



History, Memory and The Quest for Self-Improvement in Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape* and August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson*

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Abstract:

This paper looks at the measures that the characters in both plays take to escape from their present situations. It posits that, despite the hardships that these characters face, they still have hope. It examines how characters in both Beckett's and Wilson's plays attempt to break free from the grip of the past by definitely rewriting history. For the purpose of this study, we will x-ray it using trauma and dream as a tenet in psychoanalysis by Freud and subjectivity of history. It is construed that both plays, are written in generically mimetic terms, as we see in the portraying of some elements or quality universally connected to human life. In some cases, while the characters try to get hold of the past, we cannot also undermine the fact that some happenings are beyond their control. In this chapter, one argues that there will be no more tape recordings, not because Krapp will not live again, but because he has definitely sorted out a way to overcome the past complexities. Eric Levy notes that, "by fixating exclusively on the past moments, Krapp reduces the present to the site of 'remembrance' and thus fortifies his life" (56). It shows that at some point, Krapp finds a way to break free from the grip of the past. Krapp's looking back into history is not to dwell in it, but to define his identity. In as much as *The Piano Lesson* illustrates the disconnectedness and complex nature of the past, it is only by asserting Africanness that the Black Americans can belong, have a sense of identity and possess that understanding of where he or she belongs.

Keywords: History, memory, Self-improvement, Psychoanalysis, Identity Formation.

Review Article

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INTRODUCTION

Beckett and Wilson set characters who are traumatised by their past on stage. However, these characters are not only confronted by the time past, but also by the present and the future as well. As such, their memories do not just link them with events of the past, but also attempts to use the past to ameliorate the present and build the future. By so doing, the characters rewrite the history they recollect.

Samuel Beckett was born on Good Friday on 13 April, 1906, in Ireland. At the age of fourteen, he began attending Portora Royal School which is the same school that Oscar Wilde attended. In school, Beckett was

generally moody and barely interacted with other students. He later confirmed this when he wrote "I had little talent for happiness". As a child, he suffered from great depression so that, on many days, he was in bed until midday. This gloomy and moody lifestyle undoubtedly influenced his writings since most of his works are characterized by a feeling of uncertainty and general gloom. He obtained his Bachelor's Degree in 1927 and started publishing in the 1930s.

August Wilson was born on April 27th 1945, in Pittsburgh in Pennsylvania to a German father and an African American mother. While in school, at the age of sixteen, he was accused of plagiarism after he wrote a

piece which the school authorities thought was too good to have been written by him. This led to his suspension and so he had to educate himself informally through reading and writing. His ingenuity was manifested by the Yale School of Drama where the Dean was of immense help to him and his works. Wilson died of liver cancer on October 2, 2005 in Washington just a few hours after one of his plays entitled *Radio Gulf* had opened in Los Angeles.

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines memory as the ability to remember something. It is from the Latin word 'memoria', which means to have a record of events or experiences. Michael Eysenck, in his book *Psychology for AS Level*, believes that memory is "the process of retaining information after the original thing is no longer present" (41). Again, memory represents the faculty of the mind is and described by many as the "representation of the mental process" (Ntube 4). History, according to *The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* state that it is all events that have happened in the past, it is a turning point in human history. A. F. Scott posits that memory is a narrative based on history to represent an imaginative reconstruction of events.

HYPOTHESIS

This article articulates the hypothesis that the characters in Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape* and Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* are trapped by time and memory as their past causes them to live in gloom and emptiness. The characters however attempt to overcome their plight by using their past to reconstruct their present and to build their future.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATION

The theory used in this paper is the Psychoanalytical theory. The term "Psychoanalysis" was coined by Sigmund Freud in 1895 in his revolutionary work entitled *The History of Psychoanalytic Movement*. In this work, Freud demonstrates the relationship between love and sex by explaining the role of love in human life. He

