

**Twentieth Century American Drama**  
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**Lecture - 56**  
**August Wilson's The Piano Lesson Part 8**

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(BERNIECE hits BOY WILLIE.)  
I said he ain't here. Is he?  
(BERNIECE continues to hit BOY WILLIE, who doesn't move to defend himself, other than back up and turning his head so that most of the blows fall on his chest and arms.)  
DOAKER: (Grabbing BERNIECE.) Come on, Berniece . . . let it go, it ain't his fault.  
BERNIECE: He ain't here, is he? Is he?  
BOY WILLIE: I told you I ain't responsible for Crawley.  
BERNIECE: He ain't here.  
BOY WILLIE: Come on now, Berniece . . . don't do this now. Doaker get her. I ain't had nothing to do with Crawley . . .  
BERNIECE: You come up there and got him!  
BOY WILLIE: I done told you now. Doaker, get her. I ain't playing.  
DOAKER: Come on, Berniece.  
(MARETHA is heard screaming upstairs. It is a scream of stark terror.)  
MARETHA: Mama! . . . Mama!  
(The lights go down to black. End of Act One.)

(The lights come up on the kitchen. It is the following morning. DOAKER is ironing the pants to his uniform. He has a pot cooking on the stove at the same time. He is singing a song. The song provides him with the rhythm for his work and he moves about the kitchen with the ease born of many years as a railroad cook)

DOAKER:  
Gonna leave Jackson Mississippi  
and go to Memphis  
and double back to Jackson  
Come on down to Hattiesburg  
Change cars on the Y.D.  
coming through the territory to  
Meridian  
and Meridian to Greenville  
and Greenville to Memphis  
I'm on my way and I know where  
Change cars on the Katy  
Leaving Jackson  
and going through Clarksdale  
Hello Winona!  
A song about the railroad



We are continuing to look at August Wilson's play *The Piano Lesson*. We are looking at Act 2, scene 1 where Doaker begins with his characteristic song, which is also a song about the railroad. As mentioned before music plays a very intricate part in this play. It is a symbolic presence, it is something very which is very integral to the history of the African American community as well.

We do understand earlier on the play itself that Doaker used to work as with the railroads. That is something which has changed his persona forever. He keeps referring to these in a very interesting ways and integrating it into the way he lives his life as well.

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Courtland!  
Bateville!  
Como!  
Sentobia!  
Lewisberg!  
Sunflower!  
Glendora!  
Sharkey!  
And double back to Jackson  
Hello Greenwood  
I'm on my way Memphis  
Clarksdale  
Moorhead  
Indianola  
Can a highball pass through?  
Highball on through sir  
Grand Carson!  
Thirty First Street Depot  
Fourth Street Depot  
Memphis!

(WINING BOY enters carrying a suit of clothes.)  
DOAKER: I thought you took that suit to the pawnshop?  
WINING BOY: I went down there and the man tell me the

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DOAKER: Berniece still at work. Boy Willie went down there to meet Lymon this morning. I guess they got that truck fixed, they been out there all day and ain't come back yet. Maretha scared to sleep up there now. Berniece don't know, but I seen Sutter before she did.  
WINING BOY: Say what?  
DOAKER: About three weeks ago. I had just come back from down there. Sutter couldn't have been dead more than three days. He was sitting over there at the piano. I come out to go to work . . . and he was sitting right there. Had his hand on top of his head just like Berniece said. I believe he broke his neck when he fell in the well. I kept quiet about it. I didn't see no reason to upset Berniece.  
WINING BOY: Did he say anything? Did he say he was looking for Boy Willie?  
DOAKER: He was just sitting there. He ain't said nothing. I went on out the door and left him sitting there. I figure as long as he was on the other side of the room everything be alright. I don't know what I would have done if he had started walking toward me.  
WINING BOY: Berniece say he was calling Boy Willie's name.




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Indianola  
Can a highball pass through?  
Highball on through sir  
Grand Carson!  
Thirty First Street Depot  
Fourth Street Depot  
Memphis!

(WINING BOY enters carrying a suit of clothes.)  
DOAKER: I thought you took that suit to the pawnshop?  
WINING BOY: I went down there and the man tell me the suit is too old. Look at this suit. This is one hundred percent silk! How a silk suit gonna get too old? I know what it was he just didn't want to give me five dollars for it. Best he wanna give me is three dollars. I figure a silk suit is worth five dollars all over the world. I wasn't gonna part with it for no three dollars so I brought it back.  
DOAKER: They got another pawnshop up on Wylie.  
WINING BOY: I carried it up there. He say he don't take no clothes. Only thing he take is guns and radios. Maybe a guitar or two. Where's Berniece?

I kept quiet about it. I didn't see no reason to upset Berniece.  
WINING BOY: Did he say anything? Did he say he was looking for Boy Willie?  
DOAKER: He was just sitting there. He ain't said nothing. I went on out the door and left him sitting there. I figure as long as he was on the other side of the room everything be alright. I don't know what I would have done if he had started walking toward me.  
WINING BOY: Berniece say he was calling Boy Willie's name.  
DOAKER: I ain't heard him say nothing. He was just sitting there when I seen him. But I don't believe Boy Willie pushed him in the well. Sutter here cause of that piano. I heard him playing on it one time. I thought it was Berniece but then she don't play that kind of music. I come out here and ain't seen nobody, but them piano keys was moving a mile a minute. Berniece need to go on and get rid of it. It ain't done nothing but cause trouble.  
WINING BOY: I agree with Berniece. Boy Charles ain't took it to give it back. He took it cause he figure he had more right to it than Sutter did. If Sutter can't understand that



This scene begins with the men and the family coming together to discuss. And, we also find one of those rare moments, where they all warm up to each other. They are also confiding in each other and telling things that, we would not dare to talk about discuss when Berniece is around.

This male bonding which comes across is one of the key features in this play is also seen as something, which gets subverted, with the intervention of Berniece. Berniece single handedly changes the course of action in this play. And the way in which the men come


together to discuss things and how that gets splintered at the end further accentuates the power that Berniece has as an individual as a woman in this in splintering this consensus so to speak.

Doaker is also now admitting that. He too saw Sutter's ghost, which was initially seen only as a figment of Berniece's imagination. "About three weeks ago, I had just come back from down there. Sutter could not have been dead more than three days. He was sitting over there at the piano. I came out to go to work, he was sitting right there. He had his hand on top of his head just like Berniece said, I believe his he broke his neck when he fell in the well. I kept quiet about it. I did not see no reason to upset Berniece."

"Doaker further says Sutter is here because of that piano, I heard him playing on it one time. And Berniece need to go on and get rid of it." Now, Doaker also seems to be on boy Willie's side though for a different reason all together to get rid of Sutter's ghost. I agree with Berniece. Boy Charles is not took it to give it back.

He took it because he figure, he had more right to it than Sutter did. So, we find a further divided opinion over here, between Doaker and Wining boy to. Who also thinks that? Doaker is also trying to be protective about Berniece because, he is the one who is there all the time with Berniece and daughter Maretha. And a wining boy wants to agree with Berniece because, he also feels that the sacrifice of boy Charles and the other black men will be worthless, if they give up the piano.

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... then that's just the way that go. Sutter dead and in the ground ... don't care where his ghost is. He can hover around and play on the piano all he want. I want to see him carry it out the house. That's what I want to see. What time Berniece get home? I don't see how I let her get away from me this morning.

DOAKER: You up there sleep. Berniece leave out of here early in the morning. She out there in Squirrel Hill cleaning house for some bigshot down there at the steel mill. They don't like you to come late. You come late they won't give you your carfare. What kind of business you got with Berniece?

WINING BOY: My business. I ain't asked you what kind of business you got.

DOAKER: Berniece ain't got no money. If that's why you was trying to catch her. She having a hard enough time trying to get by as it is. If she go ahead and marry Avery ... he working every day ... she go ahead and marry him they could do alright for themselves. But as it stands she ain't got no money.

WINING BOY: Well, let me have five dollars.

DOAKER: I just give you a dollar before you left out of here.

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WINING BOY: That's why I need the five dollars. If I had five dollars I could get me some money.  
(DOAKER goes into his pocket.)  
Make it seven.

DOAKER: You take this five dollars ... and you bring my money back here too.  
(BOY WILLIE and LYMON enter. They are happy and excited. They have money in all of their pockets and are anxious to count it.)

DOAKER: How'd you do out there?


BOY WILLIE: They was lining up for them.

LYMON: Me and Boy Willie couldn't sell them fast enough. Time we got one sold we'd sell another.

BOY WILLIE: I seen what was happening and told Lymon to up the price on them.

LYMON: Boy Willie say charge them a quarter more. They didn't care. A couple of people give me a dollar and told me to keep the change.

BOY WILLIE: One fellow bought five. I say now what he gonna do with five watermelons? He can't eat them all. I sold him the five and asked him did he want to buy more.



