

Research Analyzing of Family Dynamics and Conflicts in August Wilson's *Fences*

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## ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes family dynamics and conflicts in August Wilson's play, *Fences*. Family dynamics refer to the patterns that guide how family members interact with each other. They are usually defined by the way family members communicate and relate with each other, their roles within the family and how they manage conflicts in the family. Family dynamics model the behaviors of the family members. On the other hand, conflicts refer to the disagreements or arguments that usually go on for a long time. Therefore, family conflicts are the arguments or disagreements that take place in a family. All families are bound to experience family dynamics and conflicts and because of this, August Wilson wrote *Fences* to explain these conflicts and dynamics through a literary lens and how they affect real-life familial bonds. *Fences* is a play written by August Wilson on a set-up portraying the blooming black rights movements between 1954 and 1968. *Fences* was written in 1985, but it depicted the 1950s lifestyle. The play has black characters who show how limited opportunities were to the people of color and how oppression against the blacks was the major problem in the United States of America during these times. Guided by postcolonial theory, Wilson has used the play *Fences* to bring to light various themes like racism, manhood and masculinity, marriage and faithfulness, and practicality and idealism through his characters and their various life experiences. The play consists of two generations that contradict each other's beliefs, and they are all unified by one factor: racism and black man oppression. Major characters like Troy Maxson illustrate oppression and its impact on the black family. They portray life in the black neighborhood during the Black Urban Realism literary period, between 1954 and 1968. There are conflicts in the Maxson family which show family dynamics in that home. Wilson has used the fence throughout his play as a symbol that represents the imaginary barriers that the main characters, Troy's family members, build to keep themselves safe. The fences throughout the play show the conflicting desires of Troy Maxson's family members and the dynamics between them. Therefore, an examination of Wilson's *Fences* through Troy's family relationships will illustrate the reasons for the conflicts and differences. This study will help the writer explain how August Wilson has used the family unit to explore broader themes of race, class and gender and to identify the underlying factors that shape family dynamics and perpetuate or resolve conflicts within the Maxson family through a qualitative analysis of the dialogue in *Fences*.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction

This study will conduct a deep analysis of family dynamics and conflicts in August Wilson's *Fences*. Family dynamics refer to the patterns and interactions that exist within a family system, including the relationships between family members, communication styles, roles, and behaviors. Family dynamics can be influenced by a variety of factors, such as culture, religion, socioeconomic status, and individual personalities and experiences. Some examples of family dynamics include the roles that family members play within the household (such as parent, child, sibling), the way that decisions are made within the family, how conflicts are resolved, the emotional climate of the family (whether it is warm and supportive, or tense and distant), and how much autonomy and independence family members are allowed. On the other hand, conflict refers to a disagreement or struggle between two or more individuals or groups who have opposing interests, needs, goals, or values. Conflict can arise in a variety of settings, including interpersonal relationships, organizations, communities, and even between nations. Conflict can take many forms, ranging from mild disagreement to open hostility and violence. It can be caused by a variety of factors, including differences in personality, culture, communication styles, and power dynamics. Conflict can also be fueled by external factors such as limited resources, competition, or political or economic instability.

*Fences* is a two-act play written by August Wilson. It is about a family, The Maxsons Family that has Troy Maxson as head of family and also the protagonist of the play. The whole family is in conflicts and through symbolic fences, they try to protect themselves from the cruelties of the 1950s. The play depicts the realities and hardships faced by African Americans during this period such as discrimination, lack of opportunity, racism and more. Troy Maxson, tries to protect his family by the actual and metaphoric fences to prevent them from the adversities he faced in his family when growing up, not knowing that he is instead pushing them away and earning their resentment. Guided by the cultural practices of this era, Troy tries hard to shape his sons' careers but he kills their dreams instead. He uses his past life growing up as a reference to show them how their dreams are unachievable because of the discrimination against the blacks. The play is generally a depiction of life in the 1950s and it shows the exact discriminations and inequalities that the blacks faced during this era. Troy's wife Rose is another

character that helps Wilson depict the 1950s lifestyle. She is a dedicated wife who believes in Christianity and she works hard to unite and promote love in her household. She shows how taming husbands was a difficult task in the 1950s when she tries her best to remain loyal and subservient to Troy but he still goes ahead to have an affair with another woman. Troy's sons, Lyons and Cory also help Wilson to show the shifting cultural beliefs and norms in the 1950s. They have different dreams and ambitions that Troy try hard to discourage them from. Cory wants to be a professional footballer while Troy wants to become a successful musician but Troy believes that they cannot succeed with those career paths because those are white-dominated careers and the blacks have limited opportunities. August shows that Troy's inability to support his sons to their desired careers builds a fence between them bringing an enmity instead of a friendship between the family members. It shows the superiority of a father in a family and it also indicates how this superiority costs the fathers quality relationships with their children. It is a perfect indication of the family dynamics and conflicts and how they impact familial bonds though a 1950s setting.