was very much interested in the laboratory and it was there that he did intensive work related to the human nervous system. Freudian psychoanalysis was influenced by three major experts, namely, Franz Anton Mesmer, Jean Charcot and Joseph Breuer. Psychoanalysis is tilted towards the understanding of persons by trying to uncover desires that are hidden deep within the mind, then portraying their link with the unconscious space. In most literary works, scholars argue that the unconscious mind of the writer is revealed in his or her writings. Consequently, a psychoanalytic critic must start with the study of elements in a writer's period that shaped his or her imagination.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The two works understudy have received much reviews but we going to limit ourselves to a few. Jeanette R. Malkin, in "Matters of Memory in *Krapp's Last Tape*," states that remembering is, in a sense, inherently dualistic. The first part of the mind recalls, brings up the past while the other watches, listens, reacts is reminded and sometimes refuses the memory brought up and rejects it. This is clear where Krapp says "mouth try something else, think of something else". This work argues that the characters' rejection of the past is what pushes them to reconstruct their present and build their future. Jadwiga Uchman, in "Voluntary and Involuntary Memory in Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*," argues that there exist two types of memory in the play, namely, voluntary and involuntary memory which are explained by Beckett in his Proust essay. The first kind of memory is dominated by a person's will to preserve certain things for the future. The remembrances, thus saved, are static and do not change with the passage of time. The tape indicates what Krapp decided to commemorate the past. The fact that he recalls the past becomes evident.

William A. Henry, writing for *Times*, stated that the play was Wilson's richest, yet sentimental piece. This view was echoed by many other critics including the *New York*

Post's Clive Barnes, who calls it "the fourth best and most immediate in the sense of plays exploring the Afro-American experience during this century." It is this black experience that makes the lives of these characters bleak. This work shows how both Beckett's and Wilson's characters use their memories to make their present and their future better. Anonjoh Meh Nchang, in "Memory and 'Rememory': Reclaiming Identity in August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson*", investigates manners in which Wilson's notion of memory and the interplay between memory and 'rememory' is constructed in Wilson's *The Piano Lesson*. She observes that the Black's past tragic experiences and their present plight in America gets them to be what she terms "shackled and disoriented". Her work demonstrates that, as a result of this disorientation, characters have constructed alternative identities. She hypothesises that for the characters to reclaim and regain their identities, they must, as a matter of urgency, go back to the past in order to fix the present. In addition, it also examines how history is reconstructed both in Beckett's and Wilson's plays.

HISTORY, MEMORY AND THE QUEST FOR SELF-IMPROVEMENT

History and memory pervade the worlds of both plays as the characters grapple to cope with what life offers them. It is evident that in both plays, the historicity of the texts, what goes on in the minds of the characters and the notion of the passing of time occupy pride of place. In Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*, Krapp makes significant strides to get rid of the haunted past. He does this by a series of repeated rituals in order to help him pass time and give him a purpose for living to his very existence. He starts by adopting a mother-child relationship with his much-cherished tape, the eating of bananas, opening bottles and going through ledgers of his tapes. To comfort himself, Krapp decides to rewind and replay selected passages from his series of soliloquies, these actions of his, is what brings the play under the theater of the Absurd. It can also be added that Krapp attachment to his

bowels which is very unlikely at old age, could be interpreted to mean, a response to his isolation and his attempt to control the world around him and he can only do this by controlling his body movement thus Jean Paul Satre's philosophy on 'the anguished of freedom' which says that "man is condemned to be free; because once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does". Faced with the memories of the past and confronted with no clear idea about his identity and the meaning of his existence, Krapp tries to find meaning by constantly going through the tape recorder. The tape recorder becomes his main companion and he cannot live without it. In an attempt to make the tape friendlier to him, he tries to edit it. He therefore uses the tape recorder as a means to select certain personal memory and some other that are repressed. Tom Lagier notes that, "by listening to these tapes, this little of his past, Krapp manages to relive and review his life, events long passed." This indicates that, in order to get rid of his past experiences, Krapp engages in a series of activities and one of such is listening to his tape repeatedly.

We cannot fail to observe the way the older Krapp appears to be charmed, and at the same time is bitter about his middle-aged self. Though he finds amusement with his youthful foibles. It is noted that the three Krapps (Krapp in his youth, Krapp in his middle age and Krapp in his old age) are not connected. Each Krapp is a new being so much so that they become separate entities. Beckett, by creating three different Krapps, tries to show that a person is a unique and separate entity. The main lesson Beckett passes across through Krapp is that it is necessary to consider someone's personality before making any conclusive statements.

At the start of the play, Krapp is found at the centre of the room, a spot where he finds light, the rest of the room is in total darkness. He occupies the bright center of the stage, sits at his desk while listening to tapes and makes a new one. This tells of a man who is trapped inside his mind as he fumbles with the ledger,

unlocks the drawer and searches for tapes. This fumbling by Krapp metaphorically talks of a man trapped in his own world. The fact that Beckett uses the lighting up of the stage at the centre suggests that there is hope even though the rest of the stage is in darkness. Again, Krapp's ability to find this centre stage where there is light, can signify that he is conscious of the fact that there is life after all.