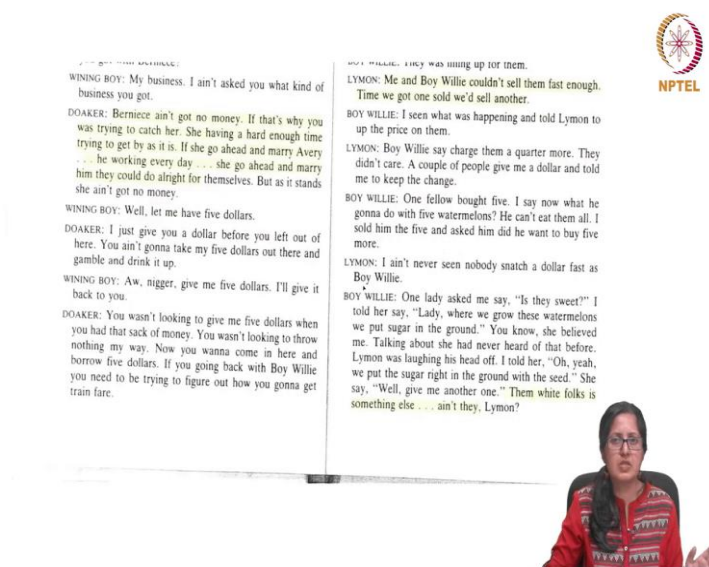
If Sutter can understand that, then that is just the way that go. Sutter dead and in the ground do not care where his ghost is his attitude is quite similar to that of boy Willie. And they are the ones who are wandering as well. They are the ones who are wandering about in a sense that nothing seems to affect them beyond the point.

Berniece have not got no money, if that is why we were trying to catch her. She was having a hard enough time trying to get by as it is. If she go ahead and marry Avery. He working every day she go ahead and marry him, they could do alright for themselves. So, we through these snippets of conversation, we also get to know the kind of life that Berniece is leading.

A very hard working woman, which is why even at the outset when Willie boy and Boy Willie and Lymon, when they show up at the door at the crack of dawn Doaker is also warning them that Berniece is still in bed and she has a routine and she needs to get up and leave for work .

So, here she is also presented as a woman, who is trying to sort things for the family, who is trying to keep things secure for the future, who cares about her daughter who wants to protect her from all the terrible things which had happened to their family in the past.

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WINING BOY: My business. I ain't asked you what kind of business you got.

DOAKER: Berniece ain't got no money. If that's why you was trying to catch her. She having a hard enough time trying to get by as it is. If she go ahead and marry Avery . . . he working every day . . . she go ahead and marry him they could do alright for themselves. But as it stands she ain't got no money.

WINING BOY: Well, let me have five dollars.

DOAKER: I just give you a dollar before you left out of here. You ain't gonna take my five dollars out there and gamble and drink it up.

WINING BOY: Aw, nigger, give me five dollars. I'll give it back to you.

DOAKER: You wasn't looking to give me five dollars when you had that sack of money. You wasn't looking to throw nothing my way. Now you wanna come in here and borrow five dollars. If you going back with Boy Willie you need to be trying to figure out how you gonna get train fare.

LYMON: Me and Boy Willie couldn't sell them fast enough. Time we got one sold we'd sell another.



BOY WILLIE: I seen what was happening and told Lymon to up the price on them.

LYMON: Boy Willie say charge them a quarter more. They didn't care. A couple of people give me a dollar and told me to keep the change.

BOY WILLIE: One fellow bought five. I say now what he gonna do with five watermelons? He can't eat them all. I sold him the five and asked him did he want to buy five more.

LYMON: I ain't never seen nobody snatch a dollar fast as Boy Willie.

BOY WILLIE: One lady asked me say, "Is they sweet?" I told her say, "Lady, where we grow these watermelons we put sugar in the ground." You know, she believed me. Talking about she had never heard of that before. Lymon was laughing his head off. I told her, "Oh, yeah, we put the sugar right in the ground with the seed." She say, "Well, give me another one." Them white folks is something else . . . ain't they, Lymon?



There is also some stress about the watermelons because, they could not sell it and they also joke about the white folks and how they could sell the watermelons to them.

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LYMON: About that much. Maybe a little more.  
 BOY WILLIE: You think that piano will fit up in there?  
 LYMON: If we stack them watermelons you can sit it up in the front there.  
 BOY WILLIE: I'm gonna call that man tomorrow.  
 WINING BOY: (Returns with his shoes.) Here you go . . . size nine. Put them on. Cost you three dollars. That's a Florsheim shoe. That's the kind Staggerlee wore.  
 LYMON: (Trying on the shoes.) You sure these size nine?  
 WINING BOY: You can look at my feet and see we wear the same size. Man, you put on that suit and them shoes and you got something there. You ready for whatever's out there. But is they ready for you? With them shoes on you be the King of the Walk. Have everybody stop to look at your shoes. Wishing they had a pair. I'll give you a break. Go on and take them for two dollars.  
 (LYMON pays WINING BOY two dollars.)  
 LYMON: Come on, Boy Willie . . . let's go find some women. I'm gonna go upstairs and get ready. I'll be ready to go in a minute. Ain't you gonna get dressed?  
 BOY WILLIE: I'm gonna wear what I got on. I ain't dressing up for these city niggers.  
 (LYMON exits up the stairs.)  
 That's all Lymon think about is women.

THAT'S HOW THE WHOLE THING come about between me and Lymon's mama. She knew me and his daddy used to run together and he got in jail and she went down there and took the sheriff a hundred dollars. Don't get me to lying about where she got it from. I don't know. The sheriff looked at that hundred dollars and turned his nose up. Told her, say, "That ain't gonna do him no good. You got to put another hundred on top of that." She come up there and got me where I was playing at this saloon . . . said she had all but fifty dollars and asked me if I could help. Now the way I figured it . . . without that fifty dollars the sheriff was gonna turn him over to Parchman. The sheriff turn him over to Parchman it be three years before anybody see him again. Now I'm gonna say it right . . . I will give anybody fifty dollars to keep them out of jail for three years. I give her the fifty dollars and she told me to come over to the house. I ain't asked her. I figure if she was nice enough to invite me I ought to go. I ain't had to say a word. She invited me over just as nice. Say, "Why don't you come over to the house?" She ain't had to say nothing else. Them words rolled off her tongue just as nice. I went on down there and sat about three hours. Started to leave and changed my mind. She grabbed hold to me and say, "Baby, it's all night long." That was one of the shortest nights I have ever spent on this earth! I could have used another eight hours. Lymon's daddy didn't even say nothing to me when he got out. He just



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the sidewalk. You can hear it a block away. Boy Willie know where it's at.  
 (DOAKER exits into his room.)  
 LYMON: Let's go to the picture show, Boy Willie. Let's go find some women.  
 BOY WILLIE: Hey, Lymon, how many of them watermelons would you say we got left? We got just under a half a load . . . right?  
 LYMON: About that much. Maybe a little more.  
 BOY WILLIE: You think that piano will fit up in there?  
 LYMON: If we stack them watermelons you can sit it up in the front there.  
 BOY WILLIE: I'm gonna call that man tomorrow.  
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 (LYMON pays WINING BOY two dollars.)  
 LYMON: Come on, Boy Willie . . . let's go find some women. I'm gonna go upstairs and get ready. I'll be ready to go in a minute. Ain't you gonna get dressed?  
 BOY WILLIE: I'm gonna wear what I got on. I ain't dressing up for these city niggers.  
 (LYMON exits up the stairs.)  
 That's all Lymon think about is women.

WINING BOY: His daddy was the same way. I used to run around with him. I know his mama too. Two strokes back and I would have been his daddy! His daddy's dead now . . . but I got the nigger out of jail one time. They was fixing to name him Daniel and walk him through the Lion's Den. He got in a tussle with one of them white fellows and the sheriff fit on him like white on rice. That's how the whole thing come about between me and Lymon's mama. She knew me and his daddy used to run together and he got in jail and she went down there and took the sheriff a hundred dollars. Don't get me to lying about where she got it from. I don't know. The sheriff looked at that hundred dollars and turned his nose up. Told her, say, "That ain't gonna do him no good. You got to put another hundred on top of that." She come up there and got me where I was playing at this saloon . . . said she had all but fifty dollars and asked me if I could help. Now the way I figured it . . . without that fifty dollars the sheriff was gonna turn him over to Parchman. The sheriff turn him over to Parchman it be three years before anybody see him again. Now I'm gonna say it right . . . I will give anybody fifty dollars to keep them out of jail for three years. I give her the fifty dollars and she told me to come over to the house. I ain't asked her. I figure if she was nice enough to invite me I ought to go. I ain't had to say a word. She invited me over just as nice. Say, "Why don't you come over to the house?" She ain't had to say nothing else. Them words rolled off her tongue just as nice. I went on down there and sat about three hours. Started to leave and changed my mind. She grabbed hold to me and say, "Baby, it's all night long." That was one of the shortest nights I have ever spent on this earth! I could have used another eight hours. Lymon's daddy didn't even say nothing to me when he got out. He just



So, this is it is in this context that Boy Willie's obsession with women is also brought up that he is all the time thinking about women and trying to interact with them. Wining boy recalls that his daddy was the same way. I used to run around him. I know his Mama too. Two strokes back and I would have been his daddy.

So, it tells us a lot about the kind of flippancy with which they also have been dealing with relationships. They was fixing to him fixing to name him Daniel and walking through the Lion's Den. He got in a tussle with one of them white fellows and the sheriff lit on him like white on rice.

“That is how the whole thing came about between me and Lymons Mama. “She knew I and his daddy used to run together and he got in jail and she went down there and took the sheriff a hundred dollars.” So, the history that the men in this place share, it is not just a shared history of slavery; it is not just a slave narrative in that sense.

They also went to jail together, they committed crimes together, they got caught together, that is also part of this legacy, part of this history, and part of something which in a conventional sense could never become mainstream could never become respectable.

They all have some connection with the Parchman farm with the prison and we find that also becomes a source of amusement, when they are together. That also becomes something that they nostalgically refer to not just not for the experience, not for the imprisonment, but for the many things that they did or the events which took them and made them land in the prison.