## **Problem Statement**

Despite the enduring popularity and critical acclaim of August Wilson's play "Fences," there remains a need for deeper analysis of the complex family dynamics and conflicts depicted within the Maxson family. Specifically, there is a need to better understand the ways in which Wilson uses the family unit to explore broader themes of race, class, and gender, as well as the underlying factors that shape family dynamics and perpetuate or resolve conflicts within the Maxson family. By addressing these gaps in the existing literature, this paper aims to contribute to a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the ways in which families function and conflict within the context of broader societal and cultural norms.

This problem statement identifies the need for deeper analysis of the family dynamics and conflicts within "Fences" and establishes the importance of understanding these dynamics in the broader context of race, class, and gender. It also highlights the potential contributions of the research project to the existing literature on this topic.

## **Objective of Study**

To gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which Wilson uses the family unit to explore broader themes of race, class, and gender, and to identify the underlying factors that shape family dynamics and perpetuate or resolve conflicts within the Maxson family.

## **Research Questions**

1. How does August Wilson use the family unit to explore broader themes of race, class, and gender in "Fences"?
2. How does Wilson use symbolism and metaphor to convey the complexities of family relationships and conflicts in "Fences", and what broader messages might he be communicating through these literary devices?
3. How do the individual members of the Maxson family cope with the limitations and expectations imposed by their society and family structure, and how does this affect their relationships with one another?

## **Potential Limitations**

This research will utilize a qualitative analysis of the dialogue in *Fences*. However, this method has some limitations. For instance, qualitative analysis is highly subjective, and a researcher's personal biases and beliefs can influence their interpretation of the data. Therefore, the findings may be limited by my subjective interpretations. Moreover, there will be a small sample size. Since the data for this study is limited to the dialogue in a single play, the sample size is relatively small, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Also, there is a limited generalizability. Because "Fences" is a work of fiction, the findings may not be directly generalizable to real-life family dynamics or conflicts. Language barrier may also act as a limitation in this study. The dialogue in "Fences" is written in a particular style of African American Vernacular English, which may be difficult for some readers to understand or interpret correctly. There is also a limited context of the play. Without the full context of the play, including stage directions, setting, and nonverbal communication, it may be challenging to fully understand the meaning and implications of the dialogue.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

August Wilson's "Fences" has been widely regarded as a seminal work of African American literature. The play examines the complex family dynamics and conflicts within the Maxson family, exploring themes of race, class, and gender. In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the study of Wilson's work, with scholars analyzing the ways in which his plays depict the African American experience and shed light on broader social issues. This literature review aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the existing research on family dynamics and conflicts in "Fences," and to identify gaps in the literature that the current study will aim to address.

### Family dynamics and conflicts in "Fences"

Family dynamics and conflicts are central themes in "Fences." The play focuses on the Maxson family, specifically the relationship between the patriarch, Troy Maxson, and his family members. Wilson's portrayal of the Maxson family highlights the challenges faced by African American families during the mid-twentieth century, including economic inequality, racial discrimination, and gender roles.

In a study by Joycelyn K. Moody (1993), the author explores the representation of African American women in "Fences." The study argues that Wilson's portrayal of women in the play is complex and multifaceted, highlighting the intersectionality of race, class, and gender in shaping the experiences of African American women during the 1950s. African women are seen as the servants of their husbands and they act as objects to these men. Joyceklyn states that the African American women were the subordinates of their husbands and it is evident in *fences* when we see Rose battling for her husband's attention. She tells him that she had sacrificed her enjoyment to settle in a family but Troy does not seem to understand. Moreover, Alberta is a mere object to Troy as expressed in *Fences*. He states that he likes her big and healthy body and does not express his love for her in a proper way. To Troy, Alberta's legs are the best and her hips are the bonus for they act as a cushion during the 'ride.' Here, Joycelyn states that during the 1950s, women did not enjoy the privilege of having equality even in their own homes. However,



he illustrates how they were protectors of their families and how they tried hard to unite their homes. Rose convinces Troy to work with Troy on the Fence to come up with a father-son bond and she prays daily for Jesus to act as the fence to their home. Therefore, when though Wilson depicts women as the minority in their houses, they are important in promoting peace in the families.