Again, Krapp's tape recorder is a metaphorical mechanical brain, as Krapp toils with controls, the audience view Beckett's imitating of postmodern man who is more of an escapist. It is evident when he says 'on the table a tape-recorder with microphone and a number of cardboard boxes containing reels of recorded tapes. [P10]. We equally realize that, with the passage of time, Krapp's reliability on the recorder reduces as he decides to complement the recorder with the taking down of notes. This action highlights the fact that the tape recorder, which is a modern instrument, is not a guarantee for the storage of information as it can fail man at any time unlike the traditional system of documentation which is writing. According to him, writing is more reliable and incorruptible. This is evident when he says '...not a soul. sat before the fire with closed eyes, separating the grain from the hunks. Jotted down a few notes, on the back of an envelope...' [P14]. Closely linked to this is the fact that Beckett's use of punctuation marks in the play deserves close attention. One of which are the suspension marks. Page 12 and 13 contain the highest number of suspension marks which highlight the uncertainty that governs the life of the old Krapp. The old Krapp is trapped by fear and insecurity, hence he is speechless and motionless most of the time. This is exactly what Beckett experienced during The Frist and Second World Wars.

Samuel Beckett uses the banana as a symbol to pass across his message to the audience and to suggest Krapp as being in a dream-like state. Bananas have often represented two things, one is the repression of sexuality and, secondly, they symbolize

failed attempts in anything one engages in. Before Krapp goes for the tape, he unlocks the drawer, pulls out a banana and eats [P14]. After the tape begins playing, the younger Krapp notes that "have just eaten I regret to say three bananas and only with difficulty refrained from the fourth. Fatal things for a man with my condition." When Krapp eats another banana before recording and listening to the tape suggests that bananas have more useful meaning to him other than nutrition. The presence of bananas in this play suggests that, as Krapp remembers the past events, he also tries hard to forget them.

Bananas then become symbols of solace and an escape way for Krapp. By eating bananas, Krapp tries to repress and cover up his emotion, he places much emphasis on the scratches he sees on the woman's leg and attributes them to her unfaithfulness. The woman, on her part, gives a reasonable explanation for those scratches, Krapp does not want to believe her which suggests that he wants to cover up as to why he ended up the relationship. He does not want to place the blame on himself but attributes it to the woman's supposed unfaithfulness. It is therefore clear that, by trying to discredit her, he shows that it matches with the second reason why bananas are said to be eaten. It states that one's hard work will not be rewarded nor will it meet up with expectation. By this, according to Krapp, it means that though he had tried hard to keep the relationship, the woman let it down. If this is true, it suggests that Krapp lacks the physical elements of sex, thus banana represents the repressed sexuality from his lost relationship. By the end of the play, Krapp looks back at his choices in life especially those in the past and regretfully struggles to repress those memories with bananas.

In as much as *Krapp Last Tape* is a play happening in the enlightened state of the character, and not in some dream, Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis could be used to explain and expatiate the value of the banana as used in the play. It is observed that

Beckett's subscribes to the Theatre of the Absurd which gives room for the play to be interpreted psychically. Meanwhile, Krapp thinks that bananas are mere fruits that he feels comfortable eating; the audiences are able to code that they are symbols of repressed sexuality, the love he lost when he abandoned it and went into business.

It can be observed that listening to tapes is a way of exorcising himself of past demons. At thirty-nine, Krapp talks about listening to a still earlier tape of himself of ten or twelve years before. Krapp, in his twenties, lived with a lady called Bianca. He mocks at his younger self and calls these sentimental memories "gruesome." He laughs at his youthful aspirations, and at sixty-nine, he joins in the derisive laughter. Some other events observed were his father's death and the end of a romantic affair. When the contents of the tape stick hard, he turns to alcohol. When he returns on stage at one time, he sings drunkenly until he coughs. As such, to get rid of his past experiences, Krapp finds solace in laughter, drinking and singing. He laughs when he listens to himself at the age of twenty, and when terrified with the past, he drinks and sings. Though the past is not wiped away through these actions, he is at least healed for a while. At sixty-nine, old Krapp has not soaked himself in the solace of whiskey or wine, neither has he died of the terror of a remorseful past. He seemingly is strong enough to overcome the past experiences

