



The Characters's Conflicting Natures and Tensions in Sherley Anne Williams's *Dessa Rose*

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Abstract - This article studies the tensions and conflicts existing between black and white characters in Sherley Anne Williams' *Dessa Rose*. Moving from slavery, it shows how the quest of power and freedom has disturbed the social peace in America. In fact, the domination of masters like Wilson has led to many wrongdoings and suscitated the resistance of Black people for survival reasons. Black people have not been given any choice apart from resisting. This position is well-understood by *Dessa Rose*, the eponymous character who wages a rude struggle for their liberation from Wilson's coffle. As slaves are humiliated and illtreated, the only chance offered to them is to get together and resist ; which they have done and many deadly consequences have followed their rebellion since more than thirty-one among them have been killed. In addition to their deaths, some white people have also been killed in this event and the master, Wilson has lost one of his arm and a lot of properties destroyed. Through this event, Williams shows that no social peace is possible if it is not based on collective interest. She uses the relationship between Miz Rufel and the Negroes to express her will of seeing Blacks and Whites in America living in a spirit of brotherhood regardless of the ethnic groups or races they belong. She calls all American people to cultivate tolerance, solidarity, love and mutual acceptance in their differences.

Keywords: Freedom, power, rebellion, resistance, social peace, struggle,

INTRODUCTION

Race relationships in America have never been easy. From the enslavement of the African people until now, many difficulties have been registered, particularly between the black and white races. As illustrated in many African American novels, conflicts and tensions during slavery could not be avoided. A simple reading of Sherley Anne Williams's *Dessa Rose* can be convincing about this reality. Both white masters and slaves are victim of moral and physical aggressions. They are sometimes exposed to many humiliations but in different degrees.

Because of their vulnerability, slaves suffer a lot. As it is shown in the situation of the darky, there is neither a parent nor a man to protect *Dessa Rose* and her son from the cruelties of the environment. The only chance offered to her is to resist. Following this conception, she leads an uprising on Wilson's coffle opening the way to many disastrous consequences. Not only is she at the origin of Wilson's arm amputation, but she causes the deaths of many guards and the



destruction of a lot of properties belonging to the master. In addition, more than thirty-one slaves have been killed among whom Dessa Rose's lover, Kaine.

There are also some moral and psychological consequences concerning both White and black people. For example, after the loss of one of his arm, Wilson is so fearful that his only intention is to separate from Dessa Rose to stay well. He is afraid of being overpowered again and killed by the slaves who represent more in terms of number. For the preservation of his security, Wilson like many slave owners, uses a method which consists in dismantling and placing black families on different plantations to avoid affection and rebellion among them. He is exposed to many dangers, because, as someone displeasing other human beings, he can be killed at any moment.

Another position showing the conflict between Blacks and Whites can be seen in Miz Rufel after being abandoned by her husband. Seeming to be an oppressor, Miz Rufel like Wilson is a victim of the white and black relationship. She seems to guide and be there for the Negroes, whereas in reality, she is their own tool both sexually and in terms of protection. Not only does one of them {Nathan} sleep with her, but they all pretend that she is their mistress because they want her to help them get easily to the free North. Like a tool that they handle accordingly, she is victim of jealousy by Dessa Rose who cannot accept that she lays down with a black man. Having no family and nowhere to go she is then obliged to negotiate with the slaves the time to find a destination.

In comparison with many slave narratives like Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, or Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass: An American slave*, Sherley Anne Williams stresses the conflicting nature of slavery which goes with a lot of tension. All characters are living under hard pressure. Either they belong to the white or the black community, they cannot live quietly because it is the nature of slavery to oppose people and create a conflicting environment. Moving from slavery, this article shows how the quest of power and freedom has disturbed the social peace in America. Many tensions and conflicts have been lived by *Dessa Rose's* characters who, for survival reasons, fight one another.

Williams creates an infernal environment where class struggle has become a hard reality. The choices of the protagonists especially black, are very limited. Either they fight against the others to survive or they disappear. The terms mutual love and respect to keep peace as long as possible are not seriously taken into account in the relations between the black and white races. The only disturbing element of social peace is slavery. Not only does it engender the resistance of black people fighting for freedom, but Sherley Anne Williams uses it to deliver a political and soothing message to people in America and all over the world.



