picture of my daddy when he wasn't nothing but a little boy the way he remembered him. He made them up out of his memory. The only thing...he didn't stop there. He carved all this. He got a picture of his mama...Mama Esther...And his daddy, Boy Charles." (Wilson, 1990:44)

Charles' family, as a collective family record, considers the narrative of the piano, and they have to tell it to the subsequent generations. Therefore, Boy Willie also does the same by telling his sister's daughter, Martha, the story of the piano and blaming his sister for not doing it before as he states:

"You ain't even told her [Maretha] about that piano like that's something to ashamed of. Like she was supposed to go off and hide somewhere about that piano. You ought to mark down on the calendar the day that papa Boy Charles brought that piano into the house. You ought to mark that day down and draw a circle around it...and every year when it comes up, throw a party. Have a celebration. If you did that, she would have no problem in life. She could walk around with her head held high." (Wilson, 1990:91)

Although Boy Willie wants to sell the piano and take the money to buy the land from the whites, his sister prevents him from doing so since it is considered a historical symbol for the black community. Though Papa Boy Charles could not forget the piano or submit to Sutter the painful legacy of slavery, he did not. He is willing to face death in order to get the piano. He transformed this piece of wood into something more precious and important than anything in his life. He tried many attempts to steal the piano because he thought the piano represented death if he had not gotten it. In addition, Berniece regards "The piano as the soul of the family; it symbolizes the pride and struggle of the survival of the family" (Conyers, 2007:16).

In addition, Boy Charles thought through the liberator action that the piano remained as a representation of the papa Boy Charles family's power, struggles, and survival. As a result, Wilson confirms African culture and their architect as myths through his piano playing and his awareness that:

"Myth is certainly a part of it. Mythology, history, and social organizations-all of these kinds of things-economics-are all part of the culture... I purposefully go through and make sure each element of that is in some way represented-some more so than others in the plays, which I think gives them a fullness and a completeness-that is an entire world." (Shannon, 2003:71)

Moreover, we can link this piano with their ancestors to maintain their spiritual existence. Therefore, the piano lesson is considered a duty ritual, which was done by Berniece's mother, Mama Ola. As Berniece reveals:



"It didn't look like nothing was going right in my life. I said everything couldn't go wrong all the time... let me go down there and call on the Ghosts of the Yellow Dog, see if they can help me. I went there and right there where two railroads cross each other... I stood right there on that spot and called out their names. They talk back to you, too... I walked away from them, feeling like a king. Went on and had a stroke of luck that run on for three years." (Wilson, 1990:34-35)

Berniece did not believe in them until the end of the play. Since she compares her disputes with the belief in the Ghosts of the Yellow Dog in the beginning, "I don't care who preached what. Somebody down there pushing people in their wells" (Wilson, 1990:69). However, she ratifies in the Holy Ghost and observes that Sutter's ghost requests many times for Avery to remove it. She admits to Avery that "I used to think their pictures [on the piano] came alive and walked through the house" (Wilson, 1990:70).

Therefore, Berniece decided to stop playing the piano to avoid weakening these spirits. However, at the end of the play, she plays the piano again; thus, she tries to connect herself with the past. In her song, she calls on her ancestors to come and help her as it is an admission of the importance of her ancestral spirits and of her power. The spirits come to recuse the brother and sister, and they reunite them. Eventually, Boy Willie changes his intentions and maintains the songs of the family alive "Hey Berniece ... if you and Maretha don't keep playing on that piano...ain't no telling...me and Sutter both liable to be back" (Wilson, 1990:108).

#### 4. Conclusion

Heritage represents the living memory of the individual and society besides identity by which people recognize one another's culture. Wilson, in *The Piano Lesson*, tries to demonstrate and defend the values and culture in conflict with the white culture, as well as to demonstrate that Afro-Americans have their own culture and can produce the finest literary writings to enrich American literature. Afro-American people are seen as second-class by whites even if they adopt American culture and heritage to eliminate the negative ideology that has been nested in the minds of whites. Thus, Wilson uses the piano as a symbol of African heritage and cultural mother to direct the attention of the black people to their heritage. The piano creates a conflict among the family members; one wants to sell it to buy a piece of land to be land owners, and the other wants to keep saving it since it is a symbol of their heritage. Wilson, in *The Piano Lesson*, highlights the importance of heritage which represents identity and culture for past, present, and future in the musical tool, the piano. For further research, I suggest investigating which one is better for protecting and surviving one's culture; keeping the piano or purchasing a piece of land to be landowners.

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