Also, just like his younger personalities, Krapp has nothing good to say about who he has become and has no idea of making what has been described as 'last effort'. His writings really upset him, so too do the recordings of his youthful age. He tends to seek solace in memories from his dim and long passed events. By so doing, he thinks of the lady on the punt, wrenches the tape off which he has been recording, throws it away and goes back to replay the entire section found in the previous tape. This is a scene critics have described as that of masochism, reminiscent of Croak in words and music

destroying himself with a picture of a woman. At this point, Krapp leaves the tape recorder to play entirely, and ends with a thirty-nine-year-old Krapp who is determined never to regret the choices he has so far made and, convinced that he will produce a better Krapp in the future to make up for the loss and compensate his unhappy moments in the past. Here, one notices Krapp being resolute and determined to get rid of the grip of the sad past. Though the younger Krapps were filled with lofty aspirations they did not achieve anything. The old Krapp is still left only with hope and determination to right the wrongs of the past. This explains why this probably might be his last tape recording as insinuated by the title of the play. Krapp is apparently tired of a wasted past life and is poised to move on.

As earlier indicated, the action of *Krapp's Last Tape* takes place on a late evening in the future. This is evident where the stage direction indicates 'A late evening in the future. Krapp's den' It is on his sixty-ninth birthday and has been a ritual since he was twenty-four, Krapp will make a recording of the previous year. When the play begins, he sits at a desk, probably consulting his clock to ensure that it is exactly time for his birthday when he makes the recording. The series of actions that Krapp makes reduce tape recording to just another daily action. The stage goes silent as he fumbles with the keys to the drawer; he removes a tape, opens another drawer, removes a banana and eats. Unable to have his mind on what exactly he wants, Krapp leaves the stage to consume alcoholic beverage. The consumption of alcohol here seems to revive him as he returns determined to consult the ledger. He repeatedly leaves the stage to drink and each time he returns, he sings and coughs. All these actions in the present give meaning to Krapp's present life and deliver him from his past.

In August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson*, Boy Willie's visit disturbs the calmness of the family and also awakes the spirits of the dead. Thus, Berniece sees Sutter's ghost. Sutter is said to be the owner of the white land in the

Charles family and he died when the Ghost of the Yellow Dog pushed him into a well. Berniece thinks that Boy Willie is responsible for Sutter's death and this sparks a conflict between Berniece and Boy Willie. This conflict sparks up when Boy Willie wants to sell the family's piano in order to buy Sutter's land which is found in the South. Berniece objects to that arrangement because she wants to preserve the family history which is carefully carved on the piano. But Boy Willie wishes to sell the piano and buy Sutter's land because he wants to rewrite history. He wishes to buy the very land his family had labored on as slaves for long so as to erase the mark of suffering from the family. He therefore expresses optimism in the following words:

Boy Willie: Sutter got a hundred acres. Good land... His brother called me to him. And said cause of how long our families done known each other and we been good friends and all, say he wanted to sell the land to me. That's why I come up here; get Berniece to sell that piano....Walk in there. Tip my hat. Lay my money down on the table. get my deed and walk out... If my daddy had seen where he could have traded the piano in for some land of his own, it won't be sitting up here now. he spent his whole life farming on somebody else's land...(1. 1 p10-11)

This quotation shows Boy Willie's extrinsic motivation to sell the piano in order to buy Sutter's land. He wants to get rid of his disgraceful past, especially when it comes to Sutter's land. His father spent his entire life laboring for somebody else's land and Boy Willie does not want to see the chain of suffering continue. He thinks that if his father had had this opportunity, he would not have hesitated to do the same in order to remove the family from bondage. His father definitely did not have the opportunity to have a piece of land of his own, and Boy Willie now feels that this is an opportunity not to be missed. Acquiring that land will make him a Black-Middle class land owner, it will raise his status, improve his fortune and, for the first time, he sees himself being the master. Buying

Sutter's land, would mean having self-fulfillment, self-improvement, self-realization, not only for his family, but for the entire Black community. He compares the sale of the piano to the watermelons he sells. This demonstrates how he considers the piano a commercial item and also highlights his willingness and determination to sell it and to get himself out of the shackles of the past, memories of which are not the best.

