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Sublimation and the New Culture in August Wilson's Fences

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August Wilson's primary concern is to communicate the African American cultural awareness; to establish a counter-culture based on self-confidence and assertiveness. He advocates an encouraging attitude to elevate the African Americans' spiritual consciousness and to teach them how to sublimate their aims in life. He aspires to win the everlasting battle against racial discrimination, oppression, injustice, and identity confusion. Sublimation, as a defence mechanism, will be Wilson's new ammunition to re-read and to re-interpret the psychic constitution of his people, to help them get out of their self-imposed fences and this is the core of Wilson's new culture. Sublimation is the process in which the psyche directs the negative drives towards a goal, a process that generally aims at the 'progress of the spirit'; at a better and more authentic self. Wilson is perfectly aware of the ground on which he should stand as an African American and as a playwright, he is willing to help his people find their ground. Various social and psychological delinquencies have threatened the psychic constitutions of Wilson's main characters in *Fences*, yet they are finally able to reconcile their inner self and be productive through following a new culture based on the concept of sublimation.

Key words: *August Wilson, sublimation, culture, defense mechanism, African American, fences.*

Introduction

August Wilson (1945-2005) was born in Pittsburgh. He is a prolific African American playwright who is best known for his Pittsburgh Cycle that chronicles the tragedies and aspirations of the African – Americans during each decade of the 20th century. His father was a German immigrant and baker and spent very little time with the family. His mother, Daisy Wilson, raised August and his five siblings in a small apartment in the poor Hill District neighbourhood of Pittsburgh. She was working hard as a cleaning lady to earn the living of

the family. As a teenager, Wilson and his family encountered discrimination in Hazelwood, a predominately white working-class neighbourhood. Eventually, he was dropped out of school to start a journey of self-education (Nadel,2019).

The four Bs highly shaped Wilson's cultural perspective; poet Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986)(Schulte,1986), playwright Amiri Baraka (1934–2014) (Madhubuti,,2014), painter Romare Bearden (1911–1988), and most importantly, the blues. For Wilson, each one of these four Bs was influential in shaping his conception of the African American's identity and culture. The philosophical bents of their artistic works reflected the African heritage that Wilson aspired to restore in his plays. Throughout a cycle of ten plays, Wilson succeeded in chronicle and revived the history of African Americans in the twentieth century. His main concern was a spiritual return to Africa, his motherland that the recorded history deprived its original settlers of their cultural identity throughout decades. Wilson recalled in an 1984 interview with Kim Powers:

“As it turns out, I've written plays that take place in 1911, 1927, 1941, 1957, and 1971. Somewhere along the way it dawned on me that I was writing one play for each decade. Once I became conscious of that, I realized I was trying to focus on what I felt were the most important issues confronting black Americans for that decade, so ultimately they could stand as a record of black experience over the past hundred years presented in the form of dramatic literature” (Abdelsamie,2015; Allen,1995).

Understandably, Wilson is trying to alter, through literature, the African Americans' relationship to society as well as to themselves, as the black race. For him, black culture is doomed to stay in the shadow, just because it was not given the privilege and importance like its counterpart, white culture. He even criticizes Robert Brustein's argument concerning the inferiority of the work of minority artists and accused him of being a cultural imperialist who aims to deprive the African Americans their talent and humanity as well. He says in his notorious speech “The Ground on Which I Stand”: (Abdelsamie,2015)

“Brustien's surprisingly sophomoric assumption that this tremendous outpouring of work by minority artists have started substituting sociological for aesthetic criteria, leaving aside notions like quality and excellence, shows him to be a victim of the 19th –century thinking and the linguistic environment that posits blacks as unqualified” (Plotkins,2005).

Although the four Bs highly shaped Wilson's cultural perspective; he was mainly motivated by his recollections that set forth his distinct African American cultural identity. He learned the black culture from his mother, herself a symbol of Africa, the black's motherland. She was his primary caregiver, while his father did not have a consistent role in his life. Thus, Wilson “made his own decision about his cultural identity based upon parental allegiance and