1. Slavery, the Only Disturbing Element of Social Peace

In *Dessa Rose*, slavery is the only disturbing element of social peace. In fact, all the conflicts and tensions which exist between Whites and Blacks are due to the institutionalization of slavery. By allowing some people to own or possess others at all costs, and by forbidding others to be even possessive of their own children, injustice and inequality are created for ever. Social peace and harmony are possible if only all people are equal in front of the law; which is not the case in *Dessa Rose* where some white characters, who are greedy for power, are ready to invert all human values to satisfy their personal needs.

Slavery being the supremacy or domination of a group upon another one, as it is shown in the relations between Wilson and his slaves creating rebellion on the coffle, power has not been used in an appropriate way by the masters and a lot of conflicts and tensions were born because of this injustice. Negroes, led by the Darky and suffering extremely from Wilson's cruelties, wage a rude struggle for their survival. This confrontation is summed up in this passage:

Wilson, at least, had paid for his cupidity. That darky out in the root cellar and several bucks had somehow freed themselves, overpowered the guards, freed the rest of the slaves on Wilson's coffle... Still, the toll in life and property had been horrifying. Five white men had been killed. Wilson had lost an arm. Thirty-one slaves had been killed or executed, nineteen branded or flogged, some thirty-eight thousand dollars in property destroyed or damaged (Williams, 1986, p. 14).

This situation, showing the physical aggressions of the masters and the resistance of Negroes, justifies how power is able to turn human beings into beasts or savages. The author uses it to show the dangerous character of being powerful. As it is frequently observed during slavery, power pushes people to become less and less sensitive and sensible. By creating rebellion on Wilson's coffle, the slaves have ended showing their envy for freedom and their capacity to reorient and better their future. Even though they have lost many of their members during the struggle, they have succeeded in transforming their fear into courage and the masters' courage into fear. Wilson is so fearful that he is "obsessed with seeing and selling the kid she {the darky} carried." (Williams, 1986, p. 15).

By resisting, slaves want to stop the masters' exceeding power. Like Wilson, all of them are so cruel that they dismantled the families, separating children from parents, just to avoid affection among them and the spirit of solidarity which can lead to resistance and rebellion. Douglass (1999, p. 16) writes in this sense:

For what this separation is done, I do not know, unless it be to hinder the development of the child's affection toward its mother, and to blunt and destroy the natural affection of the mother for the child. This is the natural result.



With the power given by the institutionalization of slavery, White masters have the possibility to kill black people for any reason, and they do not have to answer for their acts. This discrimination based on the color is also possible thanks to the "obvious complicity between slave trader and slave owner in the resale of a dangerous slave" (Williams, 1986, p. 14).

The yearning for economic power pushes the slave buyers to close the eyes on the cruelties of slavery because for them, only business matters: "It was the nature of the negro trader to buy cheap and sell dear_ and warrant any one that could move as 'likely' or sound. That was business and the wise buyer was ware" (Williams, 1986, p. 14).

By institutionalizing black slavery, power is given to White masters to get a lot of money and properties for the bettering of their living conditions and the good preparation of their children's future. In fact, if slavery has become an institution, it is simply because it was profitable and makes masters more powerful economically and politically. Furneaux (1974, p. 60) wrote: "Well-established, profitable, a symbol of the country's naval and commercial greatness, the slave trade was regarded by the few who troubled to think about such things as an unavoidable evil"

In order to get more profits, white masters have turned their slaves into objects. The objectification of Negroes has become a reality during slavery and it can be observed through different methods such as the body treatment of slaves which is not good at all, the hard tasks that they are obliged to do night and day, the sales and separation of family members which undergo savage mistreatments, the different and numerous assassinations and so on and so forth. As Willis (1985, p. 3) puts it, "Slaves were seen as so much malleable material, easily deprived of form and shaped to the master's will. Still, according to Willis (1985, p. 4) "Slavery is an affliction upon those who profess no prophecy, who bear no allegiance to a religious law. Moreover, slavery is an humiliation_ a subjection_ which rises from infidelity."

To better set up their domination on the slaves, white masters do not want them to know about religion. They want them to live and stay ignorant all their lives as far as religion is concerned because knowing about the Bible or any religious text might deliver them from the mentality of subjection. Williams (1986, p. 32) writes:

Kaine just laugh when Mamma Hattie say that playing with God, putting yourself in the same level's His peoples is on. He say Mamma Hattie ain't knowed no more about God and the Bible than what the white folk tell her and that can't be too much cause Masa say he don't be liking religion in his slaves.