Again, Boy Willie thinks that, owning Sutter's land it is a means of paying his late father homage. His father had worked his entire life as a slave, he had been subjected to inhuman treatment and humiliation and, as a slave, and he had no chance to own a land of his own. Boy Willie strongly believes that his father had not sold the piano because he had had an opportunity. Boy Willie thinks that by selling the piano, he is putting his mark on the road. Buying the land will give him a sense of belonging and, when the people meet him, they will say "Boy Willie was here." (2.5 p95). He wants to live his life not conditioned nor controlled by any slave masters, he wants to get rid of the past and live his life freely. He states to this effect that "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 says 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" (ibid). Accordingly, to both Berniece and Boy Willie, the piano is a representation of their past, history and inheritance though their motives or intentions are different. Boy Willie wants to erase the bad memories of his suffering ancestors who labored to death in the South. Though he wants to sell the piano, he has not lost sight of the very importance or significance of the piano. Boy Willie hopes that what he is seeking is helping realize his father's dream who had hoped to buy the land but had no economic stability. He says:

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. (1. 2 p46)

The quote brings out Boy Willie's determination to sell the piano and get things better for himself, family and the community. He wants to redesign his life and thereby preserving his future and his father's legacy. He thinks that if they don't sell it to make use of the money by buying Sutter's land, the piano will eventually depreciate and gets useless with time. He puts "the only thing my daddy had to give me was that piano. And he died over giving me that. I ain't gonna let it sit up there and rot without trying to do something with it (1.2 p46)

For Berniece, the piano is a symbol of her ancestors' cultural identity which must not be tampered with. She used to play the piano for her mother and since the mother died, she sown never to touch it anymore, believing by not touching, she has permitted her ancestors to live in peace. She believes that, the ebony and ivory keys for the piano reflect the Blacks and the Whites and their histories should not be manipulated. Her refusal to sell the piano stands out as a symbol for the preservation of Black history as she says that money can't buy what the piano is worth, "money can't buy what that piano cost. You can't sell your soul for money"(1.2 p50). Contrarily, Boy Willie's thought about the piano tells one that he is typically thinking only of his family economic recovery than any other thing. He says "I'm talking about trading that piece of wood for some land" (1. 2 p50).

While travelling to the north, most of the characters believe that, their lives could be better rather in the South unlike others who see the North as a place of plenty. Boy Willie especially hopes to go back to the South because he feels that being in the South, he will possess his portion of land and become a landowner. Lymon's wish is different from his friend's Boy Willie. He decides to get back to Mississippi. His journey to the North with Boy Willie is a chance for him to get out of the shackles of the South, a place where he is said to be a wanted man. He claims that, in the North, they treat people nicely contrary to what happens in the South: "they treat you

better up here" (1.2 p38). He believes that, the North is a place of easy life, readily made money and many women to date. Be it true or not, his deep negative feelings of the South reflect the hardships Blacks went through in the South and the North represents redemption. Lymon says "they work you too hard down there. All that weeding and hoeing and chopping down trees. I didn't like all that" (1.2 p30).

Contrarily to Willie Boy and Berniece, Winning Boy chooses to forget about the piano and decides to pursue a career in music. He notes that "I gave that piano up. That was the best thing that ever happened to me, getting rid of that piano..."(1.2 p47). He claims that, by getting rid of the piano, he forgets about the memories of the past. To him, the piano represents sadness and bitterness which can only be redressed if one gets to forget about it. He also thinks that, when he plays a piano, it causes him to go after women, drink carelessly, gamble and live an indisciplined life. He has been noted for moving from one place to another with no specific objective except the burning desire to become a musician so as to enjoy the luxury it comes with. He laments:

All you know how to do is play that piano. Now, who am I ? Am I me ? Or am I the piano player? Sometimes it seem [sic] like the only thing to do is shoot the piano player cause he the cause of all the trouble I'm having. (1.2 p41)

This shows how disoriented Winning Boy has become, he has lost focus and cannot tell whether he is a piano player or not. Seemingly, his dreams are not achieved and he feels like shooting the piano because it has caused him more harm than good. He has instead wasted his life and time playing the piano; he is drunk at every given moment, gambles and wanders from place to place with the hope of performing in bars and gambling houses. He equally sent his wife, Cleotha, out of their matrimonial home and now lives in total despair. Though lost in his sorrows and pains, Winning Boy has not forgotten the

racist tendencies of the deep South, he is doubtful when Boy Willie wants to enter an oral agreement with a white man. He says “how you know Sutter’s brother ain’t sold it (the land) already? You talking about selling the piano and the man’s liable to sold the land two or three times” (1.2 p36)

Nevertheless, Boy Willie wants to return to the South on the condition that he becomes a landowner and not a servant someone. This might seem that he has to a certain extent accepted his identity though with strings. To him, the only person who stands on his way to becoming a landowner is the sister, Berniece, who he thinks is just looking at the sentimental values of the piano and not the real opportunity which had surfaced, “see, you just looking at the sentimental value... I take my hat off whenever someone says my daddy’s name, but I ain’t gonna be no fool about no sentimental value” (1.2 p51).