his belief in the aesthetic and political principles of the Black Art movement, the prevailing artistic, cultural nationalist movement of the 1960s” (Du Bois,2017). In his attempt to make a difference in African Americans’ life experiences and to help them reach sublimation, Wilson has to transcend the ,substantial historical heritage represented by the four major transitions that the African Americans have already been experienced. Each one of these four transitions has left its scares and legacies on the spiritual constitution of the African American’s psyche. Thus, the question is: what kind of culture that Wilson should create to win the battle against racial discrimination, oppression, injustice, and identity confusion? Should it be a culture based on violence, resistance, or resentment? Alternatively, should it be a culture that is based on self-affirmation, of a better and truer self as W.E.B. Du Bois puts it: “the history of the American Negro is the history of this strife – this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to manage his double self into a better and truer self” (Lewis,2017) Enslavement, the first of the four transition stages, involved the Africans’ loss of personal freedom since they were brought to America as slaves not as immigrants. Emancipation, the second major transition, was not an ideal one. After one hundred years of the Emancipation Proclamation, emancipation is still far away. It was restrictive and demeaning since it was accompanied by discrimination. The third transition of the African Americans’ experience was related to geography, socioeconomy, and culture. It was a transition from a rural, agrarian society into an industrial one.

The Blacks have to adapt themselves to the “double heritage” as Pirnajmuddin named them. He says: “calling the Blacks in America ‘African-Americans’ does not only mean that they are a people of two geographically different spaces, but it also means that these ‘double heritage’ people are of two different cultural spaces”. The last transition of the African Americans was concerned with desegregation (Monica E. et al.,2010). However, it was and is still a partially successful one. Generally, almost all of these historical transitions in the life of the African Americans were portrayed, analysed and interpreted according to the perspective of the white middle-class family researchers. It was vague and not a genuine perspective. Thus, August Wilson is trying to re-read and to re-interpret the psychic constitution of these people who have long ago been oppressed, to bring them back their ever-absent voice and to sublimate their aims in life. Like their white counterparts, the African Americans have their own distinctive culture and they can elevate themselves away from the enslaved mentality of the colonial period. Wilson himself has experienced different flaws in his life which he has well invested on his own advantage. Poverty, his father’s departure away from the family, dropping out of school due to discriminating acts and his eventual occupation of several menial jobs while still young; all these factors Wilson succeeds to invest in helping him sublimate his spirit and to build a distinctively African American culture. He decides to be a playwright and the stage would be his arena to create a new black culture. In an interview with Wilson’s sister, Linda Jean, the interviewer asked her about Wilson’s purpose to build Black Horizon Theater in 1968 in Pittsburgh. She states :

“The Black Horizon Theater was started in 1968 the same year that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated (on April 4). We all know that the anger of Blacks exploded and was subsequently channelled into positive chants of self-acceptance: “I’m Black and I’m Proud—and Black is Beautiful!”—In other words, “I AM HERE WORLD!”—Black is on the Horizon! I think their purpose, first and foremost, was actually addressing and affirming themselves as brilliant young Black men and young Black artists. I believe the theatre was to be a vehicle for the development and exposure of Black intelligence, beauty, creativity, individuality, and the expression of Black talent in the community” (Laura, and Deon,20-18).

Thus, it was a frustrating era for the African Americans that need to be channelled positively to be less harmful and even productive. According to behavioural psychology, this is called sublimation which represents the core of Wilson’s new culture. It is an inspiring concept that one must work hard towards inculcating it within oneself. Wilson is trying not only to alter others’ opinion on the African Americans but the latter’s personal understanding of themselves as well. He declares in his “The Ground on Which I Stand”:

“I felt it a duty and an honour to participate in that historic moment as the people who had arrived in America chained and malnourished in the hold of a 350 – foot Portuguese, Dutch, or English sailing ship, were now seeking ways to alter their relationship to the society in which they lived- and ... searching for ways to alter the shared expectations of themselves as a community of people” (Callahan,2018).

However, according to Sigmund, Freud human psyche consists of three elements which he calls, the Id, Ego, and Super-Ego; the three collaborate to create human behaviour. The Id is the source of human needs, desires, and impulses that are usually unacceptable if we acted on them whenever we pleased. It is the unconscious aspect of the psyche. The Ego, on the other hand, is responsible for dealing with real life. As for the last element, the Super-Ego, it stands for our sense of right and wrong. In his article “Understanding the Concept of Sublimation in Psychology Made Easy”, Rujuta Borkar explains that human beings will experience a range of negative or socially-unacceptable emotions and urges from time to time directed by the Id. The Ego will try to act, to make real these urges. However, the Super-Ego will neither accept, nor encourage these negative emotions. So what happens when a person experiences these negative urges? Sublimation as a defence mechanism is the answer. From a cultural perspective, sublimation has a fundamental role in an individual’s psychological development. By definition, sublimation is “a type of defence mechanism, an unconscious psychological defence that reduces the anxiety that might result from unacceptable urges or harmful stimuli” (Cherry 3). [Wilson](#) himself finds an outlet for his successive frustrating flaws throughout his life, personally or at work, by adopting this defence mechanism. He succeeds to sublimate his negative emotions turning them into positive and creative ones. He

becomes an icon in the African American literary world. His great achievements have been crystallised into a plan to document, through playwriting, the African Americans' experience in America.