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looked at me funny. He had a good notion something had happened between me an' her. L. D. Jackson. That was one bad-luck migger. Got killed at some dance. Fello walked in and shot him thinking he was somebody else. (DOAKER enters from his room.)  
Hey, Doaker, you remember L. D. Jackson?  
DOAKER: That's Lymon's daddy. That was one bad-luck migger.  
BOY WILLIE: Look like you ready to railroad some.  
DOAKER: Yeah, I got to make that run.  
(LYMON enters from the stairs. He is dressed in his new suit and shoes, to which he has added a cheap straw hat.)  
LYMON: How I look?  
WINING BOY: You look like a million dollars. Don't he look good, Doaker? Come on, let's play some cards. You wanna play some cards?  
BOY WILLIE: We ain't gonna play no cards with you. Me and Lymon gonna find some women. Hey, Lymon, don't play no cards with Wining Boy. He'll take all your money.  
WINING BOY: (To LYMON.) You got a magic suit there. You can get you a woman easy with that suit . . . but you got to know the magic words. You know the magic words to get you a woman?

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DOAKER: That man don't need you to tell him nothing about no women. These women these days ain't gonna fall for that kind of stuff. You got to buy them a present. That's what they looking for these days.  
BOY WILLIE: Come on, I'm ready. You ready, Lymon? Come on, let's go find some women.  
WINING BOY: Here, let me walk out with you. I wanna see the women fall out their window when they see Lymon. (They all exit and the lights go down on the scene.)

SCENE 2

(The lights come up on the kitchen. It is late evening of the same day. BERNIECE has set a tub for her bath in the kitchen. She is heating up water on the stove. There is a knock at the door.)

BERNIECE: Who is it?  
AVERY: It's me, Avery.  
(BERNIECE opens the door and lets him in.)  
BERNIECE: Avery, come on in. I was just fixing to take my bath.



So, this camaraderie is something which is very strange for us to understand. And even Berniece feels terribly left out of it and she in that sense comes across as the only rational figure, who is trying to do things in a safe way. , and the safety that the notion of safety that she has in her mind. And the kind of emotions that she feels about the suffering that her mother underwent that something, which is entirely lost on these men we realized that as well.

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BOY WILLIE: LOOK like you ready to railroad some.  
DOAKER: Yeah, I got to make that run.  
(LYMON enters from the stairs. He is dressed in his new suit and shoes, to which he has added a cheap straw hat.)  
LYMON: How I look?  
WINING BOY: You look like a million dollars. Don't he look good, Doaker? Come on, let's play some cards. You wanna play some cards?  
BOY WILLIE: We ain't gonna play no cards with you. Me and Lymon gonna find some women. Hey, Lymon, don't play no cards with Wining Boy. He'll take all your money.  
WINING BOY: (To LYMON.) You got a magic suit there. You can get you a woman easy with that suit . . . but you got to know the magic words. You know the magic words to get you a woman?  
LYMON: I just talk to them to see if I like them and they like me.  
WINING BOY: You just walk right up to them and say, "If you got the harbor I got the ship." If that don't work ask them if you can put them in your pocket. The first thing they gonna say is, "It's too small." That's when you look them dead in the eye and say, "Baby, ain't nothing small about me." If that don't work then you move on to another one. Am I telling him right, Doaker?

(They all exit and the lights go down on the scene.)

**SCENE 2**

(The lights come up on the kitchen. It is late evening of the same day. BERNIECE has set a tub for her bath in the kitchen. She is heating up water on the stove. There is a knock at the door.)

BERNIECE: Who is it?  
AVERY: It's me, Avery.  
(BERNIECE opens the door and lets him in.)  
BERNIECE: Avery, come on in. I was just fixing to take my bath.  
AVERY: Where Boy Willie? I see that truck out there almost empty. They done sold almost all them watermelons.  
BERNIECE: They was gone when I come home. I don't know where they went off to. Boy Willie around here about to drive me crazy.  
AVERY: They sell them watermelons . . . he'll be gone soon.  
BERNIECE: What Mr. Cohen say about letting you have the place?

So, wining boy is also giving some tips to Lymon about pickup lines about how to pick up women. So, we would not get into those details at the moment, but this is also a way in which August Wilson gets into the minor micro details of everyday life to give a the sense of how life is lived on a an ordinary sense on a daily basis and how these things continue to happen irrespective of the macro things which are happening at a historical level at a familiar level.

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AYER: He say he'll let me have it for thirty dollars a month. I talked him out of thirty-five and he say he'll let me have it for thirty.

BERNIECE: That's a nice spot next to Benny Diamond's store.

AYER: Berniece . . . I be at home and I get to thinking you up here an' I'm down there. I get to thinking how that look to have a preacher that ain't married. It makes for a better congregation if the preacher was settled down and married.

BERNIECE: Avery . . . not now. I was fixing to take my bath.

AYER: You know how I feel about you, Berniece. Now . . . I done got the place from Mr. Cohen. I get the money from the bank and I can fix it up real nice. They give me a ten cents a hour raise down there on the job . . . now Berniece, I ain't got much in the way of comforts. I got a hole in my pockets near about as far as money is concerned. I ain't never found no way through life to a woman I care about like I care about you. I need that. I need somebody on my bond side. I need a woman that fits in my hand.

BERNIECE: Avery, I ain't ready to get married now.

AYER: You too young a woman to close up, Berniece.

BERNIECE: I ain't said nothing about closing up. I got a lot of woman left in me.

BERNIECE: I got enough on my hands with Maretha. I got enough people to love and take care of.

AYER: Who you got to love you? Can't nobody get close enough to you. Doaker can't half say nothing to you. You jump all over Boy Willie. Who you got to love you, Berniece?

BERNIECE: You trying to tell me a woman can't be nothing without a man. But you alright, huh? You can just walk out of here without me—without a woman—and still be a man. That's alright. Ain't nobody gonna ask you, "Avery, who you got to love you?" That's alright for you. But everybody gonna be worried about Berniece. "How Berniece gonna take care of herself? How she gonna raise that child without a man? Wonder what she do with herself. How she gonna live like that?" Everybody got all kinds of questions for Berniece. Everybody telling me I can't be a woman unless I got a man. Well, you tell me, Avery—you know—how much woman am I?

AYER: It wasn't me, Berniece. You can't blame me for nobody else. I'll own up to my own shortcomings. But you can't blame me for Crawley or nobody else.

BERNIECE: I ain't blaming nobody for nothing. I'm just stating the facts.

AYER: How long you gonna carry Crawley with you, Berniece? It's been over three years. At some point you got to let go and go on. Life's got all kinds of twists and turns. That don't mean you stay home. That don't mean



So, in act 2 scene 2, there is also this brief instance where Avery tries to propose to Berniece confessing how he feels about Berniece and he also thinks that I need a woman that fits in my hand and Berniece says, she is not ready to get married. And when Avery and Berniece are having this conversation, we also get to know more about Berniece. And, we realize that Avery also realizes, what is holding her back. That she is still living in the past in so many ways.

So, now, you are trying to tell me a woman cannot be nothing without a man, but you are alright ha. You can just walk out of here without me without a woman and still be a man that is alright. Then is not nobody going to ask you. Gender becomes a very significant component over here, when Berniece over and again points out, how their attitudes are very different because, they will not understand they are not able to understand what women went through in this entire process.


And men also are not able to understand the kind of difficulties that a woman like Berniece had to face during life, during death and it is like the suffering which never comes to an end. Her mother suffered after her father's death. A death which was brought about by the piano. The piano is a constant reminder of seventeen years of suffering and moaning and tears.

And the after her husband's death, who also recklessly went to the woods along with boy Willie and Lymon and he gets a shot. And then it is like a cycle, it is like a historical



cycle repeating itself where, she finds herself moaning and almost replicating the life that Mama Ola lived her mother lived. So, Avery gets to the heart of this issue and asks how long are you going to carry Crawley with you, Berniece? It is been over three years. At some point you got to let go and go on. It is a very practical advice that Avery is giving.

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down and married.

BERNIECE: Avery . . . not now. I was fixing to take my bath.

EVERY: You know how I feel about you, Berniece. Now . . . I done got the place from Mr. Cohen. I get the money from the bank and I can fix it up real nice. They give me a ten cents a hour raise down there on the job . . . now Berniece, I ain't got much in the way of comforts. I got a hole in my pockets near about as far as money is concerned. I ain't never found no way through life to a woman I care about like I care about you. I need that. I need somebody on my bond side. I need a woman that fits in my hand.

BERNIECE: Avery, I ain't ready to get married now.

EVERY: You too young a woman to close up, Berniece.

BERNIECE: I ain't said nothing about closing up. I got a lot of woman left in me.

EVERY: Where's it at? When's the last time you looked at it?

BERNIECE: *(Stunned by his remark.)* That's a nasty thing to say. And you call yourself a preacher.

EVERY: Anytime I get anywhere near you . . . you push me away.


man. That's alright. Ain't nobody gonna ask you, "Avery, who you got to love you?" That's alright for you. But everybody gonna be worried about Berniece. "How Berniece gonna take care of herself? How she gonna raise that child without a man? Wonder what she do with herself. How she gonna live like that?" Everybody got all kinds of questions for Berniece. Everybody telling me I can't be a woman unless I got a man. Well, you tell me, Avery—you know—how much woman am I?

EVERY: It wasn't me, Berniece. You can't blame me for nobody else. I'll own up to my own shortcomings. But you can't blame me for Crawley or nobody else.

BERNIECE: I ain't blaming nobody for nothing. I'm just stating the facts.

EVERY: How long you gonna carry Crawley with you, Berniece? It's been over three years. At some point you got to let go and go on. Life's got all kinds of twists and turns. That don't mean you stop living. That don't mean you cut yourself off from life. You can't go through life carrying Crawley's ghost with you. Crawley's been dead three years. Three years, Berniece.