This passage shows white masters's refusal to pull black slaves out of darkness in order to take them to enlightenment. A leading slave owner advised to "create in him {slave} a habit of dependence on you {master}" (Sowell, 1981, p. 187). Slave owners generally prefer to plunge their slaves into ignorance because they want to keep them in servility during all their lives. As slaves are kept ignorant, they can't refuse any illtreatment and they are forced to transmit slavery from a generation to the next, just to keep masters's economical and political interests but to enable them impose their supremacy and power upon all other groups for a long time.

In the logic of being selfishly more and more powerful, white masters encourage Negroes to have children who, like cows are destined to the market or to land cultivation. For these reasons, black women are really exposed to rapes or sexual violations as illustrated in the following passage:

The men and women were bound together at night; and, while it was more common for the white guards to take one of the women, the chains were no real barrier to a determined couple. They were encouraged to it. Pregnancy was proof of a woman's breeding capacity; and the boy was often chained with her at night. But neither man touched her (Williams, 1986, p. 57).

Sherley Anne Williams stresses the illtreatments undergone by slave women because the masters are power-hungry. Just to show their pitiless character, she describes a harmful situation where a slave woman, Linda is put in a dangerous position of sexual violation:

The other white men didn't even rouse up as the guard thrashed off into the underbrush with Linda, but everyone on the coffle was awake. Every night since Montgomery, one of the white men had taken Linda into the bushes and they had been made wretched by her pleas and pitiful whimperings (Williams, 1986, p. 60).

The same situation witnessed in *Dessa Rose* can be found in other novels written on slavery. The system is the same everywhere: the domination of the White masters and the subjection and objectification of the Negroes. Power has turned White masters into savages caring only about their proper interests even though they necessitate families dismantling, murders, whippings, sexual violations among others. This power, resting on what Jacob Vaark calls "lawless laws" (Morrison, 2008, p. 10), has a discriminatory position in the relations between Whites and Blacks during slavery. Justice stops being general and works for the interests and benefits of the Whites who have supremacy over all other ethnic



groups in America. However, anarchy has reached such a higher level that black resistance becomes a necessity for the survival of the race.

2. Black Resistance and the Walk for Freedom

Black resistance during slavery has been a survival issue. As it is expressed in many situations in *Dessa Rose*, slaves have two choices: either they fight to liberate themselves and survive, or they accept their domination by White masters and suffer painfully for the rest of their lives. They have chosen the first condition and the fight with the masters has started. The most remarkable struggle opposing black slaves to white masters has been observed on Wilson's coffer and has been led by the eponymous character, Dessa Rose. This struggle has been very rude and filled with a lot of deadly consequences. Apart from the many deaths recorded, there has been a lot of economical losses which plunge Wilson in a very miserable position with the loss of one of his arm.

Dessa Rose is known for her rebellious character which exposes her "for sale at a bargain price because she'd attacked her master" (Williams, 1986, p. 13). Through her behavior, one can understand better the attitude of slave women when resistance and the walk for freedom is concerned. Because of their position as mothers, their resistance has always been remarkable. For their protection and the well-being of their offsprings, killing has never been excluded even if, sometimes, the life of their children are endangered. In *Beloved*, for example, Morrison describes the situation of a mother, Sethe who kills her daughter and tries in vain to do so with the three other infants, just to spare them from the cruelties of slavery stating later: "I took and put my babies where they'd be safe" (Morrison, 1987, p. 164). This position of Sethe addresses the philosophical question of safety. What does it mean to be safe, especially for a slave? If for Sethe safety only exists in the afterlife, for Dessa Rose, it should be checked in the present life through resistance and self-protection.

In the walk for freedom, Blacks are aware of the fact that no resistance is achievable without the spirit of togetherness. In *Dessa Rose* as well as other books written on slavery, they have resisted in group. After the rebellion on the coffer of Wilson, Negroes, men and women get together for their long run for freedom. Being more powerful when they are in group, they have much power to even manipulate a white woman, Miz Rufel after her abandonment by her husband. Instead of working for her as a master, they handle and use her to help them get to the North where slavery does not exist.

During this long run for freedom, Williams has taken the power from the masters' hands and give it to the Negroes. Many things have happened at this



moment showing the very powerful position of slaves in relation with Miz Rufel. Through this situation, Whites have lost their power and have been obliged to follow the Negroes's will. That's why, Miz Rufel, as someone who cannot refuse, has been sexually exposed to the desire of men as is illustrated in this passage by Dessa Rose, being jealous and despising:

I was wakened by some muttering and it took me a minute to realize it was him {Oscar, a white man} and her {Miz Rufel} in that bed. At first I was embarrassed and surprised. If she wanted to do that, I could have slept in the kitchen. And glad, too, 'cause this could show Nathan {a slave} just what kind of thing he'd taken with (Williams, 1986, pp. 218-219).

