

FAMILY DYNAMICS AND THE PURSUIT OF DREAMS IN A RACIST SOCIETY IN AUGUST WILSON'S FENCES.

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Abstract

The American history is marked by the multiraciality of its population. Among this multicolored people, are the blacks, deported from Africa to America in 1619 as slaves. They have finally been freed from the chains of slavery in 1868. But, persistent discriminations continue to hinder the effectiveness of the rights granted by this new status. In this new posture, they noticed that they are not offered the same opportunities as their fellow whites. To be short, racism is manifestly guided against them, living them to harsh living conditions, which have repercussions from generations to generations. This is what August Wilson perceived and painted in Fences, a play from which, themes like family dynamics, racism and failure of pursuit of dreams are clearly underlined as the thematique of this study.

The aim of this article, being to identify how the American social system of the 1950s has disoriented black individuals and disrupted their sense of hope in a racist environment, which has traumatized Troy Maxson and had a significant impact on his family. Therefore, sociocriticism and family systems theory will be used as the framework for literary analysis.

Key words: Racism, Family, Pursuit of dream, Conflict

Résumé

L'histoire américaine est marquée par la multiracialité de sa population. Parmi ce peuple multicolor, se trouvent les Noirs, déportés d'Afrique en Amérique en 1619 en tant qu'esclaves. Ils ont enfin été libérés des chaînes de l'esclavage en 1868. Cependant, des discriminations persistantes continuent de faire obstacle à l'effectivité des droits accordés par ce nouveau statut. Dans cette nouvelle posture, ils constatent qu'on ne leur offre pas les mêmes

opportunités que leurs concitoyens blancs. En bref, le racisme est manifestement dirigé à leur endroit, les laissant dans des conditions de vie difficiles, de génération en génération. C'est ce qu'August Wilson a perçu et dépeint dans *Fences*, une pièce où des thèmes comme les dynamiques familiales, le racisme et l'échec dans la réalisation des rêves sont clairement soulignés constituant la thématique de cette étude.

Le but de ce travail étant de cerner comment le système social américain des années 1950 a désorienté les Noirs et bouleversé ce qu'ils considéraient comme de l'espoir dans un environnement raciste pendant des générations. Ce qui a traumatisé Troy Maxson, impactant drastiquement sa famille, la sociocritique et la théorie des systèmes familiaux serviront alors d'analyse littéraire.

Mots clés: Racisme, Famille, Réalisation des rêves, Conflit

Introduction

Since human being existence, family dynamics have been a central mark to society. But, with the instauration of slavery, America has added to this mark, a tragic aspect called slavery which end produced racism, which itself, traumatized the Blacks and distanced them from their dreams. August Wilson, of his real name Frederick August Kittel, as an Afro American playwright, raises his voice through literary works like his play *Fences* in which, with clear objectivity, paints the America 1950s society with its vicious racism.

Fences explores the themes of disappointment, family relationships, love and betrayal, through the story of Troy Maxson who had been mistreated by his father and ended up leaving the family home at 14. This situation impacted negatively his life to the point he became a violent man, conducting him to prison, where he met his best friend Bono and got the dream of becoming a baseball player. His skin color betrayed him with this dream, constructing in him an awful idea of the American society. For him, no black individual is made to succeed with this racist system.

Furthermore, he met Rose with whom, he built a family and got a son: Cory who became an antagonist to his father

because of their divergent view of the American society. The example of this family teaches us how complex are family relationships generally resulting from past and environmental realities. Racism has been a real fence in the pursuit of Troy's dream and has an impact on those who, like Cory, want to follow their own aspirations. These existential realities of Troy Maxson's which have been those of the whole black community in American, meticulously painted by August Wilson, guide us to the following topic: "Family Dynamics and the Pursuit of Dreams in a racist Society in August Wilson's *Fences*". The choice of this play is not hazardous at all: D.S. Johnson Mills in "Family Dynamics in Literature: Why we Relate so Deeply", underlines that "Family relationships serve as a backdrop for many significant themes in literature. They often highlight the multifaceted nature of love and conflict, illustrating how familial ties can both uplift and undermine individuals".