BERNIECE: I know how long Crawley's been dead. You ain't got to tell me that. I just ain't ready to get married right now.



Life has got all kinds of twists and turns. That do not mean you stop living. That do not mean you cut yourself off from life. You cannot go on through life carrying Crawley's ghost with you. There are many ghost, we realize that the family is carrying particularly Berniece.

The ghost of Mama Ola, the ghost of Crawley, the ghost of all the ancestors and they need to be brought back for a good cause in order to bring the play to a clear coherent resolution. And here Avery is particularly talking about Crawley, but we know that this is true in general about Berniece's attitude towards past.

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BERNIECE: Avery, I told you . . . when you get your church we'll sit down and talk about this. I got too many other things to deal with right now. Boy Willie and the piano . . . and Sutter's ghost. I thought I might have been seeing things, but Maretha done seen Sutter's ghost, too.

AVERY: When this happen, Berniece?

BERNIECE: Right after I came home yesterday. Me and Boy Willie was arguing about the piano and Sutter's ghost was standing at the top of the stairs. Maretha scared to sleep up there now. Maybe if you bless the house he'll go away.

AVERY: I don't know, Berniece. I don't know if I should fool around with something like that.

BERNIECE: I can't have Maretha scared to go to sleep up there. Seem like if you bless the house he would go away.

AVERY: You might have to be a special kind of preacher to do something like that.

BERNIECE: I keep telling myself when Boy Willie leave he'll go on and leave with him. I believe Boy Willie pushed him in the well.

AVERY: That's been going on down there a long time. The Ghosts of the Yellow Dog been pushing people in their wells long before Boy Willie got grown.

will smite my enemies. Reverend Thompson used to preach on the Ghosts of the Yellow Dog as the hand of God.

BERNIECE: I don't care who preached what. Somebody down there pushing them people in their wells. Somebody like Boy Willie. I can see him doing something like that. You ain't gonna tell me that Sutter just upped and fell in his well. I believe Boy Willie pushed him so he could get his land.


AVERY: What Doaker say about Boy Willie selling the piano?

BERNIECE: Doaker don't want no part of that piano. He ain't never wanted no part of it. He blames himself for not staying behind with Papa Boy Charles. He washed his hands of that piano a long time ago. He didn't want me to bring it up here—but I wasn't gonna leave it down there.

AVERY: Well, it seems to me somebody ought to be able to talk to Boy Willie.

BERNIECE: You can't talk to Boy Willie. He been that way all his life. Mama Ola had her hands full trying to talk to him. He don't listen to nobody. He just like my daddy. He got his mind fixed on something and can't nobody turn him from it.

AVERY: You ought to start a choir at the church. Maybe if he seen you was doing something with it—if you told him



So, boy Willie and the piano and Sutter's ghost. I thought I might have been seeing things, but Maretha done scene Sutter's ghost too. Maretha scared to sleep up there now. Maybe, if you bless the house he will go away. So, Berniece is not ready to get married to Avery, but she is seeking his help to get rid of Sutter's ghost. Because, now that Maretha is also affected.

And this can be seen at a very symbolical level too. As Maretha is growing up and when she is being her access to this past, which is not shared by her mother, but it is out there. And when she has more and more access to this past and direct and indirect ways, we find that the Sutter's ghost begins to invade her life as well.

And he is also tracing the stubbornness of boy Willie. As something that he inherited from Papa Charles. From he cannot talk to boy Willie. He been that way all his life Mama Ola had her hands full trying to talk to him. He do not listen to nobody. He is just like my daddy. He got his mind fixed on something and cannot nobody turn from him. So, like the piano there are many things with here which operate as legacy.

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you was gonna put it in my church—maybe he'd see it different. You ought to put it down in the church and start a choir. The Bible say "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord." Maybe if Boy Willie see you was doing something with it he'd see it different.

BERNIECE: I done told you I don't play on that piano. Ain't no need in you to keep talking this choir stuff. When my mama died I shut the top on that piano and I ain't never opened it since. I was only playing it for her. When my daddy died seem like all her life went into that piano. She used to have me playing on it . . . had Miss Eula come in and teach me . . . say when I played it she could hear my daddy talking to her. I used to think them pictures came alive and walked through the house. Sometime late at night I could hear my mama talking to them. I said that wasn't gonna happen to me. I don't play that piano cause I don't want to wake them spirits. They never be walking around in this house.

AVERY: You got to put all that behind you, Berniece.

BERNIECE: I got Maretha playing on it. She don't know nothing about it. Let her go on and be a schoolteacher or something. She don't have to carry all of that with her. She got a chance I didn't have. I ain't gonna burden her with that piano.

AVERY: You got to put all of that behind you, Berniece.

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down by the side of the road and walk away from it. You don't have to carry it with you. You can do it right now. (AVERY crosses over to the piano and raises the lid.)

Come on, Berniece . . . set it down and walk away from it. Come on, play "Old Ship of Zion." Walk over here and claim it as an instrument of the Lord. You can walk over here right now and make it into a celebration. (BERNIECE moves toward the piano.)

BERNIECE: Avery . . . I done told you I don't want to play that piano. Now or no other time.

AVERY: The Bible say, "The Lord is my refuge . . . and my strength!" With the strength of God you can put the past behind you, Berniece. With the strength of God you can do anything! God got a bright tomorrow. God don't ask what you done . . . God ask what you gonna do. The strength of God can move mountains! God's got a bright tomorrow for you . . . all you got to do is walk over here and claim it.

BERNIECE: Avery, just go on and let me finish my bath. I'll see you tomorrow.

AVERY: Okay, Berniece. I'm gonna go home. I'm gonna go home and read up on my Bible. And tomorrow . . . if the good Lord give me strength tomorrow . . . I'm gonna come by and bless the house . . . and show you the power of the Lord.



Many things which have been handed down to individuals, handed down to the family, things that they cannot; they cannot willfully get out of. I do not told you I do not play on that piano is not and no need to keep talking about this choir stuff and Avery is trying to bring back discuss the piano. Again, in very useful ways as something which could be used for the church choir. And we do see from the different perspectives from which these characters are approaching the piano, how it could be made use of.

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mama died I shut the top on that piano and I ain't never opened it since. I was only playing it for her. When my daddy died seem like all her life went into that piano. She used to have me playing on it . . . had Miss Eula come in and teach me . . . say when I played it she could hear my daddy talking to her. I used to think them pictures came alive and walked through the house. Sometime late at night I could hear my mama talking to them. I said that wasn't gonna happen to me. I don't play that piano cause I don't want to wake them spirits. They never be walking around in this house.

AVERY: You got to put all that behind you, Berniece.

BERNIECE: I got Maretha playing on it. She don't know nothing about it. Let her go on and be a schoolteacher or something. She don't have to carry all of that with her. She got a chance I didn't have. I ain't gonna burden her with that piano.

AVERY: You got to put all of that behind you, Berniece. That's the same thing like Crawley. Everybody got stones in their passway. You got to step over them or walk around them. You picking them up and carrying them with you. All you got to do is set them down by the side of the road. You ain't got to carry them with you. You can walk over there right now and play that piano. You can walk over there right now and God will walk over there with you. Right now you can set that sack of stones

(BERNIECE moves toward the piano.)

BERNIECE: Avery . . . I done told you I don't want to play that piano. Now or no other time.

AVERY: The Bible say, "The Lord is my refuge . . . and my strength!" With the strength of God you can put the past behind you, Berniece. With the strength of God you can do anything! God got a bright tomorrow. God don't ask what you done . . . God ask what you gonna do. The strength of God can move mountains! God's got a bright tomorrow for you . . . all you got to do is walk over here and claim it.

BERNIECE: Avery, just go on and let me finish my bath. I'll see you tomorrow.

AVERY: Okay, Berniece. I'm gonna go home. I'm gonna go home and read up on my Bible. And tomorrow . . . if the good Lord give me strength tomorrow . . . I'm gonna come by and bless the house . . . and show you the power of the Lord. (AVERY crosses to the door.)

It's gonna be alright, Berniece. God say he will soothe the troubled waters. I'll come by tomorrow and bless the house. (The lights go down to black.)



So, I got Maretha playing on it. She do not know nothing about it. Later let her go on and be a school teacher or something. She do not have to carry all of that with her. She got a chance I did not have I am going burden her with that piano.

While Berniece does not want to get rid of that piano while Berniece wants to keep that as a reminder of the things which went wrong in her family the sufferings, the sacrifice, the lives of women, which got all the more complicated because of the recklessness of men. In spite of all that, she does not want this legacy to be passed on to her daughter.

She wants Maretha to have a more normal life by becoming a school teacher or something which is worthwhile and not like tied emotionally or burdened down with a legacy which does not offer her anything much. You got to pull all that behind you Berniece that is the same thing like Crawley. Everybody got stones in their pass way.

You have got to step over them or walk around them. You picking them up and carrying them with you. All you got to do is to set them down by the side of the road. You are not got to carry them with you. You can walk over right now and play that piano. So, Avery suggestion is also at a practical level, but using that piano to get rid of those fears. To using that piano to overcome the stigma that it has.

And Avery is being asked to come over and bless the house so, that the house will be free of Sutter's ghost. He is not very sure, but if he if you look at the way in which he is responding to it. He is bringing the oral tradition. He is bringing the African mystic tradition and combining it with the Christian tradition. He is bringing the best of these both spiritual worlds and trying to in some sense make a concoction out of it, while he is performing the ritual when which we will also witness towards the end of the play.

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BOY WILLIE: I will say this for Avery. He done figured out a path to go through life. I don't agree with it. But he done fixed it so he can go right through it real smooth. Hell, he liable to end up with a million dollars that he done got from selling bread and wine.