In fact, Dessa Rose is so much yearning for taking back the power from white people's hands that she cannot consider Miz Rufel as someone superior to her. Not only is she jealous of her, but she cannot place her reliance on her because of what White folks have done to them. This passage is an illustration of this unreliable ambiance between women of different races: "You know, girl, you didn't have no business calling that woman out her name. We been trusting her all along, just like she been trusting us. How you going to stop now ?" (Williams, 1986, p. 206).

The will of taking power from White people's hands and give it to Negroes can be observed in the attitude of Nathan. In fact, in daring to have sexual intercourse with a white lady, Nathan has shown his courage and capacity to change the situation regarding the mixed relationships. He shows that, White and Black are simply a question of color which can be surpassed by love. Through his behavior, one can understand that the good relationship among the races in America should rest on love which is universal and away from separateness. With Miz Rufel, Nathan has shown that only love and mutual reliance matter for the well-being and well-balance of the American society which is composed of many ethnic groups.

Another situation expressing black takeover of power can be noticed in the position of Negroes selling other Negroes into slavery for their survival. Even though it shows a paradoxical situation from slaves' attitude, it gives them much power for their survival. But some of them do not agree with this way of doing. Dessa Rose States, "I had a deep admiration for Harker myself but I really didn't like the idea of us selling ourselves back into slavery" (Williams, 1986, p. 195). Despite her refusal to practise slave trade, Dessa Rose acknowledges: We sold Flora as a laundress and expert ironer when she hadn't even so much as seen a flatiron in them days. People could do these things was sold for more money" (Williams, 1986, p. 226).



Negroes selling other Negroes into slavery can also be another dimension or responsibility that the author wants to indicate. Selling Flora to get money does not seem to be the best way to act in a position where Negroes start being powerful because of their important number. It can also be seen like another way of showing that the responsibility of black slavery is shared between both white and black people. Black responsibility in the enslavement of Africans is expressed by Baker (1974, p. 364): "Negrids who had been accustomed to sell slaves to others of their race were just as willing to sell them to foreigners"

Finally, the same questions asked regarding white people can be posed as far as black power is concerned. What do they do with the power they get? Do they use it appropriately? Apart from giving in sexual intercours with a white lady (Miz Rufel and Nathan) and selling other Negroes into slavery (Flora), the small power black people get does not serve them efficiently. As they are ignorant and marginalized, they do not know what to do with power. In reality, their freedom is a bit insignificant when one observes what they become later. Berlin (1974, p. xiii) summarizes:

Once free, blacks generally remained at the bottom of the social order, despised by whites, burdened with increasingly oppressive racial proscriptions, and subjected to verbal and physical abuse. Free Negroes stood outside the direct governance of a master, but in the eyes of many whites their place in society had not been significantly altered. They were slaves without masters.

Another position enhancing black power is the fact of sleeping in a hotel. In fact, in normal circumstances, it is unacceptable that a Negro lives in comfortable conditions in America during that period. By creating an analogous situation in favor of the slaves, Williams seeks to grant them much power even though they are guided by a white lady. She tries to say that the place of the Negro is not on the infernal plantations or in prison but in society because they are human beings who deserve comfort like everyone else in America.

Like White people, power has drastically transformed the Negroes by urging them to do many negative things. Not only are they tempted to assassinate white masters, but they use it to tame and manipulate a poor white lady who has no means to resist their way of doing. Unlike white people, they do not detain political power. However, they become very strong and powerful thanks to their spirit of togetherness and solidarity. Through their position of doing everything together, there is a political message that the author wants to show to people in America and all around the world.

3. Williams' Political and Soothing Message

As Morrison states in one of her interviews, Arts and Politics cannot be separated. In other words, a good artist has always been political. She sums up this idea in this small passage:

I think all good art has always been political. None of the best writing, the best thoughts have been anything other than that. I think he [Larry Neal in his essay "The Black Arts Movement"] was really making two points in that article. One is that Black people who are writing must concentrate on the political plight of Black people. Second, he was trying to forestall a movement towards art for art's sake" (Danille Taylor-Guthrie 1994, p. 3).

This passage pushes to ask a few questions related to Sherley Anne Williams: is she a good artist or a politician? If so, what is her political message? Does her writing focus on the political plight of Black people? There are many possible answers but all of them turn around the social function of Williams's writing which is very prolific. According to King (1993, p. 353), "Williams forces her reader, whether white or black, to release preconceived notions about gender and race in pre-Civil War America."