Talking about family, Ng, Celeste, in *Little Fires Everywhere* (2017), asserts that from traditional structures to evolving forms, authors adeptly navigate the complexities of familial bonds to illuminate broader themes of identity, belonging, conflict, and societal critique. Family, as depicted in contemporary fiction, serves as a microcosm of society itself, embodying the diverse array of human experiences and relationships. When looking closely at the tension between Troy and Cory, we can be seen as a mere misunderstanding: while Cory sees a new American society, stainless of social inequalities, Troy's attitude of refusing Cory's playing football can be seen as a means of protection and warning because of his own life tortured by racism. So, racism can be seen as the catalyst of the conflict between Troy and his son who is, through his father's attitude, watching the collapse of his dreams.

In his book *As a Man Thinketh* (1902), James Allen shows that "The dreams are the saviors of the world...Dreams lofty dreams, so shall you become". In other word, James means

that the departure point of any great success precede the dream. The Dream is the main thing which gives hope that one day, will permit to achieve our objectives. The same for Abraham Maslow when he quotes in his novel *Hierarchy of Needs* that: “Dreams as ambitions are part of the need for self-actualization, the accomplishment of personal potential, self-fulfillment, and seeking personal growth and peak experiences”.

These definitional approaches help us understand the topic in the lens of Maya Angelou’s poem *Still I Rise* which sheds light on justice and discrimination in American society to fight against it in order to establish equality in and give the same chances to people, both whites and blacks (1978). Claude McKay also contributes to the promotion of this equal society in his poem *White House* in which he expresses his personal feelings about alienation and the desire for acceptance in a society that often marginalizes individuals based on race (1922). Concerning the pursuit of dreams, Nandy Intan Kurnia in her Article *August Wilson’s Fences: The African-American Women’s Pursuit of Dreams Seen from the Perspectives of Rose Maxson* (2010), teaches us the struggle of black people like Troy pursue their dreams as reflected in Wilson’s *Fences*. Nandy’s article, especially, deals an African American woman whose dream was to have a good family and husband — to give a sense to her life and live happily.

The target of this study will be reached through the following questions: how does August Wilson use this play to sensitize the audience about family dynamics? How can racism affect someone’s objectives? How can someone’s dreams be perturbed by someone else’s past? And finally, how does August Wilson succeed in, indirectly, answering these questions in *Fences*.

To go through these questions, sociocriticism and family systems theory are the ideal guides to develop this topic. Claude Duchet (1971), referring to what is seen as the sociality of

literature, defines what he calls "socio-criticism" as "a critical semiology of ideology" whose purpose is "to place [...] the logos of the social at the center of critical activity and not outside of it" (Claude Duchet, février 1971, p. 14) ».

In his thesis *“Family Systems Theory as Literary Analysis: The Case of Philip Roth”*, Sarah Eden Schiff cited Murray Bowen and John V. Knapp who, respectively, argue that: the “family is a system in that a change in one part of the system is followed by compensatory change in other parts of the system” makes a universal claim that seems “anti-humanities””. As John V. Knapp explains:

The family system becomes the source of the matrix of identity, rather than only the individual character. Thus, the “causes” of a given problem in growing up (and beyond) in fictional and real families is much less the person construct or single event, and more the emotional process that links people and events. . . . To understand a member(s) of a fictional family, one needs to understand the family system.

For a detailed exposition, this study is structured into three axes. The first axe titled “Family Dynamics in *Fences*” deeply portrays the family August Wilson uses to illustrate African Americans’ norms and realities in the 1950s racist America. The nuclear family used as illustration is composed of Troy Maxson, his wife Rose Lee and their child Cory. The confined family is blended through Lyons, Troy’s son from a previous marriage and extended to his younger brother Gabriel and Raynell, his illegitimate daughter, whose presence creates new dynamics in Troy’s family. The second axe titled “Racism and Social Constraints” relates how Troy Maxson was traumatized by the 1950s America’s vicious racism and the promising horizon envisioned by his son Cory. And the third axe

tilted “The Pursuit of Dreams and its impossible Achievement” paints Troy’s failure to become baseball player because of racism and his refusal to let Cory play football for the reasons.