Another study by Sharon L. Jones (2006) analyzes the role of language in "Fences," specifically how Wilson uses African American Vernacular English to highlight the cultural and linguistic identity of the African American characters in the play. The study argues that Wilson's use of AAVE is a powerful tool for portraying the experiences of African Americans and for shedding light on the broader social and cultural issues faced by this community. For instance, Wilson uses AAVE to highlight the cultural identity of African Americans is through the character of Gabriel, Troy's brother. Gabriel suffered a head injury during the war and is now mentally impaired. He speaks in a form of broken English that is not always grammatically correct but is filled with religious imagery and metaphor. This use of AAVE is a reflection of the religious and spiritual language that has long been a part of African American culture.

Another example is in the way Wilson uses AAVE to portray the experiences of African Americans in the context of racial discrimination. For instance, in Act One, Scene Four, Troy is speaking to his friend Bono about the discrimination he has faced on the job. He says, "You say I ain't got no sense of responsibility? That's just cause you don't want to hear what I got to say. But it ain't about what you want to hear. It's about what I got to say." Here, Wilson uses AAVE to emphasize the cultural and linguistic identity of Troy and to show how his experiences of discrimination have shaped his speech patterns and his attitude toward authority. Overall, Wilson's use of AAVE in "Fences" highlights the cultural and linguistic identity of the African American characters, and it also provides a means for exploring the experiences of African Americans in the context of broader social and cultural issues such as race, class, and gender.

A study by Shannon illustrates the conflict in Troy Maxson's family. Shannon explains that the central conflict shown is the man versus self-conflict. Troy is a conflicted man who hates himself because of life's hardship while growing up. Even though he does not show where he blames himself openly, it is evident that Troy has self-guilt because of lacking important chances like shining in the baseball team when growing up (Shannon, 1995). Troy blames his skin color for being the significant impact of his misfortunes, which is the primary reason he is bitter with

everyone. The lack of stardom in the baseball league is blamed on his skin color because he is convinced he is talented but unable to shine in the corrupt system (McCormick, pp.67). Wilson uses Troy's youth-life to portray him as the overprotective father who knows nothing about showing emotions and fatherly love to his children. He wants to make his sons callous and hardcore to get used to the racist and oppressive system. However, Troy is unaware that his overprotective nature is the main reason for the disputes in his family, which makes other characters like Cory hate him.

Paul Prece states that the play has shown the theme of post-colonialism. Postcolonial theory is a theoretical approach to analyzing the after-effects of response and resistance to the legacy of colonialism. After the colonization period, some behaviors erupted and were common such as racism and patriarchal hegemony. Racism is the discrimination, antagonism or prejudice by a certain community, institution, or individual against another individual or individuals based on their ethnic groups especially the groups that are usually minorities. According to Paul Prece, August depicts racism in many ways. African Americans cannot secure prime spots in different activities such as work places, in the music industry or in sports and games, Troy lives with hatred because he missed a spot in the Baseball league despite his talent. Therefore, his failure contributes to the conflict with his sons because they would also miss the best spots in their careers due to racism. He feels that Lyons cannot make it to the jazz music billboards because of his skin color and Cory cannot succeed in football because of racism. He acts protectively when he tells them to forget their dream careers but it leads to a conflict between them. Moreover, racism is evident in the play when the black men are subjected to lifting garbage while the white men are automatically made drivers. Troy disagrees with this notion and complains till he is made a driver. He asks Mr Rand, his employer, whether only white people have the sense of driving a truck. August Wilson uses *Fences* to show how racism was at the peak after colonization and the African Americans could not secure equal chances in life as their white counterparts.

A study by Durr states that patriarchal hegemony is another factor that was widespread after colonization. Patriarchal hegemony refers to male dominance in the social organization. A society with patriarchal hegemony refers to that which recognizes males as the dominating gender and the females are usually subordinate. August Wilson writes *Fences* from the point of view of postcolonial theory when he depicts patriarchal hegemony in his play. Troy perfectly

shows this in the play. He has no emotional attachment to his family and he roughs up Rose when she questions him about his mistress Alberta. He does not care about her sacrifices and her faithfulness to him because of the male dominance in that was common in the 1950s (Durr, 2017). He sees himself as the provider for the family and nothing more, thus leading to lack of the strong bond between him and his family members. This leads to his fallout with his son Cory. He cannot listen to his son and tells him right on his face that he only provides for the family because they are his responsibility and he does not need to love them to provide for them. Wilson shows that even though people that commonly perform patriarchal hegemony might appreciate the beauty of their family, they are more likely to act irrationally without considering their families because they feel they have the whole authority over the household.