As far as the relationship between black and white races in America is concerned, Williams's message which seems to concentrate on universal values is a very good one. In fact, through many situations that she creates in *Dessa Rose*, the reader can clearly notice that she is calling people to nourish the spirit of tolerance, solidarity and love to install peace and harmony in the American society. This passage showing the apparent complicity between Miz Rufel or Ruth and the Negroes expresses Williams's will to improve race relationship in America:

We come West and Ruth went East, not back to Charleston; she went on to... Philly-me-York- some city didn't allow no slaves. I guess we all have regretted her leaving, one time or another. She couldn't've caused us no trouble than what the white folks gived us without her (Williams, 1986, p. 259).

The fact that all slaves regret their separation with Ruth, shows that their relationship, even though it faces many inconvenients, is much better than the way they were treated by White folks during slavery. Through their characters, Williams expresses her intention of improving the social relations in America and lowering the tensions existing among races. As a writer, she understands that being Black in America is not an easy position because as Burns (2013, p. 119) states, "To be Black was by definition to be excluded from the principle of



personal and collective autonomy, a principle that took shape in relation to its ideological counterpart, slavery.”

By creating a love position between Nathan and Miz Rufel, Williams is urging mixed relationship in order to facilitate social peace and the country's stability. Through this relation, it is clear that the author does not grant too much importance to the skin which is only a natural characteristic. She is trying to say that what unites the American people is more important than what divides them. The love between Nathan and Miz Rufel is not based on the races to which both belong but on a natural feeling that goes beyond appearances or visible items.

To transcend racist feelings and live as a unique community in America, Williams evokes some attitudes of solidarity among the black and white characters. For instance, when, down the hotel on their way to the North, Ruth is recognized by the journalist Adams Nehemiah and is about to be taken back to her owner, then to slavery, she benefits from the rescue of Ruth who claims to be her master, just to protect her. It's a way for the author to show that not all white people had a bad behavior during the period of African enslavement. Some of them are good people who do not want to hurt anyone. In *Beloved*, for example, Morrison describes the attitude of a white lady, Amy Denver from Boston, who assisted a slave woman, Sethe giving birth in the woods in her flight from Sweet Home, her master's plantation. As a proof of recognition, Sethe's daughter is named after that Amy Denver.

Through Wilson's behavior of humiliating and torturing Negroes, Williams is sending a message to the community to show that cruelty can never be fruitful. The fact that he loses one of his arm indicates the negative consequences of being a bad person. Like in the ships transporting slaves, there is excessive cruelty on his coffle, where the degree of wickedness cannot be described. Furneaux (1974, p. 62) witnesses:

In these ships the slaves were crammed in 'spoon fashion' always lying on their right sides because this was thought to be better for their hearts. Slaves suffered more from sickness than Europeans and sometimes died of this complaint. Others were driven mad by the conditions and the terror of the unknown future. Mad or dead they were thrown overboard to feed the sharks that followed the slave ships all the way across the Atlantic.

In *Dessa Rose*, some black people like Harker and Flora accept to be sold back to slavery by their own slave community because they want to save them. It's a proof for the author to send a crucial message to all communities in America: sacrificing oneself for the benefit and well-being of others and not sacrificing others for one's own benefit and well-being as slave masters usually do. Harker



and Flora's attitudes can even be taken for a message sent to African political leaders who did not protect their people when foreigners invaded their lands to capture slaves. Goldthorpe (1984, p. 45) writes in this sense:

Slavery was a traditional institution in many African societies, and those involved in the trade included African chiefs who made war on their neighbours, captured slaves, and sold them for guns to make further wars.

One of Williams's most important message in the novel is when she creates a scenario where a White woman is nursing a black child as stated as follows "At first, I (Dessa Rose) couldn't put no dependence on what I was seeing_ a white woman nursing a negro; negroes acting good as free" (Williams, 1986, p. 214). This position is very telling of Williams's wish to see race relationships in America turning into brotherhood, sisterhood and parenthood. In fact, it is her way of calling all American people, regardless of their races or ethnic groups, to be good and caring the ones towards the others. Instead of using her power to destroy other people, Miz Rufel uses it to help, guide and share love and goodness all around herself. Power, does she seem to say, is not for the destruction of others, but for the contribution of people's development whereas for Dessa Rose, contestation and resistance are compulsory for a slave who wants to get to freedom and be autonomous as illustrated in this passage:

Given her situation, Dessa's very survival requires her to recognize that the performance of power establishes its own prior truth, and that the everyday actions through which slavery is maintained are therefore subject to contestation, resistance, and resignification (Burns, 2013, p. 121).