I — Family Dynamics in *Fences*

Before tackling this part, it is important to foretell that D.S.Johnson Mills clearly underlines that “With family dynamics at the core, literature often weaves common themes such as loyalty, betrayal, and sacrifice”¹, items which are, in August Wilson’s *Fences*, the prototypes of the family used to identify the African American life in the 1950s America. Troy Maxson is the head of the family composed of Rose (his wife) and his sons (Lyons and Cory). His family embodies all the known dynamics: from nuclear to blended and extended. His nuclear family include Rose and Cory, but the present of Lyons, his son from a previous marriage, and Raynell, his illegitimate daughter, render Troy’ family a blended one. Finally, his family is extended by the fact he is supposed to care for his mentally ill young brother. He is introduced as a complex figure, embodying authority and concrete fatherhood; building a patriarchal family. Thus, Troy Maxson became an ambiguous character because of his past experiences and aspirations. He did not expect to be such a person, the American systemic racial society made his such a person. His behavior can be rooted in his upbringing stained of difficult relationship with his own father. A relationship which instilled a sense of tough love. He had had a father who had known “the importance of having family relationships that are loving and supportive”². This past truly influences his character and has significantly impacted the way he built a relationship between him and his sons, even his wife. In his family, he focuses on responsibility and discipline. He never forgets that he

¹ Family Dynamics in Literature: Why We Relate So Deeply
<https://dsjohnson-millsauthor.com/author/dsjohnsonmills/>

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is and should be the provider for the family, in spite of the hard realities of life he thinks his wife and children should be aware of. To show that to them, he uses authority and strict control over them. Troy should be understood that way, especially when he tells Cory that:

"it's my job. It's my responsibility! You understand that? A man got to take care of his family. You live in my house...sleep you behind on my bedclothes...fill you belly up with my food...cause you my son. You my flesh and blood. Not 'cause I like you! Cause it's my duty to take care of you. I owe a responsibility to you!" (p. 38).

This is the way he introduces the role of the father he is to his son. It is a responsibility to take care of one's family, not a matter of love. Unfortunately for him, the fact of assuming these responsibilities toward his family makes him the true and unique chief of the family, extending his ability to dictate and enforce fences, which creates tension within the family. His refusal to allow Cory to pursue a football career results from his fear of racial discrimination which causes his own failure in his sport aspirations. It is in the same vein that Mary L. Bogumil (1999), in her Article *Understanding August Wilson*, demonstrates African Americans lifestyle and their family management through their experiences. She explains how African Americans follow their ancestral system of ruling the family by placing man as a dictator — as social norm. Troy's authoritative behavior often alienates him from his children, highlighting the complex interplay between his protective instincts and his authoritarian demeanor. Unfortunately, this authority is complicated by his new relationship with Rose, his wife; as well as his responsibility as a father. However, Rose is still the prototype of African American woman who often serves

as a mediator and counterbalance to the husband's rigid authority in the family. Despite his social failures and particularly in sport and his eventual betrayal, Rose's faith in a solid and coherent family underscores the duality of Troy's role as both a provider and an imperfect man in quest of redemption means at a moment where opportunities are extremely limited. Harry Justin Eliam (2006), in *The past and present in August Wilson Drama*, emphasizes woman's place in the family and her devotion to a stable family. This article shed light on the role of a female gender seen as a wife in the family and her ability to sacrifice herself for the family welfare. So, because of marital strains of gender roles, Rose accepts the role of the silent resilient woman. She accepts to go on playing unconditionally the role of the perfect caretaker and emotional support to an unbearable and infidel husband and an almost broken family.

Throughout the play, Rose's marriage to Troy Maxson encounters significant challenges: Troy's infidelity and emotional distance, his excessive authority and constant shoutings at the children; especially Cory. Despite her inner pain, Rose maintains her composure and upholds her role as the stabilizing force in the household. She represent the quiet endurance who prefers to listen and wait. She never pretends to confront directly. She is the woman, the wife and the mother; she fits the mold of the family's coherence — representing then, the "third person" in Kerr's "triangle". In fact, in his thesis "Family Systems Theory as Literary Analysis: The Case of Philip Roth" Sarah Eden Schiff cited Kerr who explains that a triangle "is considered the building block or 'molecule' of larger emotional systems because a triangle is the smallest stable relationship system. A two-person system is unstable because it tolerates little tension before involving a third person".