Avery, Berniece potential suitor, is another opportunist who wants to use religion and Christianity to escapes the past and its sad memories. He yawns for economic stability and wealth in the North has pushed him wants to open a church there. He thinks that, as a clergy man, the North will be suitable for him to build a church and begin administering to them. Most characters in the play feel that, Avery is just out for the financial security and not religious devotedness. Winning Boy says about him that “Ain’t nothing wrong with being a preacher. You got the preacher on one hand and the gambler on the other. Sometimes there ain’t too much difference (1.2 p.30).

Winning Boy holds that Avery is somehow a dubious person because he has the idea of opening a church but primarily, his motive is to make money and have financial security. In total support for Winning Boy, and in disrespect, Boy Willie makes fun of Avery, “How you get to be a preacher, Avery? I might want to be a preacher one day. Have everybody call me Reverend Boy Willie” (1.1 p24). Purportedly, Avery is in need of his

financial stability and not religious upliftment. He had gained employment in Pittsburgh, working as an elevator operator though, he was never satisfied with it. His only hope is to convince the white bankers in a local bank to secure a loan which will enable him start up the church ‘business’. He feels like the whites are nice towards him judging from the way they talk, as he tells Doaker “oh, they talked to me real nice. I told Berniece... they say maybe they let me borrow the money” (2.5 p96).

Berniece, though an architect for the preservation of the piano, also seeks for alternative ways to escape the past and have an alternative identity. Contrary to Boy Willie, she doesn’t want the piano to be sold because it stands as a symbol of their identity, history, core values and that it represents her mother’s blood. By refusing to play the piano, and again, rejecting the Ghost of the Yellow Dog, she is somehow rejecting her link with history and a denial of the ancestors’ spirits. She struggles to gain cultural consciousness through her daughter, Maretha, a child she trains in a Whiteman’s way in an effort to get rid of the past. Berniece does not tell her daughter about the piano and its importance to the family. Rather, she prays that she should become a teacher. She remarks about Maretha that “she doesn’t know nothing about it. Let her go on and be a teacher or something. She doesn’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” (2.2 p70). This is a clear illustration that she wants to forget about the past and works on the present to make the future better.

The ugly past should end with her and not be transmitted to her children. By not telling her, Berniece, cuts off the link between the gloomy past and Maratha’s present. With all these efforts, it seems the past might still haunt them especially as we notice that the ghost appears to Maretha, towards the end. This, Wilson tries to caution that, it only through Africans accepting their Africanness that the culture and heritage of Blacks in a typical white dominated world by recognized.

His admiration of Black identity searches for the acknowledgement of African Americans to be linked to Africa, and to who we are. Wilson frantically refused the notion that Slavery made the African culture to be extinct.

Thus, Boy Willie, Winning Boy, Lymon and Avery are typical reflections of the different methods Blacks used to negotiate life, and rewrite their history in order to escape the ugly past and improve on themselves. Each of these characters struggles to surmount the challenges of life by engaging in one issue or the other. First, Boy willing is bent on selling the piano to buy Sutter's land. Meanwhile, Winning Boy struggles to forget about the piano because it brings nothing but damnation on his person, Berniece strives to identify with the White community while Avery plans to loan money to enable him open a church. Lymon for his part, escapes the hardships in the South to settle in the North where he feels there is some degree of freedom and unlimited women to flirt with. These are all measures taken by characters in Wilson's *The Piano Lesson*, to escape from their past experiences and attempts to break free from the grip of the past.

CONCLUSION

This paper aimed at showing how characters sought to escape from sad memories of the past. It has demonstrated that, Krapp, in Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*, manages to overcome his haunted past by drinking, singing, laughing, and most importantly, by eating bananas. He equally seeks to do so by constantly listening to his tapes. These actions are ways in which Krapp reconstructs his identity. It has equally shown how characters in Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* seeks alternative sources of happiness which is, in essence, ways of improving themselves. This study equally shows how the different characters in the play struggle to reclaim their individual identities and how this affects them as a family and as a people. Both playwrights think that, if the characters continue to overlook the pain and struggles of the past, it will prevent them from growing.

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