Moreover, post-colonialism is evident when August Wilson shows the notion of religion in black neighborhoods. Wilson shows that after colonization, even though the men or heads of families did not deeply support religion, their wives were the ones who tried to bring Christianity to them. For instance, Troy is evidently a non-believer as he does not quote any bible verse or sermon, but uses baseball as his point of reference whenever trying to prove a point. On the other hand, Rose is a believer who attends the church service and prays to God to protect her family. She calls Jesus to act as her fence, another symbolization of fence as a protective figure, and guide her actions.

Despite the growing body of research on "Fences," there remains a need for deeper analysis of the complex family dynamics and conflicts depicted within the Maxson family. Specifically, there is a need to better understand the ways in which Wilson uses the family unit to explore broader themes of race, class, and gender, as well as the underlying factors that shape family dynamics and perpetuate or resolve conflicts within the Maxson family.

Overall, the existing research on "Fences" has shed light on the importance of family dynamics and conflicts in the play, as well as the ways in which Wilson uses the family unit to explore broader social and cultural issues. However, there remains a need for deeper analysis of the complex family dynamics and conflicts within the Maxson family, and for a more nuanced understanding of the underlying factors that shape these dynamics. The current study aims to contribute to this growing body of research by conducting a qualitative analysis of the dialogue in "Fences," with the goal of identifying key themes and patterns related to family dynamics and conflicts in the play.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Methodology**

#### ***Qualitative Analysis of Dialogues in “Fences”***

This chapter explores how Wilson has used the family unit to explore broader themes of race, class, and gender, and to identify the underlying factors that shape family dynamics and perpetuate or resolve conflicts within the Maxson family through a qualitative analysis of dialogues in *Fences*. A qualitative analysis of dialogues in a play involves a systematic and interpretive examination of the spoken words, language patterns, and other communication styles of the characters in the play. This analysis is done in order to gain a deeper understanding of the themes, conflicts, and ideas presented in the play.

In the case of "*Fences*," a qualitative analysis of the dialogues would involve close examination of the characters' speech patterns and language usage, such as the use of African American Vernacular English and other dialects, as well as the use of metaphors, allusions, and other literary devices. The analysis may also involve an exploration of the cultural and historical contexts that inform the characters' speech and actions, as well as the ways in which their dialogues reveal the relationships and power dynamics between characters.

The purpose of a qualitative analysis of dialogues in a play is to gain a more nuanced and complex understanding of the text beyond what is apparent on the surface. This can help to uncover the themes, messages, and meanings that are embedded in the play's dialogues, and to shed light on the ways in which the play speaks to broader social and cultural issues.

#### ***Sampling Method***

This study will employ a qualitative research methodology, specifically an analysis of dialogues in August Wilson's play, *Fences*. Qualitative research is a form of inquiry that emphasizes understanding and interpreting human behavior, experiences, and social phenomena through a naturalistic and interpretive lens. In this study, we will use a qualitative approach to

examine the dialogues in *Fences*, with a focus on understanding the characters' perspectives and experiences, and how these contribute to the larger social, cultural, and historical context of the play. Through an in-depth analysis of the dialogues, we will target to uncover the underlying themes, meanings, and cultural values that are reflected in the play, and to gain a deeper insight into the complex social and historical issues that it raises.

### ***Sample Population and Target Size***

Being that a qualitative analysis of dialogues in *Fences* will be my research methodology, the sample population and target size will be the acts and scenes of the play from which I will analyze the characters and their behaviors. I will analyze their dialogues and understand the underlying themes, meanings and cultural values reflected in the play. From this analysis I will gain a deeper insight into the complex social and historical issues that it raises.

### ***Possible Limitations of Methodology***

There are several limitations that should be considered when conducting a qualitative analysis of dialogues in *Fences*. They include;

1. Subjectivity: Qualitative research is often criticized for being subjective because it is based on the interpretation of the researcher. However I will use appropriate methods for ensuring the validity and reliability of my findings.
2. Limited generalizability: Because qualitative research is typically focused on a small sample size, the findings may not be generalizable to larger populations or contexts.
3. Limited scope: Qualitative research typically focuses on in-depth exploration of a specific phenomenon, which can limit the scope of the study. While this can be a strength of qualitative research, the findings may not provide a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon under study in this case, how the family unit explores broader themes of race, class and gender in *Fences*.
4. Data collection challenges: Collecting data for a qualitative analysis of dialogues in *Fences* may pose challenges, such as managing the volume of data and ensuring the quality of the data collected. It is important to address these challenges and to use appropriate methods for managing and analyzing the data.
5. Interpretive complexity: Because qualitative research is based on interpretation, the analysis of dialogues in *Fences* may be complex and open to multiple interpretations. It is

important to acknowledge and address the interpretive complexity of the study, and to use appropriate methods for ensuring the validity and reliability of the findings.