MARETHA: OWWWWWW!

BERNIECE: Be still, Maretha. If you was a boy I wouldn't be going through this.

BOY WILLIE: Don't you tell that girl that. Why you wanna tell her that?

BERNIECE: You ain't got nothing to do with this child.

BOY WILLIE: Telling her you wished she was a boy. How's that gonna make her feel?

BERNIECE: Boy Willie, go on and leave me alone.

DOAKER: Why don't you leave her alone? What you got to pick with her for? Why don't you go on out and see what's out there in the streets? Have something to tell the fellows down home.

BOY WILLIE: I'm waiting on Lymon to get back with that truck. Why don't you go on out and see what's out there in the streets? You ain't got to work tomorrow. Talking about me . . . why don't you go out there? It's Friday night.

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of. Like she 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 come up throw a party. Have a celebration. If you did that she wouldn't have no problem in life. She could walk around here with her head held high. I'm talking about a big party!

Invite everybody! Mark that day down with a special meaning. That way she know where she at in the world. You got her going out here thinking she wrong in the world. Like there ain't no part of it belong to her.

BERNIECE: Let me take care of my child. When you get one of your own then you can teach it what you want to teach it.

(DOAKER exits into his room.)

BOY WILLIE: What I want to bring a child into this world for? Why I wanna bring somebody else into all this for? I'll tell you this . . . If I was Rockefeller I'd have forty or fifty. I'd make one every day. Cause they gonna start out in life with all the advantages. I ain't got no advantages to offer nobody. Many is the time I looked at my daddy and seen him staring off at his hands. I got a little older I know what he was thinking. He sitting there saying



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tell her that?

BERNIECE: You ain't got nothing to do with this child.

BOY WILLIE: Telling her you wished she was a boy. How's that gonna make her feel?

BERNIECE: Boy Willie, go on and leave me alone.

DOAKER: Why don't you leave her alone? What you got to pick with her for? Why don't you go on out and see what's out there in the streets? Have something to tell the fellows down home.

BOY WILLIE: I'm waiting on Lymon to get back with that truck. Why don't you go on out and see what's out there in the streets? You ain't got to work tomorrow. Talking about me . . . why don't you go out there? It's Friday night.

DOAKER: I got to stay around here and keep you all from killing one another.

BOY WILLIE: You ain't got to worry about me. I'm gonna be here just as long as it takes Lymon to get back here with that truck. You ought to be talking to Berniece. Sitting up there telling Maretha she wished she was a boy. What kind of thing is that to tell a child? If you want to tell her something tell her about that piano. You ain't even told her about that piano. Like that's something to be ashamed

meaning. I that way she know where she at in the world. You got her going out here thinking she wrong in the world. Like there ain't no part of it belong to her.

BERNIECE: Let me take care of my child. When you get one of your own then you can teach it what you want to teach it.

(DOAKER exits into his room.)

BOY WILLIE: What I want to bring a child into this world for? Why I wanna bring somebody else into all this for? I'll tell you this . . . If I was Rockefeller I'd have forty or fifty. I'd make one every day. Cause they gonna start out in life with all the advantages. I ain't got no advantages to offer nobody. Many is the time I looked at my daddy and seen him staring off at his hands. I got a little older I know what he was thinking. He sitting there saying, "I got these big old hands but what I'm gonna do with them? Best I can do is make a fifty-acre crop for Mr. Stovall. Got these big old hands capable of doing anything. I can take and build something with these hands. But where's the tools? All I got is these hands. Unless I go out here and kill me somebody and take what they got . . . it's a long row to hoe for me to get something of my own. So what I'm gonna do with these big old hands? What would you do?"



Maretha's presence - future generation

So, we will straight away go to the end of this play. In scene 5, where Berniece and boy Willie are having a proper conversation perhaps for the first time towards the end of the play. And this is also happening, when Berniece is doing Maretha's hair. And Maretha presence is very significant here, it is of much significance over here because, it is also what is at stake over here is the future of the marathon generation. What is its stake here is the fate of the future generation.

“They having this conversation in Maretha’s presence where Berniece just mumbles that if you were a boy I would not be going through this while she is making her hair, while doing her hair. And boy Willie takes great offense with that. Tony tell that girl that, why you want to tell her that.

You are not got nothing to do with this child. Telling her you wish she was a boy. How is that going to make her feel? Boy Willie go on and leave me alone.” So, they do not want to talk like siblings, there is nothing in this conversation which they can amicably carry forward, which is why the ending becomes all the more important all the more inevitable too.

So, this boy Willie uses this opportunity to again start talking about the piano. And now it is in a slightly different way altogether. That he is bringing up the piano and trying to talk about its historical significance. And remember this piano was also stolen on the fourth of July on the American Independence day.

And he is bringing back that reference over here sitting. So, “Boy Willie is also complaining about this to Doaker you are not going to worry about me. I am going to be here just as long as it takes Lymon to get back here with the truck. You ought to be talking to Berniece.

Sitting up there telling Maretha. She wished, she was a boy. What kind of thing is there to tell a child? You find that in a very strange sense, boy Willie is also he has that sense to be sensitive towards what needs to be told to a child something that one would not expect from a man like him who has led his life pretty much in a very reckless way. And we find that he does care for the emotional needs of the child and how she would be perceiving herself. Because for him, he is a man who is on his quest to this self identity and in that process in this little bit of conversation that he has. He makes sure that the self worth of the child is not damaged either.”

So, what kind of a thing is that to tell a child? If you want to tell her something, tell her about that piano. You have not even told her about the piano, like that is something to be ashamed of. Like she 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 the day down and draw a circle around it.

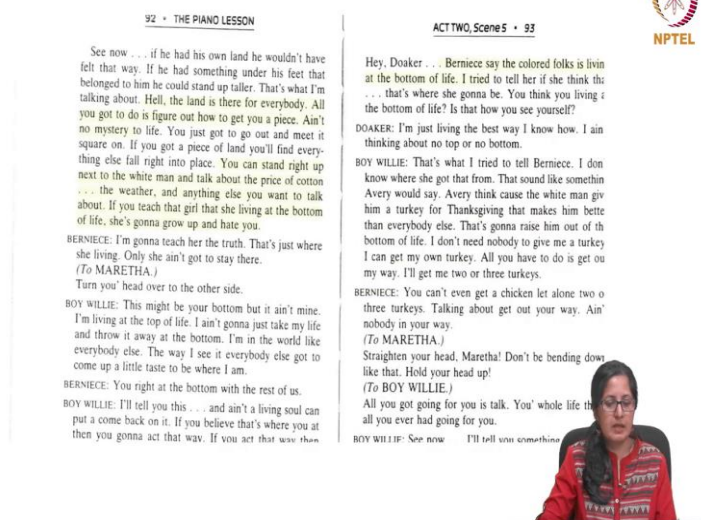
And every year when it come up through a party, have a celebration, if you did that she would not have no problem in life. She would walk around here with her head held high. I am talking about a big party. Invite everybody. Mark that day down with a special meaning that way she know where, she sat in the world you got her going out here thinking she wrong in the world like then any part of it belong here.

Let me take care of my child, when you get one of your own then you can teach it the way you want to teach it. Berniece snaps back, but we do know that there is some sense in what boy Willie is mentioning over here. The need to mark this date as a special day, when the day when Papa Boy Charles brought that piano home.

So, the way Berniece looks at it. It is a piano which was stolen and a piano which brought suffering and just endless suffering to their family, which led to Papa Boy Charles's death, but the way boy Willie is looking at it is an object, a legacy which was brought home.

Which needs to be talked about with great pride of course, he wants to sell it, he wants to buy land with that money that is there, but there is also immense pride that he feels. In such a way that, we further see this division between this paternal and maternal way in which the legacy is being looked at.

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See now . . . if he had his own land he wouldn't have felt that way. If he had something under his feet that belonged to him he could stand up taller. That's what I'm talking about. Hell, the land is there for everybody. All you got to do is figure out how to get you a piece. Ain't no mystery to life. You just got to go out and meet it square on. If you got a piece of land you'll find everything else fall right into place. You can stand right up next to the white man and talk about the price of cotton . . . the weather, and anything else you want to talk about. If you teach that girl that she living at the bottom of life, she's gonna grow up and hate you.

BERNIECE: I'm gonna teach her the truth. That's just where she living. Only she ain't got to stay there.  
(To MARETHA.)  
Turn you' head over to the other side.

BOY WILLIE: This might be your bottom but it ain't mine. I'm living at the top of life. I ain't gonna just take my life and throw it away at the bottom. I'm in the world like everybody else. The way I see it everybody else got to come up a little taste to be where I am.

BERNIECE: You right at the bottom with the rest of us.

BOY WILLIE: I'll tell you this . . . and ain't a living soul can put a come back on it. If you believe that's where you at then you gonna act that way. If you act that way then

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Hey, Doaker . . . Berniece say the colored folks is livin at the bottom of life. I tried to tell her if she think this . . . that's where she gonna be. You think you living at the bottom of life? Is that how you see yourself?

DOAKER: I'm just living the best way I know how. I ain thinking about no top or no bottom.

BOY WILLIE: That's what I tried to tell Berniece. I don know where she got that from. That sound like somethin Avery would say. Avery think cause the white man giv him a turkey for Thanksgiving that makes him better than everybody else. That's gonna raise him out of the bottom of life. I don't need nobody to give me a turkey. I can get my own turkey. All you have to do is get out my way. I'll get me two or three turkeys.