Wilson's play *Fences* (1985) is one of his ten - plays cycle that throws light on the period of the late 1950s. The year 1957, specifically, was a year of a radical change in the perspective of the white Americans towards African Americans. The latter were no more denied equal employment and education opportunities. They were even given the right to protest against discrimination as is manifested in the first scene of the play where the spirit of protest is clear in the attitude of Troy Maxson who works as a garbage collector. Troy protests to his boss the discrimination in the treatment of the African Americans since they are denied the right to drive the truck and are only allowed to collect the garbage. He says addressing his friend, Bono:

"I ain't worried about them firing me. ... I went to Mr Rand and asked him ... why you got the white men's driving and the coloured lifting? ... what's the matter, don't I count? You think only white fellows got sense enough to drive a truck ... How come you got all whites driving and the coloured lifting?" (*Fences* 3)

Kim Pereira asserts this radical change towards the African Americans when she says: "that a black garbage collector can do this without repercussion is a sign of the changing time" (36). However, to August Wilson, this ideological change is no more than a beginning, since he sets his campaign of the healing process; based on the concept of sublimation, to eradicate any traces of conflict within themselves. The title of his play, *Fences*, is the beginning of this campaign; it represents the strings that the writer uses to pull the family members together and to help them reconcile with their circumstances as well as with themselves. However, the title has a psychological connotation that is connected to Freud's Defense mechanisms, specifically sublimation.

The fence is a symbol of protection if we assume that everyone on the outside of the fence is potentially dangerous. The fence will provide the secluded privacy that will give the African Americans the space to find their true identity. Each one of the characters in this play is in need to have his own-made fence, his new ideology of self-realisation and self-sublimation. This fence will protect and confine the African American's psyche and give it the space it needs to elevate itself away from the oppression and marginalisation of the white community. Nevertheless, having the freedom to put borders into one's life and to keep intruders away is what Wilson attempts to establish as the new ideology of the Black culture to cope with the historical changes during the 1950s. Pereira avers Wilson's sincere endeavours to put an end to the spiritual anxiety of the Blacks that dismantles their sense of familial stability. He approves that "in examining the lives of these migrant blacks, Wilson's focus is on their



dreams, their restlessness, and their struggle to find practical and spiritual havens in an essentially hostile society” (3). Troy, the play’s major character, is one of those African American migrants who headed towards the north to find his own spiritual havens. He tries more than once to direct his ego to make a compromise with his id by using sublimation as a defence mechanism. Consciously or unconsciously, Troy tries to reduce the anxiety that is caused by the harmful stimuli in his life and which is, sometimes, fencing him in or out of his inner self. His familial background turned him to be a ‘psychological refugee’ as is described by Lois Tyson who mentions that: “to be unhomed is to feel not at home even in your own home because you are not at home in yourself: your cultural identity crisis has made you a psychological refugee” (421).

Starting with his relation to his father, Troy’s childhood events greatly influence his unconscious. He suffers the bad treatment of his father, although he admits that his father used to be committed to his children, unlike his mother who ran away when Troy was only eight years old. He says: “But I will say this for him ... he felt a responsibility toward us. Maybe he ain’t treated us the way I felt he should have ... but without that responsibility, he could have walked off and left us” (*Fences* 42). Still, the gap between father and son increases when, at the age of fourteen, Troy is scared to death because his father sends him out with an old mule to do some ploughing, but instead Troy is fooling around with a girl. He forgets about the mule which “had got loose and wandered back to the house and [his] daddy was looking for [him]” (*Fences* 42). The confrontation between the two is drastic, but at the same time revolutionary to Troy, since the devilish reaction of the father has motivated Troy to articulate his defence mechanisms. He sublimates his negative, unpleasant, and threatening desires against his father that might have a damaging effect on his mental health and psyche. He decides to leave his father’s home in order to find himself and be a man. He says: “the only thing I knew was the time had come for me to leave my daddy’s house. And right there the world suddenly got big” (*Fences* 43). Thus, it is a new mature beginning to Troy who starts “channelling the energy from negative emotion, that can, and will, cause potential self-harm, to a positive outlet that will lead to self-improvement and growth” (Borkar 4). The north is Troy’s outlet; it represents the big world that he is dreaming to find solace in. He wishes to escape the doubled oppression in the south, both of his father and of racism which is still pervasive despite the abolition of slavery. Nevertheless, an even greater sense of desperation obsessed Troy once more since he, not only could not get a job but could not find a place to live in as well in the north.