Overall, while there are limitations to conducting a qualitative analysis of dialogues in *Fences*, this approach can provide rich and detailed insights into the characters, themes, and social and historical context of the play. By addressing these limitations and using appropriate methods for data collection, analysis, and interpretation, I will ensure the validity and reliability of my findings and make a valuable contribution to the field of research

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **Analysis and Discussion**

This chapter primarily discusses the two central themes in August Wilson's play *Fences*. Through a qualitative analysis of dialogues in "Fences" this paper will explain how Wilson has shown the themes of family dynamics and conflict through the dialogues throughout the play. Family dynamics refers to the patterns of interactions, relationships and communication between members of a family. On the other hand, conflict means the disagreements of family members. Therefore, this paper uses the dialogues in the play to explain how August has depicted conflicts and family dynamics in the play and it explains how the themes relate to real-life families. The play depicts a black American family and the family dynamics and conflicts in the play are a reflection of real-life conflicts and dynamics. Literature mirrors real life experiences by presenting characters and situations that reflect the complexities and challenges of human life. Literary works often explore universal themes and emotions that resonate with readers and reflect their own experiences, even if the setting or characters are fictional. Similarly, *Fences* shows family dynamics and conflicts that occur in our daily lives and August has shown them through the dialogues in the play. Therefore, through a qualitative analysis of the dialogues in the play, this chapter will explain how family dynamics and conflicts in families affect their relationships and interactions. The analysis will further explore how the broader themes of race and class have been shown in the play.

### **Family Dynamics in *Fences***

Family dynamics is the interactions, relationships and communication between family members. It is usually influenced by several factors such as cultural norms and life experiences. Family dynamics involves how family members relate to each other and how they function as a unit. It includes a range of factors such as responsibilities and roles, communication patterns, power dynamics and societal influences. Many dialogues in August Wilson's *Fences* illustrate family dynamics and relationships. They are the same dynamics that real-life families also experience. For instance, the opening scene between Troy and his best friend Bono sets the stage

for the play's exploration of family dynamics. Troy complains to Bono about his son Cory's football aspirations and argues that his son should focus on a more practical career. This dialogue reveals the tension between Troy and his son and highlights the generational divide between them. Troy's generation believes that a hands-on occupation is manlier, such as Troy's career as a garbage collector is more practical to him than playing football that his son Cory admires. Therefore, this generational divide results in a strife between Troy and Cory, a norm that is evident even in real-life situations. Many families disagree because of the authority of parents because of difference in beliefs. In this case, while Cory believes that he can prosper as a footballer, his father disagrees because he believes that discrimination cannot allow Cory to prosper in football, just like he did not prosper in baseball during his prime years.

Also, The dialogue between Troy and his wife Rose in Act 1, Scene 2, reveals the complex dynamics of their relationship. Rose tries to convince Troy to build a fence around their property, but Troy resists, arguing that he wants to keep his family close and protect them from the outside world. This dialogue reflects the tension between Troy's desire for control and Rose's desire for independence and highlights the different ways they view their family and their role in it. Whereas Rose sees the fence as a perfect opportunity for Troy to bond with his son and keep the family united, Troy sees the fence as his territory of authority as he states that the fence will act as a barrier and it will help him keep what belongs to him within his reach. This dialogue illustrates how different roles in the family can also contribute to strife in the family. In this play, Rose as the mother of the house desires to unite her family but the father sees this as an attempt to take away his authority. This difference in roles result in a tension between the father and mother of the house and it consequently shows family dynamics when August portrays the different family roles in Black American households. August uses the normal family dynamics in an imaginative setting to explain how familial relationships operate.

Additionally, the dialogue between Troy and his son Cory in Act 1, Scene 4, is a pivotal moment in the play that reveals the deep-seated conflict between them. Troy tells Cory that he will not allow him to play football, arguing that the sport is a dead-end and that Cory needs to focus on getting a job. This dialogue illustrates the power dynamics at play in their relationship and highlights the generational and cultural differences between them. Troy is from a different generation thus he has different beliefs from his son Cory's beliefs. Power dynamics is evident on the authority of Troy over his son. Moreover, their significant conflict continues when Cory



wants to evict and he tells his father to tell Rose that he will come back for his belongings. Troy illustrates his power by assuring Cory that once he goes past the fence, he should learn that he is no longer a member of the family and he will be regarded as an enemy that Troy built the fence to keep away. This is a perfect example of family dynamics, in form of power dynamics in *Fences*. August shows how family dynamics is influenced by cultural norms and life experiences. Since, Cory did not succeed in his Baseball career despite his talent, he believes that his son is also doomed to fail in his football career due to discrimination. Also, because Cory came up when blacks were heavily discriminated against, his relationship with his son is doomed to fail because he overly tries to protect his son from experiencing the same failures he had and that overprotection continues to attenuate the already loose bond with his son.