BERNIECE: You can't even get a chicken let alone two or three turkeys. Talking about get out your way. Ain't nobody in your way.  
(To MARETHA.)  
Straighten your head, Maretha! Don't be bending down like that. Hold your head up!  
(To BOY WILLIE.)  
All you got going for you is talk. You' whole life the all you ever had going for you.

BOY WILLIE: See now . . . I'll tell you something




He is also now looking at Boy Willie continues to feel that. If Papa Boy Charles had access to land none of these things would have happened. If he had his own land, he would not have felt that way. If he had something under his feet that belonged to him, he could stand up taller that is what I am telling about, hell there is land for everybody.

All you got to do is to figure out how you get your piece, how to get you a piece, is not no mystery to life. You just got to go out and meet it square on. If you got a piece of land, you will find everything else falls right into place. You can stand right up next to the white man and talk about the price of cotton.

The weather and anything else you want to talk about. If you teach that girl, that she is living at the bottom of life. She is going to grow up and hate you. He wants to change the course of history not just for himself, but for the entire family, but for the entire community.

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... the weather, and anything else you want to talk about. If you teach that girl that she living at the bottom of life, she's gonna grow up and hate you.

BERNIECE: I'm gonna teach her the truth. That's just where she living. Only she ain't got to stay there.  
(To MARETHA.)  
Turn you' head over to the other side.

BOY WILLIE: This might be your bottom but it ain't mine. I'm living at the top of life. I ain't gonna just take my life and throw it away at the bottom. I'm in the world like everybody else. The way I see it everybody else got to come up a little taste to be where I am.


BERNIECE: You right at the bottom with the rest of us.

BOY WILLIE: I'll tell you this . . . and ain't a living soul can put a come back on it. If you believe that's where you at then you gonna act that way. If you act that way then that's where you gonna be. It's as simple as that. Ain't no mystery to life. I don't know how you come to believe that stuff. Crawley didn't think like that. He wasn't living at the bottom of life. Papa Boy Charles and Mama Ola wasn't living at the bottom of life. You ain't never heard them say nothing like that. They would have taken a strap to you if they heard you say something like that.  
(DOAKER enters from his room.)

Avery would say. Avery think cause the white man give him a turkey for Thanksgiving that makes him better than everybody else. That's gonna raise him out of the bottom of life. I don't need nobody to give me a turkey I can get my own turkey. All you have to do is get on my way. I'll get me two or three turkeys.

BERNIECE: You can't even get a chicken let alone two or three turkeys. Talking about get out your way. Ain't nobody in your way.  
(To MARETHA.)  
Straighten your head, Maretha! Don't be bending down like that. Hold your head up!  
(To BOY WILLIE.)  
All you got going for you is talk. You' whole life that's all you ever had going for you.

BOY WILLIE: See now . . . I'll tell you something about me I done strung along and strung along. Going this way and that. Whatever way would lead me to a moment of peace. That's all I want. To be as easy with everything But I wasn't born to that. I was born to a time of fire.  
The world ain't wanted no part of me. I could see that since I was about seven. The world say it's better off without me. See, Berniece accept that. She trying to come up to where she can prove something to the world



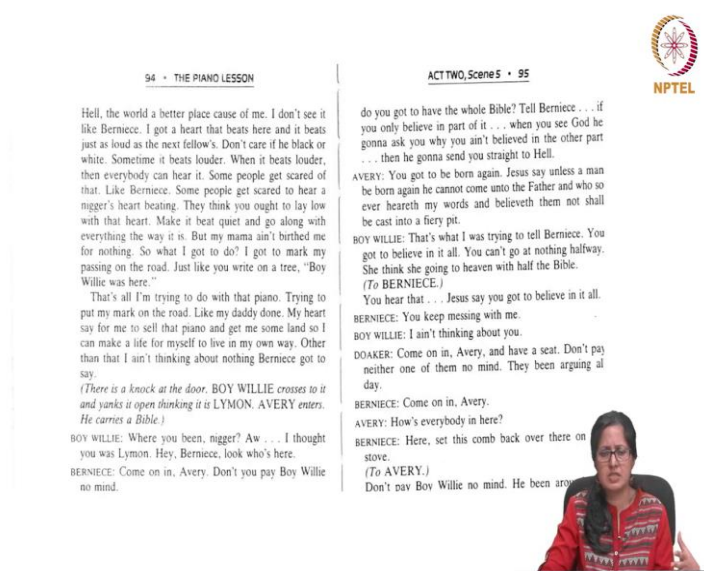
And that is what he seeks to achieve by getting acquiring that land. Acquiring the land that one belonged to the ancestors of the family, which owned them, which owned them as slaves. And boy Willie continues to reiterate. He was not living at the bottom of life. Papa Boy Charles and Mama Ola was not living at the bottom of life. You never heard them say nothing like that, they would have taken us trapped to you if they heard you say something like that.



Boy Willie chooses to see their past in a certain way that, it will continue to instill pride in him. And at some level they are both very similar. They are both; they are both conscious of the past, they both know what the past brought to them, but them quite unsure of what from this could be handed over.

The way Boy Willie sees it, it is the money that the piano is capable of making that is the legacy that could be handed over. And the Berniece is saying the Berniece looks at it none of these memories should be passed over should be handed down to the next generation. Lest that will become a reason to further affect them emotionally, historically and tie them to this the bottom of the society.

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Hell, the world a better place cause of me. I don't see it like Berniece. I got a heart that beats here and it beats just as loud as the next fellow's. Don't care if he black or white. Sometime it beats louder. When it beats louder, then everybody can hear it. Some people get scared of that. Like Berniece. Some people get scared to hear a nigger's heart beating. They think you ought to lay low with that heart. Make it beat quiet and go along with everything the way it is. But my mama ain't burred me for nothing. So what I got to do? I got to mark my passing on the road. Just like you write on a tree, "Boy Willie was here."

That's all I'm trying to do with that piano. Trying to put my mark on the road. Like my daddy done. My heart say for me to sell that piano and get me some land so I can make a life for myself to live in my own way. Other than that I ain't thinking about nothing Berniece got to say.

*(There is a knock at the door. BOY WILLIE crosses to it and yanks it open thinking it is LYMON. AVERY enters. He carries a Bible.)*

BOY WILLIE: Where you been, nigger? Aw . . . I thought you was Lymon. Hey, Berniece, look who's here.

BERNIECE: Come on in, Avery. Don't you pay Boy Willie no mind.

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do you got to have the whole Bible? Tell Berniece . . . if you only believe in part of it . . . when you see God he gonna ask you why you ain't believed in the other part . . . then he gonna send you straight to Hell.

AVERY: You got to be born again. Jesus say unless a man be born again he cannot come unto the Father and who so ever hearth my words and believeth them not shall be cast into a fiery pit.

BOY WILLIE: That's what I was trying to tell Berniece. You got to believe in it all. You can't go at nothing halfway. She think she going to heaven with half the Bible.

*(To BERNIECE.)*

You hear that . . . Jesus say you got to believe in it all.

BERNIECE: You keep messing with me.

BOY WILLIE: I ain't thinking about you.

DOAKER: Come on in, Avery, and have a seat. Don't pay neither one of them no mind. They been arguing all day.



BERNIECE: Come on in, Avery.

AVERY: How's everybody in here?

BERNIECE: Here, set this comb back over there on stove.


*(To AVERY.)*

Don't pay Boy Willie no mind. He been arguing



That that is something that she is visibly scared of, tangibly scared of, she is working day in and day out to help her get out of that and help her daughter get out of that situation.

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BOY WILLIE: What about that part that say an eye for an eye a tooth for a tooth and a life for a life? Ain't that in there?

DOAKER: What they say down there at the bank, Avery?

AVERY: Oh, they talked to me real nice. I told Berniece . . . they say maybe they let me borrow the money. They done talked to my boss down at work and everything.

DOAKER: That's what I told Berniece. You working every day you ought to be able to borrow some money.

AVERY: I'm getting more people in my congregation every day. Berniece says she gonna be the Deaconess. I get me my church I can get married and settled down. That's what I told Berniece.

DOAKER: That be nice. You all ought to go ahead and get married. Berniece don't need to be by herself. I tell her that all the time.

BERNIECE: I ain't said nothing about getting married. I said I was thinking about it.

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AVERY: Berniece say Maretha seen him too. I don't know, but I found a part in the Bible to bless the house. If he is here then that ought to make him go.

BOY WILLIE: You worse than Berniece believing all that stuff. Talking about . . . if he here. Go on up there and find out. I been up there I ain't seen him. If you reading from that Bible gonna make him leave out of Berniece imagination, well, you might be right. But if you talking about . . .


DOAKER: Boy Willie, why don't you just be quiet? Getting all up in the man's business. This ain't got nothing to do with you. Let him go ahead and do what he gonna do.

BOY WILLIE: I ain't stopping him. Avery ain't got no power to do nothing.

AVERY: Oh, I ain't got no power. God got the power! God got power over everything in His creation. God can do anything. God say, "As I commandeth so it shall be." God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. He made the world in six days and re



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. . . they say maybe they let me borrow the money. I they done talked to my boss down at work and everything.

DOAKER: That's what I told Berniece. You working every day you ought to be able to borrow some money.

AVERY: I'm getting more people in my congregation every day. Berniece says she gonna be the Deaconess. I get me my church I can get married and settled down. That's what I told Berniece.

DOAKER: That be nice. You all ought to go ahead and get married. Berniece don't need to be by herself. I tell her that all the time.

BERNIECE: I ain't said nothing about getting married. I said I was thinking about it.

DOAKER: Avery get him his church you all can make it nice.

(To AVERY.)  
Berniece said you was coming by to bless the house.

AVERY: Yeah, I done read up on my Bible. She asked me to come by and see if I can get rid of Sutter's ghost.