Her decision to take care of Troy's child from his infidelity went further than simple female role. It is not a passive acceptance of her husband's infidelity, but the reflex of a

complex expression of love, morality, and endurance, giving a sense of both emotional and moral to her strength. She precises, before taking the child: “I will take care of your baby for you ... cause ... like you say she’s innocent ... and you can’t visit the sins of father upon the child” (p. 79). Here, although partly and unwillingly, Rose forgave Troy. But, he, did not forgive Cory with whom there has always been a conflicted relationship.

In fact, the complex relationship between Troy Maxson and his son Cory exemplifies the profound intergenerational conflict that often arises within families. This kind of relationship generally results from understandings, the choice of personal ambition and the weight of familial expectations. The tense relationship between Troy and his son is inextricably tied to the father’s past experiences which shape his worldview, leading him to adopt a protective and oppressive stance towards Cory, who aspires to become a football player. Like in many Black families in which past traumas still live in the present, Troy’s own failures and disappointments conduct him categorically to refuse Cory’s ambition. He believes that the American society is pitiless and still have the same glance at Black people and that pursuing sports will lead Cory to the same disillusionment he experienced. That is why, Simmons G (1999), in his article *Intergenerational conflict in August Wilson Fences. African American Review*, shows how Troy projects his fears in Cory with his over protection mentality. But, Cory does not understand the thing this way and that creates a conflict between father and son.

In fact, Cory represents a new generation eager to break free from the constraints imposed by the past. For him, playing football is an opportunity that Troy never had — because of the old system. Cory’s attempts to assert his independence are met with resistance from Troy who fears that his son will face the same disappointments and pain he endured. For Troy, Cory should forget about football playing; it is better for him to do

what Black people are sentenced for in America. Troy still believes that toughness, hard work, sacrifice and resilience are what America considers essential for their survival. This misunderstanding leads to an explosive confrontation, crating in Cory the decision to leave home. This is a clear symbol of the painful rupture between generations, due to racism and the constraints it imposes to the society.

II — Racism and Social Constraints

The 1950s in America was a tumultuous period marked by significant social and political changes, particularly racial relations. This period witnessed the deep-seated legacy of racism that permeated every aspect of life for African Americans, manifesting in systemic discrimination, social segregation, and widespread violence. To understand the context of racism of this time, it is essential to consider the historical backdrop that shaped the life of African Americans, painted through Troy Maxson, his wife (Rose), his children (Lyons, Cory and Raynell), his young brother (Gabriel) and his friend Bono in *Fences* by August Wilson.

In the play, racism has had a traumatic impact on Troy's life, even as a father; changing him mentally to the point he sees America as the evil and projects this fear on his son Cory. He clearly expresses it when he tells Rose: "I got good sense, woman. I got sense enough not to let my boy get hurt over playing no sports" (p. 39). This can be seen as the expression of a man visibly out of himself, a man affected by the bitterness left by racism and who is determined to protect a son he does not want to be "miserable" like him. Of course, this is part of parental roles. Troy knows, like Alice Walker (1982), in *The Color Purple* that racism can decrease self-esteem and contribute to the minimization of our potentials to serve society and realize our most ardent dreams. Ralph Ellison, to talk about

how racism erases Blacks in the American society, underlines it can lead some people to feel themselves invisible and useless in the society. In his book *Invisible Man* (1952), he relates the experience of an unnamed black narrator who feels himself invisible in a racially divided America. It means that racism deprives people from their full existence as a human being. In this case, we can imagine that racism can bring rebellion in the society and traumatize some individuals.

In *Fences*, Troy Maxson was visibly traumatized by his being refused a post in football because of the color of his skin and even working, this reason was also the reason of his being refused to drive. These racial barriers in sports and employment tormented the black communities in general and Troy Maxson, in particular. Thus, through Troy, August Wilson tries to popularize the inequalities faced by African Americans, to reveal how importantly discriminatory practices limit opportunities for Black individuals to prosper. Troy still got this mind limitation that no Black can have a good job in this racial system. And it is what he tries to put in Cory's mind: "The white man ain't gonna let you get nowhere with that football noway. You go on and get your book-learning so you can work yourself up to A&P or learn how to fix cars or build houses or something, get you a trade" (p. 35). Through this, Troy clearly underlines the impossibility for black people to find a good job in a society ruled by white, still referring to his own experience — past and present. In the past, he aspired to play football but the social realities remind him his place, as a Black. In the present, he was not offered a good job opportunity; he became a rubbish collector, with insignificant weekly-pay. Did Sarah Schiff Eden, in "Family Systems Theory as Literary Analysis: The Case of Philip Roth", not focus on the uniqueness of individuals? She clearly underlines that "It is important to realize, though, that differentiating a self from the family unit does not entail cutting off from one's family; it rather requires recognizing one's