African Americans used to live in ghettos, segregated from the white people. Troy describes the scene stating that: “colored folks living down there on the riverbanks in whatever kind of shelter they could find for themselves. Right down there under the Brady Street Bridge. Living in shacks made of sticks and tarpaper” (*Fences* 44). Feeling hopeless, he starts stealing as a way to earn his living. Yet, stealing involves him more, and he turns to be a

killer as well. Eventually, he is imprisoned for fifteen years.

However, instead of being labelled forever as a criminal, Troy channels his energy into something creative; he starts playing baseball in jail. Thus, he is sublimating the socially unacceptable and threatening behaviour of being a robber and a killer, into a healthier and more civilised way of living. Freud describes this process “to be a sign of maturity, not only individually but also societally, allowing people to function in culturally acceptable ways” (Siegfried 3).

Unfortunately, Troy’s sublimating process is interrupted by the discriminating act of the white community. He is denied the opportunity to play baseball and is excluded from the Major League due to his skin colour. Troy believes that baseball would turn his dreams into reality, yet it remains just a dream after all. This oppression causes an everlasting wound that unconsciously penetrates and severely affects all of Troy’s family members in the future. It kills the illusion of the American dream inside him, though it is supposed to be an age of freedom and equal opportunities to everyone living in America. More than twenty-five years have passed by now, yet Troy’s deep-rooted sense of failure is still alive. He is content that no significant change has happened in society. Consequently, Troy concludes that assimilation into the white community is impossible and therefore, he strictly opposes Cory’s serious endeavours to play football in the white team. He is telling Rose that: “the white man ain’t gonna let him get nowhere with that football” (*Fences* 7).

Though frustrated, Troy starts building a new fence around him to protect himself from the sense of failure that accompanied him after being rejected as a baseball player in the league. Troy’s new emotional fence, represented by his marriage to Rose, leads him again towards sublimation. Still, this metaphorical fence is incomplete till almost at the end of the play. Troy’s defensive fence will never give him a complete sense of protection. He will always require channelling his negative stimuli to reach the self-confidence that he is dreaming of as an African American.

Troy gets married to Rose. His marriage represents the new challenge that might help him lead a positive change in his life. He needs to recapture his sense of self that was already shaken by the white’s discriminating acts. He needs a space in life where he can breathe freedom and individualism. In the beginning, his marriage was a success, or at least he believes so. Wilson seems to doubt the success of this marriage from the very beginning when he describes Rose stating that:

“She is ten years younger than TROY, her devotion to him stems from her recognition of the possibilities of her life without him: a succession of abusive men and their babies, a life of partying and running the streets, the church, or aloneness with its attendant pain and

frustration” (*Fences* 5).

Even though their marriage lasted for eighteen years, it ends with infidelity. Troy’s increasing sense of responsibility and commitment towards his family members, which characterises him as a husband and a father, has consequently led to losing himself again. He reaches to an understanding that his marriage to Rose will kill him spiritually. He says addressing Rose: “I’m responsible for it. I done locked myself into a pattern trying to take care of you all that I forget about myself” (*Fences* 56). He needs a little space for himself. Therefore, he starts searching for happiness outside Rose’s fence. He decides to channel his negative feelings of frustration and lack of happiness into a positive and life-giving the sense of existence represented by the new girl, Alberta. He says describing the latter:

“She gives me a different idea ... a different understanding about myself. I can step out of this house and get away from the pressures and problems ... be a different man. I ain’t got to wonder how I’m gonna pay the bills or get the roof fixed. I can just be a part of myself that I ain’t never been” (*Fences* 56).