BOY WILLIE: Ain't no ghost in this house. That's all in Berniece's head. Go on up there and see if you see him. I'll give you a hundred dollars if you see him. That's all in her imagination.

DOAKER: Well, let her find that out then. If Avery blessing the house is gonna make her feel better . . . what you got to do with it?

from that Bible gonna make him leave out of Berniece imagination, well, you might be right. But if you talking about . . .

DOAKER: Boy Willie, why don't you just be quiet? Getting all up in the man's business. This ain't got nothing to do with you. Let him go ahead and do what he gonna do.


BOY WILLIE: I ain't stopping him. Avery ain't got no power to do nothing.

AVERY: Oh, I ain't got no power. God got the power! God got power over everything in His creation. God can do anything. God say, "As I commandeth so it shall be." God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. He made the world in six days and rested on the seventh. God's got a wonderful power. He got power over life and death. Jesus raised Lazareth from the dead. They was getting ready to bury him and Jesus told him say, "Rise up and walk." He got up and walked and the people made great rejoicing at the power of God. I ain't worried about him chasing away a little old ghost!

(There is a knock at the door. BOY WILLIE goes to answer it. LYMON enters carrying a coil of rope.)

BOY WILLIE: Where you been? I been waiting on you and you run off somewhere.

LYMON: I ran into Grace. I stopped and bought her drink. She say she gonna go to the picture show with me.



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BOY WILLIE: Get on out the way, Wining Boy! Doaker get him!  
*(There is a knock on the door.)*  
BERNIECE: I got him, Doaker. Come on, Wining Boy, I done told Boy Willie he ain't taking the piano.  
*(BERNIECE tries to take WINING BOY away from the piano.)*  
WINING BOY: He got to take me with it!  
*(DOAKER goes to answer the door. GRACE enters.)*  
GRACE: Is Lymon here?  
DOAKER: Lymon.  
WINING BOY: He ain't taking that piano.  
BERNIECE: I ain't gonna let him take it.  
GRACE: I thought you was coming back. I ain't gonna sit in that truck all day.  
LYMON: I told you I was coming back.  
GRACE: *(Sees BOY WILLIE.)* Oh, hi, Boy Willie. Lymon told me you was gone back down South.  
LYMON: I said he was going back. I didn't say he had left already.  
GRACE: That's what you told me.  
BERNIECE: Lymon, you got to take your company someplace else.

whoever win you. Just go on get out my house.  
BOY WILLIE: You gonna help me move this piano first, nigger!  
LYMON: *(To GRACE.)* I got to help Boy Willie move the piano first.  
*(Everybody but GRACE suddenly senses SUTTER's presence.)*  
GRACE: I ain't waiting on you. Told me you was coming right back. Now you got to move a piano. You just like all the other men.  
*(GRACE now senses something.)*  
Something ain't right here. I knew I shouldn't have come back up in this house.  
*(GRACE exits.)*  
LYMON: Hey, Grace! I'll be right back, Boy Willie.  
BOY WILLIE: Where you going, nigger?  
LYMON: I'll be back. I got to take Grace home.  
BOY WILLIE: Come on, let's move the piano first!  
LYMON: I got to take Grace home. I told you I'll be back.  
*(LYMON exits. BOY WILLIE exits and calls after him.)*  
BOY WILLIE: Come on, Lymon! Hey . . . Lymon! Lymon . . . come on!  
*(Again, the presence of SUTTER is felt.)*



So, we find Avery coming in and trying to bless the house and get rid of the Sutter's ghost, but to no avail. So, boy Willie tries to in this with this confusion, tries to remove the piano. "I got to take grace home I told you I will be back." So, grace is a woman that he brings home in between all of this.

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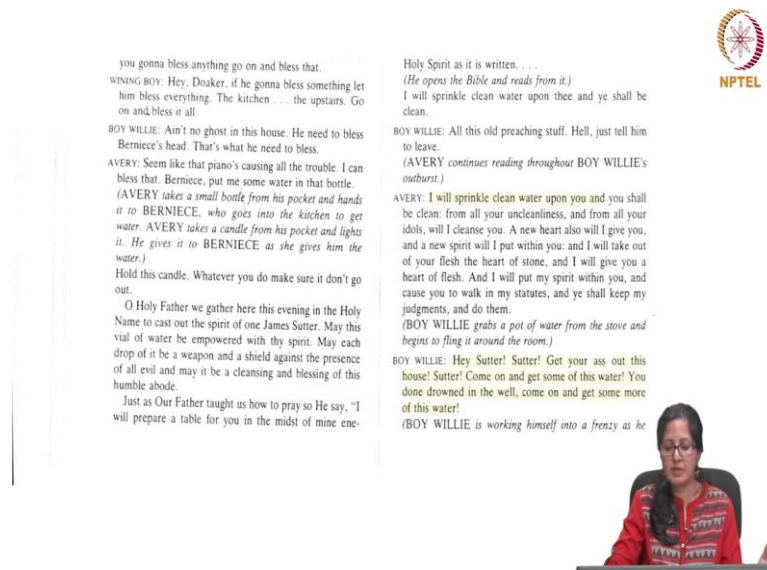
WINING BOY: Hey, Doaker, did you feel that? Hey, Berniece . . . did you get cold? Hey, Doaker . . .  
DOAKER: What you calling me for?  
WINING BOY: I believe that's Sutter.  
DOAKER: Well, let him stay up there. As long as he don't mess with me.  
BERNIECE: Avery, go on and bless the house.  
DOAKER: You need to bless that piano. That's what you need to bless. It ain't done nothing but cause trouble. If you gonna bless anything go on and bless that.  
WINING BOY: Hey, Doaker, if he gonna bless something let him bless everything. The kitchen . . . the upstairs. Go on and bless it all.  
BOY WILLIE: Ain't no ghost in this house. He need to bless Berniece's head. That's what he need to bless.  
AVERY: Seem like that piano's causing all the trouble. I can bless that. Berniece, put me some water in that bottle.  
*(AVERY takes a small bottle from his pocket and hands it to BERNIECE, who goes into the kitchen to get water. AVERY takes a candle from his pocket and lights it. He gives it to BERNIECE as she gives him the water.)*  
Hold this candle. Whatever you do make sure it don't go

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mies," and in His hands we place ourselves to come unto his presence. Where there is Good so shall it cause Evil to scatter to the Four Winds.  
*(He throws water at the piano at each commandment.)*  
AVERY: Get thee behind me, Satan! Get thee behind the face of Righteousness as we Glorify His Holy Name! Get thee behind the Hammer of Truth that breaketh down the Wall of Falsehood! Father, Father, Praise, Praise. We ask in Jesus' name and call forth the power of the Holy Spirit as it is written . . .  
*(He opens the Bible and reads from it.)*  
I will sprinkle clean water upon thee and ye shall be clean.  
BOY WILLIE: All this old preaching stuff. Hell, just tell him to leave.  
*(AVERY continues reading throughout BOY WILLIE's outburst.)*  
AVERY: I will sprinkle clean water upon you and you shall be clean: from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and



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you gonna bless anything go on and bless that.

WINING BOY: Hey, Dsaker, if he gonna bless something let him bless everything. The kitchen . . . the upstairs. Go on and bless it all.

BOY WILLIE: Ain't no ghost in this house. He need to bless Berniece's head. That's what he need to bless.

AVERY: Seem like that piano's causing all the trouble. I can bless that. Berniece, put me some water in that bottle. (AVERY takes a small bottle from his pocket and hands it to BERNIECE, who goes into the kitchen to get water. AVERY takes a candle from his pocket and lights it. He gives it to BERNIECE as she gives him the water.)

Hold this candle. Whatever you do make sure it don't go out.

O Holy Father we gather here this evening in the Holy Name to cast out the spirit of one James Sutter. May this vial of water be empowered with thy spirit. May each drop of it be a weapon and a shield against the presence of all evil and may it be a cleansing and blessing of this humble abode.

Just as Our Father taught us how to pray so He say, "I will prepare a table for you in the midst of mine ene-

Holy Spirit as it is written . . . (He opens the Bible and reads from it.)

I will sprinkle clean water upon thee and ye shall be clean.

BOY WILLIE: All this old preaching stuff. Hell, just tell him to leave. (AVERY continues reading throughout BOY WILLIE'S outburst.)

AVERY: I will sprinkle clean water upon you and you shall be clean: from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. (BOY WILLIE grabs a pot of water from the stove and begins to fling it around the room.)

BOY WILLIE: Hey Sutter! Sutter! Get your ass out this house! Sutter! Come on and get some of this water! You done drowned in the well, come on and get some more of this water!

(BOY WILLIE is working himself into a frenzy as he

Well, let him stay up there as long as he do not mess with me. Avery go on and bless the house. You need to bless that piano that is what you need to bless it have not done nothing but cause trouble. If you going to bless anything go on and bless that. If you going to bless something let him bless everything.

The kitchen the upstairs go on and bless it all. And boy Willie continually says there is no ghost in this house. He need to bless Berniece's head that is what he need to bless. So, he starts this ritual which is again we will find a combination of the African rituals, the African mysticism and he also uses a vocabulary, which is closer to the Christian tradition.

I will sprinkle clean water upon you and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness and from all your idols. But I cleanse you a new heart also I will give you his quoting from the bible. Boy Willie saying Sutter, Sutter get your ass out of this house. Sutter come on and get some of this water. You done drowned in the well come on and get some more of this water.

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runs around the room throwing water and calling SUTTER's name. AVERY continues reading.)