unique position within the family system in relation to the other members". Troy did not mention nor take into account Cory's uniqueness. He is not to blame. It is the trauma of racism.

In fact, this is the 1950s America where black workers were either excluded from certain jobs or confined to the lowest rungs of the employment ladder, reinforcing the cycle of poverty and disenfranchisement, creating a psychological impact on the black individual in general and more particularly on Troy Maxson. This psychological trauma that would resonate for generations and Troy will try to perpetuate it through Cory. He wanted Cory to accept and believe in those negative stereotypes associated to black people — as Langston Hughes (1926), in his Poem *The Negro Speaks of the Rivers* tells us the historical and emotional journey of African Americans, connecting rivers to the deep roots of cultural and systemic oppression. The pressure to conform to societal expectations can also result in distress and anxiety, as individuals grapple with the duality of their identity navigating between their cultural heritage and the dominant societal norms that often devalue them, engendering a sense of hopelessness and helplessness. The barriers to education, employment, and social mobility can foster feelings of despair among those affected, leading to a pervasive belief that change is unattainable. Even though these challenges occur, resilience is a vital aspect of the African American experience. Many individuals and communities have developed coping mechanisms and strategies to navigate the psychological impact of systemic oppression.

The historical legacy of slavery, segregation, and discrimination carry all that that the African Americans have kept as souvenir for the American society. This vision created a collective memory of pain and suffering that is passed from generation to generation. Children raised in such an environments are supposed to also be marked by such a

systemic oppression. Apparently, Troy is pushing Cory into this legacy.

III -The Pursuit of Dreams and its impossible Achievement

In August Wilson's play, Troy Maxson epitomizes the struggle between ambition and the harsh realities imposed by societal norms. His life is marked by broken dreams and a pervasive bitterness that results from unfulfilled aspirations. Troy's life story reflects the broader themes of lost potential and the psychological toll of systemic oppression. This radically racial society blocks Troy from becoming a professional baseball player in Major League Baseball when he was young. Nobody mentioned his skill and determination; just the system does not want a Black around. By the time Jackie Robinson (p. 9) broke the color barrier in 1947, Troy was already past his prime, having faced years of exclusion and discrimination. This unfulfilled dream becomes a profound resentment for him, leading him to project his frustrations onto those around him, particularly his son Cory, who he considers as a hope, the potential performer of his unperformed visions.

Internally aware that the failure to realize his dreams was not just due to personal aspirations but also intertwined with his identity as a Black man in America, he cannot venture to let his own son live the same experience in the same America. Thus, he carries the weight of generational struggles, still reminding the reality that has denied him the opportunities enjoyed by his white promotional in the same America. Troy Maxson, by refusing his son to play football, continues to dwell on what he considered as injustice and dishonest from the nation he considers to be his. Cory, by being sure that he is eligible to play football in America, visibly contracts with his father. Hannah Byers, in her Article *Breaking the Cycle: Trauma, black masculinity and systemic Oppression in August Wilson's*

Fences, highlights this explosive confrontation between Troy and Cory in Act two scene four. She supports that this confrontation illustrates the rooted pain that arises from unhealed wounds from society. This sense of injustice festers within him, shaping his worldview and influencing his relationships. Troy's bitterness manifested in his interactions with others with whom he often adopts a cynical and confrontational attitude. Troy Maxson's tragedy lies not only in his unfulfilled dreams but also in his inability to recognize the potential for change within himself and his family; especially within Cory.

In fact, while the other members of the family try their best to do exactly what the father — known for his discipline, traditional values, and firm belief in duty — very early, Cory turned elsewhere, with his strong desire to make football a career. He categorically refuses to make his father's legacy to be the guide of his dreams. For Cory, dreams were not distinct from reality but a necessary fuel for it. We mean dreams are catalysts to reality. Thus, while his father still dreams of the past, a past that had refused him the right to be American, Cory longed for a positive present that roads to a brighter future.