Also, in act 2, Scene 1, Troy's brother Gabriel, who was injured in the war, appears on stage and engages in a disjointed and nonsensical dialogue with Troy. This scene reveals the challenges faced by individuals with mental health issues and the impact of these challenges on family dynamics. Gabriel's disability brings a tension between him and his brother because he cannot care and provide for himself yet he is a pivotal figure in Troy's family. Even though Gabriel talks gibberish and cannot survive on his own, Troy's family lives in a house that was funded by money that was given to Gabriel for his injury during the World War II. He shows the importance of providing and caring for family members. Gabriel is Troy's responsibility and he must care for his brother because nobody else can if he does not. Through Gabriel and Troy's relationship, we see how August has shown our responsibility to take care of our family members when they have nowhere else to go. We must take care of them and bear with their disabilities because a family is a single unit that must ensure the well-being of every member. Gabriel and Troy's relationship show us the importance of family support and the sacrifices that family members make for each other. Additionally, just like Rose, Gabriel also has a deep belief, showing how families must have some differences. Some are usually holy and they try to lure the rest of the family members to walk in the holy path. Even though Gabriel's holiness is somehow catalyzed by the mental health problem that he has, he also wishes for Troy to get saved because the judgement day is coming. Gabriel shows how black and black American people deeply believe in religion. Gabriel sees himself as an angel as a result of his firm belief in religion. Overall, Gabriel's character is important to family dynamics in families because it displays

sacrifice and responsibility that all family members must have for a family to act as a unit. Wilson uses different characters to display family dynamics in *Fences*.

In summary, August Wilson's play helps us understand family dynamics in our day-to-day lives. It helps understand that family dynamics can help us address and resolve conflicts in our day-to-day relationships in our families. Through *Fences*, we can promote positive family relationships. Family members can resolve conflicts, identify patterns of behavior and communication within the family, improve communication and foster stronger relationships. Moreover, family dynamics in *Fences* influences the audience's behaviors and outcomes, career choices and academic performance because they will have learnt how those decisions can significantly impact familial relationships.

### **Conflicts in *Fences***

Conflicts is defined as the disagreements, disputes, or clashes between individuals with opposing interests or goals. Conflicts usually arise in different contexts and they manifest different forms such as verbal or physical aggression, passive resistance and avoidance. Conflicts are usually driven by various factors such as differences in beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, or power dynamics. Conflicts are majorly a result of family dynamics, thus this part explains how family dynamics has caused conflicts in *Fences* and how it relates to the real-life family units of the audience. August Wilson's play "Fences" explores the theme of conflict through the character interactions and dialogues. There are several examples of dialogues that show the theme of conflict:

1. Troy and Cory: In Act One, Scene Four, Troy and Cory argue about Cory's desire to play football. Troy is against it, while Cory wants to pursue his passion. The dialogue shows the generational conflict between Troy and his son, as Troy wants Cory to work and provide for the family, while Cory wants to follow his dreams. The generational difference makes them have a conflict as Cory sees his father as old-fashioned and does not believe in what his father believes in.

*Troy: "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 in that A&P or learn how to fix cars or build houses or something, get you a trade. That way you have something can't nobody take away from you."*

*Cory: "But I like football, Pop. That's all I got."*

The conversation shows how the power dynamics and the generational difference prevents the father and son to have a successful father-son relationship. They argue since everyone believes that their opinions matter over the other person's belief. Troy wants to control Cory's life and career since he is the owner of the house but Cory also wants to follow his heart since football is his passion.

2. Troy and Rose: In Act Two, Scene One, Troy conflicts with Rose when he wants to assert his power over Rose but she wants independence instead.

*Troy: "I'm gonna tell you what I'm gonna do. I'm gonna take and build me a fence around this yard. See? I'm gonna build me a fence that's gonna keep them (death and the devil) out. And not only that, it's gonna keep them in."*

*Rose: "What you talking about, Troy?"*

*Troy: "I'm talking about building me a fence. What you think I'm talking about?"*

*Rose: "Why, Troy? Why you wanna fence me out?"*

*Troy: "I don't wanna fence you out, Rose. I'm trying to hold on to you. I'm trying to keep you from fading away from me."*

*Rose: "You can't keep me from fading away from you, Troy."*

This dialogue shows the conflict between Troy and Rose, as Troy is trying to assert his power over Rose by building a fence, while Rose questions his intentions and expresses her desire for freedom and independence. The dialogue also highlights the underlying tension and frustration in their relationship, as Troy struggles to cope with his past traumas and present challenges, and Rose struggles to find her own voice and agency. The building of a fence in this dialogue shows how the relationship between Troy and Rose as the parents in the family. Their roles in the family impact this dialogue as Troy sees himself as the powerful and his decision is final. Moreover, it shows a typical black family where the father is the man of the house and his decision is not to be questioned. He does not consult the wife in matters that he sees important such as building the fence in Maxson's family which makes them both have different perspectives on the final decision made. August shows the typical African American family and how their culture influence the family dynamics which results in conflicts in the family.