The final resolution of the novel is very informative of Williams's intention to bring peace and harmony in the American society. In reality, between Ruth and the Negroes, everything has been good and their separation has been regrettable for all of them. Black slaves nourish a feeling of recognition about all that Ruth has done for them. All the moment they stay together, there is an attitude of mutual protection which cannot be forgotten for a good person. Dessa Rose acknowledges:

I have met some good white men_Eckland, he was always fair with us; Nathan rode for him on two wagon trains. Many the time he have sat at my table. And Brim live down the road; the steeles down to the Junction. But none the equal of Ruth (Williams, 1986, pp. 259-260).



This acknowledgement of *Dessa Rose* is very political. Through it, the author tries to call both white and black community for building up a spirit of tolerance, love, solidarity, mutual respect. It is a way of urging people to live stuck to human values, the only guarantee of social life and stop preconceived ideas because good and evil can be found everywhere. Inscoe (1989, p. 423) defends:

Through interaction of black and white, male and female, in various combinations throughout her novel, she demonstrates the moral ambiguities and inconsistencies in all of her characters. Both her masters and slaves are capable of injustices, violence, and cruelty, and her white women, as well as black, are subject to various forms of victimization by men, black and white. One critic noted with approval that Williams "turns the institution upside down in order to suggest that human relations were determined more by individual personalities than by social roles."

Through one of the messages of her character, *Dessa Rose*, Williams thinks of the future generations:

Well, this the childrens have heard from our own lips. I hope they never have to pay what it costs us to own ourselves. Mother, brother, sister, husband, friends... my own girlhood all I ever had was the membrance of a daddy's smile. Oh, we have paid for our children's place in the world again, and again... (Williams, 1986, p. 260).

The passage above shows that there is a policy behind any Art. In writing a novel about black history, not only does Williams try to keep it, but she is participating to its good transmission to the future generations. She is not a historian; she gives a historical function to her novel which inspiries from real events as stated below:

Williams weaves this narrative of *Dessa Rose* from two "real" events. She connects the story of a pregnant, black slave woman who, in 1829, helped lead an uprising on a Kentucky slave coffle and a white woman who, in 1830, harbored fugitive slaves on her remote North Carolina plantation. Says Williams, "How sad, that these two women never met." With this sentiment in mind she constructs the narrative of a white and black woman of the antebellum South who defy social and sexual orders usually dominated by the white slave master (King, 1993, p. 354).

Williams' appreciation of both women seems to be very positive. All of them garner a lot of good things in their hearts, which push them to fight injustice in all its forms even though they have, sometimes, to face each other.



CONCLUSION

In the relationship between Blacks and Whites in *Dessa Rose*, the intention of dominating others has been remarkable. Characters are running for power that they do not really master because it has a lot of temptations. After the institutionalization of black slavery, white masters are so powerful that they can even kill any black person for any reason without being concerned. As a proof, the massacre on Wilson's coffin is very telling of the white masters' cruelties on the Negroes.

The abusive position of masters is then at the origin of the Negroes resistance and rebellion which engenders a lot of deaths on both sides. However, this occasion has been seized by the author to show and express the political function of a writer which cannot be separated from social aspirations and orientations. Since power has drastically changed the characters' mentalities, turning them into cruel people, Williams seems to take a pilgrim position to soothe the tensions.

Williams creates many situations where, she seems to be calling American people to install tolerance and respect among all ethnic groups in America. She then stresses human values, calling for love, the spirit of solidarity as expressed in the relationship between Miz Rufel and the Negroes. In writing a novel about slavery, her aim, far from reenacting vengeance among communities, is to build up a good society, learning from the errors of the past.

The objective of power should not be to abuse the others but to serve them appropriately as Ruth has done with the black slaves, helping them to get to the North despite the many risks of this journey. As a white lady, she imperils her life and even freedom if it were discovered that she was helping runaways to be free. Through her behavior, Williams seems to praise the attitude of people who sacrifice their lives for other people regardless of their origins, races or ethnic groups because she does understand that the right to live, pursue one's happiness and keep one's dignity is common to all human beings as defended in the American Constitution. Power is inseparable from social peace and harmony, otherwise it drives directly to human self-destruction as it was the case during the enslavement of Africans by White people.

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