Wilson bounds Alberta to Troy’s lost dream of playing baseball. The latter is trapped in a moment of departure when he was denied the opportunity to play baseball. It was in that moment that Troy lost himself, his happiness and his dreams forever. Throughout his life, he never gives up trying to overcome his sense of failure. He tries to transgress this moment, once through his marriage to Rose, and others through his insistence to be given a promotion from being a garbage collector into a driver of the garbage truck.

However, all his attempts are in vain since he is still dissatisfied and unhappy. Troy is somehow convinced that Alberta will bring him back his smile. Still, his dream will never be accomplished since his new hope dies with Alberta’s death while she is giving birth to Troy’s baby, Raynell. The baby represents Wilson’s continuation of Troy’s story not while alive, but when dead. She is Troy’s final hope to reach sublimation and to reconcile himself since she “stands for the promise of new life. She bears witness to a changing world at the house and represents the changing world of the United States as it evolves into the passionate and liberating decade of the sixties” (Pereira,1995). Raynell’s existence affirms Wilson’s aim to create and establish the new image of a comfortable life to the African Americans. His message, to these persecuted people, is metaphorically expressed through Raynell’s newly planted garden, as explained by Rose who says addressing the little girl: “You just have to give it a chance. It’ll grow” (*Fences* 73). African Americans require a chance to be themselves and to accomplish the cultural change that defines who they are among the white community. Rose Maxson is Wilson’s best representative of the cultural change that he is willing to endorse in the mentality of the Black’s community. She is the garden that promises life in Maxson’s house as “she represents loving care and nurturing, attributes also frequently

used to grow plants. Like the characteristics of the flower after which she is named, Rose is a beautiful soul that gives fragrance and love to her family” (Pereira,1995).

Moreover, Rose contradicts all that Troy represents and the fence that she insists on having, surrounding her garden, is to protect not only herself but her whole family members. More than once Troy threatens the safety of her household, but her invincible determination and her desire to overcome the quandaries of life will empower her to survive and to choose for herself. From the very beginning of the play, Wilson demonstrates how Rose succeeds to reach sublimation by converting all the obstacles in her life into a better and more promising way of living. Despite her recurrent feeling of dissatisfaction and the vagueness of her future, Rose knows what she wants to do in her life. Her marriage to Troy is her first step towards sublimation. She seeks protection from the hardship of life. She is content that her life without him would be “a life of partying and running the streets, the church, or aloneness with its attendant pain and frustration” (*Fences* 5). For eighteen years, Rose has been living with him devoting herself entirely to her family as a wife, a mother, and a mediator; but not living her dreams and hopes. She is happy with the role she is playing in her family life. She says addressing Troy “I took all my feelings, my wants and needs, my dreams ...and I buried them inside you. I planted a seed and watched and prayed over it. I planted myself inside you and waited to bloom” (*Fences* 58). However, her dream of a blooming future with Troy proves to be just an illusion. She wakes up on the fact that Troy is an infidel. He betrays her and soon will have a baby. He says addressing Rose: “I’m gonna be a daddy. I’m gonna be somebody’s daddy” (*Fences* 54). The baby represents a new fence that will separate Rose from her dreams of unified family members where the children will have the same parents. She tells Troy:

“I ain’t never wanted no half nothing in my family. My whole family is half. Everything got different fathers and mothers ... my two sisters and my brother. Can’t hardly tell who’s who. Can’t never sit down and talk about Papa and Mama. It’s your papa and your mama and my papa and my mama” (*Fences* 55).

Wilson complicates the situation by Alberta’s death, leaving the new-born baby to the aged father to take care of. However, this complication of events is crucial to character development. Troy’s adultery and the child’s birth will eventually lead Rose to bloom and start anew, not to submit and despair; as explained by Harry J. Elam in his “August Wilson”. The latter states that: “Troy’s adultery provides the catalyst that propels his wife, Rose, to reassess her position, to gain greater self-awareness and to change” (325). Rose is finally able to decide for herself, she distances herself physically from Troy but does not leave the marriage. She tells Troy: “I’ll take care of your baby for you ... cause ... like you say ... she’s innocent ... and you can’t visit the sins of the father upon the child. A motherless child has got a hard time. ... From right now ... this child got a mother. But you a womanless man”

(*Fences* 64). She decides to be a mother to Troy's innocent child, but no more a wife to him.

In the second scene of Act One, Rose sings a religious song asking Jesus Christ to guide her to sublimate her aims in life and to protect her: She sings:

“Jesus be a fence around me everyday
Jesus I want you to protect me as I travel on my own
Jesus, be a fence all around me every day” (*Fences* 17).