Cory's mentality captured by a desire to follow his own dreams creates a deep labyrinth between him and his father — a kind of generational conflict. Troy, with a static worldview, misunderstands Cory who sees a possibility to succeed where his father sees failure: "Just cause you didn't have the chance! You just scared I'm gonna be better than you, that's all" (p. 58). In other words, Cory perceives his father's refusal as a revenge for his unfulfilled dreams. This is another misunderstanding; from Cory. He could not hear the voice of protection of his father who does not want his son to be humiliated by the system — like him. This clearly remembers the relationship between Jimmy Carter and his father, in his poem "I Wanted to share my Father's World". In this poem, Cater, manifestly, expresses the

hatred he had for his father because of his rigor: “I despised the discipline (L7) / he used to shape what I should be (L8). But, at the end, he realized how good this father was for: “his final hours, and came to see (L20)/what he’d become, or always was (L21)/he father who will never cease to be (L22)/alive in me (L23) (Jimmy Carter; p. 99).

Rather than walking in his father's footsteps, Cory creates his own path; seeking his own way for success. In doing so, he started a difficult, uncertain process of seeing what and who he is really; a kind of self-redefinition which is, in any case necessary. He, contrary to his father, does not see that as an act of rebellion. He sees it just as a quest for personal freedom. But, he did not realize that the price of non-conformism is often loneliness. He did not question Sula Peace, in Toni Morrison's *Sula* who can be cited as a perfect example.

For having chosen his own path, Cory felt himself estranged not just from his father's expectations, but sometimes from his own certainty. But despite his internal troubles, he insisted, because he was very sure that choosing a path true to oneself even if it does not follow the family expectations means courage, not defiance. His story should remind that the pursuit of dreams often requires the painful rejection of what others consider as sacred. Thus, with this faith, he hoped to assume his choice and complete his quest for freedom.

In the achievement of his desire, Cory sees hope not as a simple feeling but as a real act of resistance; because he grew up in a family rigidly structured where conformism to Troy's expectations is the single norm. So, hope seems to be his only salvation, the foundation for his journey toward freedom. Hope offered a glimpse of another life, one not dictated by tradition or fear, but by the quiet conviction that he could choose differently, highlighting, thus, Bowen's concept of “Differentiation of Self” which, he defines as “the degree to which one self fuses or merges into another self in close emotional relationships”. That

differentiating a self from the family unit does not entail cutting off from one's family; it rather requires recognizing one's unique position within the family system in relation to the other members.

Throughout the play, Cory's power of choice emerged progressively. Since his early years, he often had the impression that he was submitted to external decisions; concerning what to study, how to behave and even who he should be. But as he matured, he began to understand that true freedom lies not in escaping responsibility, but in claiming agency. Any small act of defiance, the desire to refuse the path drawn by his father, the decision to move away or the risk of choosing his artistic career instead of stable job as prescribed by his father was an assertion of his right to choose. Philosopher Viktor Frankl wrote on his book *Man's search for Meaning* (1959) that, "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances". This assertion can be understood as a permission to everyone to follow his dreams freely, beyond those obstacles others can see.

But freedom sometimes has paradoxical sides or effects. It be accompanied by internal battles of self-doubt and fear. He, at a certain moment, discovered that freedom was not just a destination but a strong desire in his choices to stay true to himself, whatever the realities. Yet does hope still remain his compass. It guides him by reminding him that nobody's can create his freedom, but he and himself is responsible for his destiny. In rejecting a predetermined life, Cory delves into these ambitions, with the faith that authenticity is worth the risk. His decision became a testament to the idea that hope, choice and the quest for freedom represent full life in spite of the loneliness and the uncertainty of the answers.

Conclusion

After a general course of the play, we notice that *Fences* is August Wilson's way of painting African Americans' life of the 1950s America. Through themes like family dynamics, racism and the pursuit of dreams he uses Troy Maxson's internal and external reactions to express the unspoken voice of his people whose rights, as Americans, were confiscated by a systemic racism. He succeeded in creating characters like Troy Maxson, Rose Lee, Lyons and Cory who are surrounded by minor but extremely significant characters like Bono, Gabriel, and Raynell. To materialize the real society of the 1950s America, Wilson mention an invisible but sensible white representation through Troy's speeches, mentioning his white bosses.