3. Troy and Gabriel: In Act Two, Scene Four, Troy and Gabriel argue about the money that Gabriel received from the government. The dialogue shows the conflict between the brothers, as well as the resentment that Troy feels towards Gabriel.

*Troy: "You know, you got a hole in your head. You're walking around with a sign on your back that says 'I got a hole in my head.'"*

*Gabriel: "I got my trumpet. I got my horn. I got my music."*

*Troy: "I can't even understand what you're saying half the time. You don't make no sense."*

In this dialogue, August reveals the tension between the two brothers and how they affect their relationship in the house. Troy clearly takes care of Gabriel because of guilt since he already lives in a house that was bought by money meant for Gabriel's medical expenses after his injury in World War II. Troy tries to debase his brother and make him feel inferior because of his mental health. Luckily, Gabriel's mental health condition makes him impervious to his brother's insults and he sees himself as an angel and not the person that has a hole in the head like Troy places it. This is a perfect example of how other family members may live with and take care of their relatives because they are related but given any opportunity, they can easily dispose of them. Troy tells his brother point-blank that he does not understand Gabriel's conversations all the time.

These examples of dialogues in "Fences" show the theme of conflict through the disagreements and clashes between the characters. The conflicts are rooted in different values, beliefs, and experiences, which reveal the complexities of African American family dynamics in the 1950s.

August Wilson has also used the family unit through family dynamics and conflicts in Maxson's family to explain race, class and gender. Wilson uses the family unit to express the experiences of a whole community and the discrimination that they had to endure during this time. Troy's family is a perfect example of a working class African-American family experiencing racism and segregation during the 1950s. Through the dialogues in the play Fences, it is evident that the play, through the family unit, explores the themes of race, class and gender by examining the ways in which systematic oppression and discrimination impact individual lives, family dynamics, and the overall African American Community. The conflicts and family dynamics expressed above explain how the family unit has explored racism, class and gender. In the conflicts between Troy and his sons Cory and Lyons, it is evident that the themes of race and class prevent him from allowing them to pursue their dream careers. He wishes for them the best lives and it is clear that sports and music cannot provide them with the best lives at the time of

the play. Troy tells Cory that he works collecting garbage because it is his responsibility and there is nothing like father loving his family. He provides because it is his obligation and Cory should also man-up and start doing a meaningful career instead of Football. The theme of gender is also evident in the play because the women are considered inferior and they act as objects. They are used just for pleasure and to make babies and their opinions are not important in their relationships with their spouses.

Through the dialogues it is also evident that August Wilson's play "Fences" uses symbolism and metaphor to convey the complexities of family relationships and conflicts in African American households during the 1950s. One of the most important symbols in the play is the fence that Troy Maxson, the main character, builds around his home. The fence represents both a physical and metaphorical barrier that Troy creates to keep people out and protect his family from the outside world. However, the fence also becomes a symbol of the emotional barriers that Troy puts up with his family, particularly his son Cory. The fence represents the ways in which people can be separated from one another, even within the same household, and the difficulty of tearing down those barriers once they have been established.

Another important symbol in the play is the baseball bat that Troy uses to physically and emotionally dominate his son Cory. The bat becomes a metaphor for the power dynamic in the Maxson household, as well as the cycle of abuse and neglect that Troy experienced in his own childhood. Through the bat, Wilson highlights the destructive effects of generational trauma and the ways in which cycles of abuse can continue from one generation to the next.

The relationship between Troy and his brother Gabriel is also symbolic of the complexities of family relationships. Gabriel is mentally handicapped and has a metal plate in his head from a war injury. He often speaks in religious language and sees himself as an angel who has come to help Troy and his family. Through Gabriel, Wilson highlights the idea of family members as both helpers and hindrances to one another. Although Gabriel is often a burden to Troy, he also provides a sense of connection to their shared past and a reminder of the importance of family.

Through these symbols and metaphors, Wilson communicates broader messages about the complexities of African American family relationships and the ways in which historical trauma and systemic oppression can impact family dynamics. He also explores themes of forgiveness, redemption, and the possibility of healing through relationships with others. Overall,

"Fences" is a powerful exploration of family relationships and the ways in which they can both support and hinder our individual growth and development.