BOY WILLIE: Come on, Sutter!  
*(He starts up the stairs.)*  
Come on, get some water! Come on, Sutter!  
*(The sound of SUTTER's GHOST is heard. As BOY WILLIE approaches the steps he is suddenly thrown back by the unseen force, which is choking him. As he struggles he frees himself, then dashes up the stairs.)*

BOY WILLIE: Come on, Sutter!

AVERY: *(Continuing.)* A new heart also will I give you and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.  
*(There are loud sounds heard from upstairs as BOY WILLIE begins to wrestle with SUTTER's GHOST. It is a life-and-death struggle fraught with perils and faultless terror. BOY WILLIE is thrown down the stairs. AVERY is stunned into silence. BOY WILLIE picks himself up and dashes back upstairs.)*

AVERY: Berniece, I can't do it.  
*(There are more sounds heard from upstairs. DOAKER and WINING BOY stare at one another in stunned*

BERNIECE: *(Singing.)*  
I want you to help me  
I want you to help me  
I want you to help me  
I want you to help me  
I want you to help me  
I want you to help me  
Mama Berniece  
I want you to help me  
Mama Esther  
I want you to help me  
Papa Boy Charles  
I want you to help me  
Mama Ola  
I want you to help me  
  
I want you to help me  
I want you to help me  
I want you to help me  
I want you to help me  
I want you to help me  
I want you to help me  
  
*(The sound of a train approaching is heard. The noise upstairs subsides.)*  
BOY WILLIE: Come on, Sutter! Come back, Sutter!



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*by the unseen force, which is choking him. As he struggles he frees himself, then dashes up the stairs.)*

BOY WILLIE: Come on, Sutter!

AVERY: *(Continuing.)* A new heart also will I give you and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.  
*(There are loud sounds heard from upstairs as BOY WILLIE begins to wrestle with SUTTER's GHOST. It is a life-and-death struggle fraught with perils and faultless terror. BOY WILLIE is thrown down the stairs. AVERY is stunned into silence. BOY WILLIE picks himself up and dashes back upstairs.)*

AVERY: Berniece, I can't do it.  
*(There are more sounds heard from upstairs. DOAKER and WINING BOY stare at one another in stunned disbelief. It is in this moment, from somewhere old, that BERNIECE realizes what she must do. She crosses to the piano. She begins to play. The song is found piece by piece. It is an old urge to song that is both a commandment and a plea. With each repetition it gains in strength. It is intended as an exorcism and a dressing for battle. A rustle of wind blowing across two continents.)*

I want you to help me  
Mama Esther  
I want you to help me  
Papa Boy Charles  
I want you to help me  
Mama Ola  
I want you to help me  
  
I want you to help me  
I want you to help me  
I want you to help me  
I want you to help me  
I want you to help me  
I want you to help me  
  
*(The sound of a train approaching is heard. The noise upstairs subsides.)*  
BOY WILLIE: Come on, Sutter! Come back, Sutter!  
*(BERNIECE begins to chant.)*  
BERNIECE:  
Thank you.  
Thank you.  
Thank you.  
*(A calm comes over the house. MARETHA enters from DOAKER's room. BOY WILLIE enters on the stairs. He pauses a moment to watch BERNIECE at the piano.)*



She is also ridiculing this entire exercise. And at this moment, we find that boy Willie is again invoking a Sutter. The sound of Sutter's ghost is heard. As boy Willie approaches the steps. He is suddenly thrown back by the unseen force, which is choking him as he struggles, he frees himself then dashes up the stairs.

The history that he had been continually invoking to becomes more unreal at this point. It was just something that he used to talk about to give him a sense of identity, to give him a sense of self worth. Now, it becomes very real in a very bodily sense too. It is

something which takes his body by power as we would find here the past becomes something very powerful.

Powerful enough to conquer his body in a very physical and tangible sense. So, Avery is continuing to bless and get rid of the ghost and he gives up saying, Berniece I cannot do it. It is at this point and we are also nearing the end of this play. It is at this point that Berniece decides to take charge.

, there are no more sounds I heard from upstairs, Doaker and Wining boys stare at one another in stunned disbelief. It is in this moment from somewhere old that Berniece realizes that some she must do something. She crosses to the piano. She begins to play. And this brings about a change.

There is a coherent resolution over here a practical resolution over here, when the piano is being put to use. The legacy becomes something which has to be used in some way or the other. And it is not something that will come to use after one gets rid of it. It is something that is being used while it stays within the family, while it stays within their house.

She begins to play, the song is found piece by piece, it is an old urge to song that is both a commandment and a plea with each repetition it gains its strength. It is intended as an exorcism and a dressing for battle. A rustle of wind blowing across two continents. We find a lot of things coming together in this act in this ritualistic act of play.

It is a modern equipment, it is a modern musical instrument which is now being used to perform something, which is not quite modern. , to get rid of ghosts. , we also find different traditions, different ideologies, different belief systems coming together at this point, when Berniece begins to use the piano, Berniece begins to play something in the piano.

And her singing is also very look at the look at what she is invoking over here. She is asking for help. , and she is not using any big words over here. She is not claiming to have the power or the right to over the piano or the any kind of power to get rid of the ghost. He is asking for help from Mama Berniece, from Mama Esther, from Papa Boy Charles, from Mama Ola. She is asking for help.

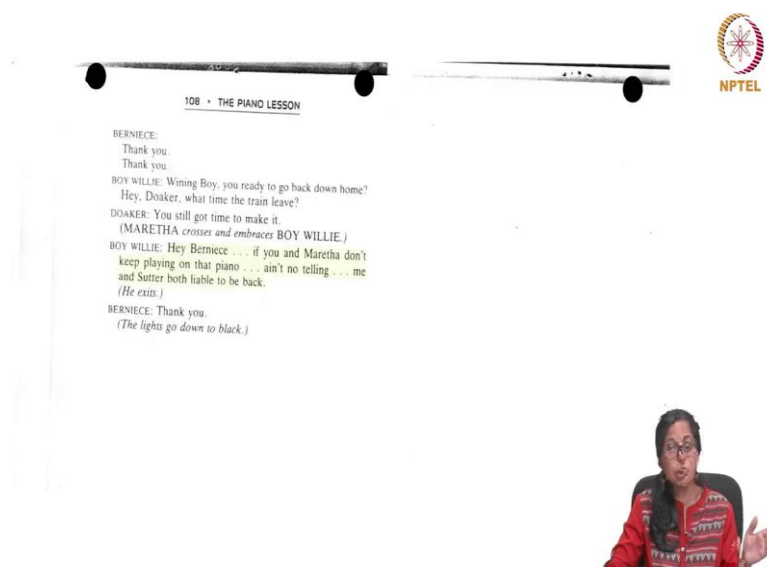
This is just like they have been hearing the sound of the voice of Sutter and just like they had been feeling the presence of Sutter. Now, they hear the sound of a train approaching and the noise upstairs subsides. It is the boxcar, where these men were burnt after the piano was brought home.

So, Bernice is asking for help from all these ancestors, whose history and whose lives were carved in that piano. So, her belief in some sense comes true, but that this is her belief takes a tangible existence only when she is in alignment with boy Willie in a sense that she puts the piano to you she begins to play it.

Come on Sutter come back Sutter. Berniece is thanking the ancestors the ghosts of Mama Berniece, Mama Esther, Papa Boy Charles and Mama Ola who are there to help them fight Sutter's ghost. And we find a certain collective at work over here. And it is very experiential. It is all in their minds perhaps, it is all part of their memory, but this experience this collective experience wins at the end of the day.

A calm comes over the house. Maretha enters from Doaker's room. Boy Willie enters on the stairs he pauses a moment to watch Berniece at the piano. And this site resolves it all for him. Like he said at the beginning to if the piano was being put to if it were being put to some everyday use some practical use. He would not think of selling it.

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BERNIECE:  
Thank you.  
Thank you.

BOY WILLIE: Wining Boy, you ready to go back down home?  
Hey, Doaker, what time the train leave?

DOAKER: You still got time to make it.  
(MARETHA crosses and embraces BOY WILLIE.)

BOY WILLIE: 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.  
(He exits.)

BERNIECE: Thank you.  
(The lights go down to black.)



And he stays true to his word though this was not something that he was expecting. “Berniece continues to thank perhaps her ancestors. Boy Willie’s says wining boy ready to go back town home. Hey, Doaker what time the train leave? And there is no more discussion.”

And the moment the legacy is being put to use. It settles down everything. They are able to fight the unsavory memories from the past and there is also peace within the family. “You still got time to make it. Maretha crosses and embraces boy Willie and you do find the family emerging over here.”

The family is evolving the family is happening over here and the familial affection they had for each other maybe many years back before the piano came into their life that is something that they are it is sort of a reunion not among just among the members who are still living, but reunion with a past as well reunion with the dead ancestors as well.

So, we to understand that almost seventeen years was spent in this intense agony this suffering because of the loss that the piano had brought about. But this is a time when they are trying to access something positive through this piano. Claim something positive through this legacy. Boy Willie is also bidding due to Berniece. “Hey Berniece, if you and Maretha do not keep playing on that piano I am no telling me and Sutter both liable to be back.”

So, on this very cheeky kind of note he is leading the scene too. And he is also there is a lot of foreignness over here. There is a lot of familial affection over here. And when he is threatening that he would come back if they do not play that piano anymore. He certainly does not want them to stop playing that piano.

Because in this moment in this ritual which may come across is being very half baked, very very pagan, very unmodern, we find that there is a resolution that the family and the community it is gets to. So, the play ends with Berniece thanking all of them and the lights go down to black.

So, we will perhaps meet again to look at some of the major themes and how this trend had radically helped in rewriting the black history. And how this also contributed to a new kind of movement in the American twentieth century American drama.