He chooses Troy Maxson as the protagonist who, as a 53 African American, is the prototype of all the items of the topic of this study: "Family Dynamics and the Pursuit of Dreams in racist Society in August Wilson's *Fences*. Troy Maxson, in his quest of a perfect family, turned to authoritarian, patriarchal and violent man. An abrupt change that results from racism which has given rise to a permanent frustration within him, the source of an almost hatred for whites. This racism broke his dreams and transformed him to a rubbish collector, instead of a talented baseball player. Racism forced African Americans to sell "the use of their muscles and their bodies. They cleaned houses and washed clothes, they shined shoes and in quiet desperate and vengeful pride, they stole, and lived in pursuit of their own dreams" (the play). It is the pursuit of the African Americans' new vision of the American society that has connected Troy Maxson and Jim Bono in prison to a lifetime

friendship. In the introduction of *Fences*, a picture of Troy is underlined as followed:

Troy learns violence from him [his father] but he also learns the value of work and the fact that a man takes responsibility for his family no matter how difficult circumstances may be. He learns respect for a home, the importance of owning land and the importance of an education because he does not have one.

To pursue this stability, he married Rose Lee with whom he has Cory — who has turned into an antagonist to Troy — after Lyons, his eldest son from a previous marriage and then Raynell his illegitimate daughter. Troy's family is extended to his younger brother Gabriel, unfortunately, crazy because of the war; one of Troy's reasons to be mad at America: an “excellent baseball player, Troy learns that in the land of equal opportunity, chances for a black man are not equal, and that the same country that deprived him asked sacrifice of his brother in World War II and got it” (Introduction). The War has taken Gabriel's “life” because he ended up with “a metal plate in the head” (P. 24) and sees himself as Archangel Gabriel.

Rose, by contrast, illustrates the silent strength and endurance often required of African American. Her commitment to her family, even in front of her husband's betrayal, is the true meaning of love, sacrifice, and resilience. Rose's decision to take care of Raynell, Troy's daughter, is beyond mere love. It is not submission. It is what is called moral conviction, extreme sacrifice, and the silent acceptance of gender roles. Her agency lies not in rebellion but in her capacity for forgiveness, caretaking, and unwavering principles.

Wilson's *Fences*, if closely approached, develops our topic through the antagonism between Troy and his son Cory; because this conflict conducts Troy to dwell on the effects of

racism and to internalize the belief that success is unattainable for Black men in a white-dominated society, while Rose promotes a new America, arguing that “times have changed … people change” (p. 40). These two opposite views of the American social realities clearly illustrate to what extend trauma and dreams can collide across generations.

In fact, his harsh behavior towards his family and especially towards Cory is not really an expression of anger or harshness, it can sometimes rather be interpreted as emotional fear. He so loves his family that he does not want them to live the experiences the American system imposed him. A system that has taught him to survive rather than to dream. This view of the American society builds a psychological fence that limits his vision and poisons his relationships. The fact of refusing to allow Cory to become a football player is an attempt for Troy to preserve his son from the same pain he endured, without really realizing that with such a behavior, he unconsciously perpetuates the cycle of restriction and repression. Troy and Cory represent in *Fences*, two different worlds: one built on bitterness and barriers, and another on possibility and change.

This study permits to realize that Wilson’s *Fences* work goes beyond a simple play. It is the representation of America’s historical drawing of the African Americans. Wilson’s critique of systemic injustice and exploration of personal freedom go with present struggles, making this play an enduring text in African American and world literature. The shortest and simple summary one can draw from this play is that while Troy’s dreams are shattered, Cory dares to dream of an America of opportunities for black fellows; raising two major questions: how does the American society change, in favor of African Americans, as promoted by Rose? Do African American continue to persecute the new generations on the basis of their past? On page 85, let us look at this conversation between Cory and Troy.

Troy Without saying excuse me???

Cory: I ain't got to say excuse me to you. You don't count around here no more.

A single question raises from this conversation: Can generational conflict, at this rate, lead to lack of respect?

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