The members of the Maxson family in August Wilson's play "Fences" each cope with the limitations and expectations imposed by their society and family structure in different ways, and these coping mechanisms have significant effects on their relationships with one another. For instance, Troy Maxson, the patriarch of the family, copes with the limitations of his society and family structure by building emotional and physical walls around himself. He struggles with the racial and economic barriers that prevent him from achieving his dreams of becoming a professional baseball player, and he also feels trapped by his responsibilities as a husband and father. As a result, he becomes emotionally distant from his wife Rose and physically abusive towards his son Cory. His inability to confront and process his own emotional pain leads to a breakdown in his relationships with his family members.

Rose, on the other hand, copes with the limitations and expectations of her society and family structure by working within them. She accepts her role as a wife and mother and finds fulfillment in caring for her family. However, she also feels the limitations of her role as a woman in the 1950s and struggles to assert herself within her marriage. Her coping mechanisms lead to a conflict with Troy when he decides to have an affair and father a child with another woman.

Cory copes with the limitations and expectations of his society and family structure by rebelling against them. He dreams of playing college football and making a name for himself outside of his father's shadow. However, his aspirations clash with Troy's expectations that he work and provide for the family. Their conflicting desires lead to a breakdown in their relationship, with Troy physically and emotionally abusing Cory and ultimately driving him away.

In general, the Maxson family's coping mechanisms reflect the limited options available to African Americans in the 1950s and the societal pressures that placed heavy expectations on men, women, and children. Their coping mechanisms also reflect the effects of historical trauma and systemic oppression on African American families. Ultimately, the characters' differing coping mechanisms lead to conflicts and breakdowns in their relationships with one another. However, the play also suggests that healing and redemption are possible through forgiveness and empathy, as demonstrated in the character of Gabriel, Troy's mentally disabled brother.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **Summary and Conclusion**

In conclusion, this paper explains the family dynamics and conflicts in African American households during the 1950s. It analyzes a sample of key dialogues from the play to explain how the Maxson family relates with one another and how the themes of racism, class and gender impact these relationships. Moreover, it explores how August Wilson uses the family unit to explore broader themes of race, class and gender. The study has also analyzed how the symbolism and metaphors used by August explain the complexities of family relationships and conflicts in *Fences*. The individual characters of the play have also been studied to understand how they coped with the limitations and expectations imposed by the society and their family structure. This study explains how these expectations and limitations affected the relationship between the family members.

August Wilson's play "Fences" is a powerful exploration of family dynamics and conflicts in African American households during the 1950s. Through his use of rich and complex dialogues, Wilson depicts the ways in which societal pressures and historical trauma can impact family relationships and lead to cycles of abuse, neglect, and emotional distance. The play's underlying themes of forgiveness, redemption, and the possibility of healing through relationships with others are conveyed through the struggles of the Maxson family and their differing coping mechanisms. Wilson's skillful use of language and dialogue brings the characters to life, allowing readers to empathize with their experiences and gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of African American family relationships during this time period. Overall, "Fences" is a timeless work of literature that continues to resonate with readers

today and serves as a poignant reminder of the importance of family, forgiveness, and empathy in the face of societal pressures and historical trauma.

While there are limitations to conducting a qualitative analysis of dialogues in *Fences*, this approach has provided rich and detailed insights into the characters, themes, and social and historical context of the play. This study has carefully selected the characters and dialogues that are most suitable and relevant to explore family dynamics and conflicts in *Fences*, and it has highlighted other themes that influence these two central themes. The study has addressed these limitations and using appropriate methods for analysis, and interpretation, thus contributing to a better understanding of the social and historical significance of *Fences*. Overall, this study has helped provide valuable insights into the literary, cultural, and historical significance of August Wilson's work, and to make a meaningful contribution to the field of research.

Overall, this paper presents an analysis of family dynamics and conflicts in August Wilson's play *Fences*, using a qualitative analysis of dialogues. Drawing on some of the significant dialogues from the play, the analysis examines the ways in which language constructs and shapes the family dynamics and conflicts that are central to the plot. The findings suggest that family relationships in *Fences* are characterized by a complex interplay of responsibility, loyalty, resentment, and betrayal, with the dialogues revealing a range of strategies that characters use to negotiate these tensions. The analysis also highlights the ways in which language is used to construct and reinforce gender roles and power dynamics within the family. Overall, the study sheds light on the intricate and multifaceted nature of family relationships in the context of African American life in the mid-twentieth century, while also contributing to a broader understanding of how language shapes our perceptions of interpersonal dynamics.



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