Through this song, Wilson is giving his answer to Rose's urgent desire to have a fence around her house to protect her loved ones. Religion stands as a powerful spiritual fence that will protect people from outdoor harm. They are seeking refuge in it, like what Rose has already done. She takes the church as her new home where she spends most of her time in after the rift between herself and her husband. Thus, “It is patent that Rose seeks a balm for her pain in the church which, in the course of shielding her from Troy, poses as a wall between Rose and her husband”, as explained by Yvonne Iden Ngwa.

African American women, whom Rose is a stereotype of in this play, prove to be capable of self – realisation and self- improvement. They have the determination and the strength of their ancestors and this is the new culture that Wilson attempts to revive among the American community in general and the African American community in particular. Rose's successive endeavours to channel her negative stimuli and turn them into powerful energy to reach sublimation resemble what Cory, the son, is trying to do throughout the play.

Rose plays an essential role in the life of her son. She acts as the superego in Cory's psyche that will help him transform into a successful and mature man. Cory is Wilson's best representative of the new generation who carries the seeds of change of the 1950s. Both Rose and Cory contrast the African American enslavement mentality represented by Troy, who still carries the heavy burden of the oppressing past. Patricia Gantt asserts in her essay “Down There: The Southernness of August Wilson” that in his 1950s play, *Fences*, “Wilson's characters are more concerned with coping with the present than with looking to their southern past”.

Still, Wilson insists on the importance of the past. He believes that it carries its legacy of the characters' interconnectedness and which he best connects through Troy's traditional folksong that he inherits from his father and transforms it into his children Cory and Raynall. Thus, the song is theirs and Troy's and older than all of them. Their song is equivalent to love as explained by Gantt who states that: “the song binds brother and sister to each other and to the mixture of pain and inarticulated love which is their common legacy. At the song's conclusion, they are for the first time truly a family” (16). Troy tries to transform his sense of

failure of pursuing his dream of playing baseball to his son Cory. However, unlike his father, the latter seeks assimilation in the white community to cope with the changes in the 1950s. He believes in the American Dream. Cory is trying to unbind the chain of the colonizer-colonized relationship that the white American community has long ago been imposing on the African Americans and which his father has been practising as well with his family members. He is seeking freedom mentally and spiritually. Cory aspires to attain a football scholarship as one of the requirements to be enrolled in college. However, Troy will deny him this opportunity by meeting Mr Zellman, Cory's coach, and demanding Cory's exclusion from the team. An act that Cory attributes to jealousy when he tells his father: "Just cause you didn't have a chance! You just scared I'm gonna be better than you, that's all" (*Fences* 47).

However, the tension between father and son escalates when Cory intervenes to protect his mother and to stop Troy's physical aggressiveness against her. He "comes up behind Troy and grabs him. Troy, surprised is thrown off balance just as Cory throws a glancing blow that catches him on the chest and knocks him down" (*Fences* 59). The tension reaches its peak in Act Two, scene four when Cory tries to force his way into the house while his father was seated on the door's steps singing for himself. Cory shows disrespect to his father since he tries to surpass Troy without excusing him. Troy says: Oh, I see ... I don't count around here no more. You ain't got to say excuse me to your daddy" (*Fences* 69). Cory's challenging behaviour enrages the father and a physical confrontation between the two takes place when Cory picks up Troy's baseball bat to swing it at the latter. Yet the father grabs it "from Cory and stands over him ready to swing. He stops himself" (*Fences* 72). Finally, Troy decides to banish Cory forever from his house. Both father and son have reached a crossroad that signifies the generational difference in the 1950s. At last, Cory is no more a captive to his father's frustration as he used to feel. Once he says addressing his father: "You ain't never done nothing but hold me back. Afraid I was gonna be better than you. All you ever did was try and make me scared of you. I used to tremble every time you called my name" (*Fences* 70). The father is still embracing the colonial enslavement mentality tightly and is unable to reconcile his self. Cory, on the other hand, advocates a new perspective in life. He believes "that there is now a new form of positivity", as explained by John Timpane, and this assumption "signifies a life in the future, liberated from his father's limitations".

Consequently, Cory replaces the original negative and submissive response to life into a more socialised one. He sets a journey of self-discovery away from his oppressing father and, at the same time, is directed by his mother's constant supporting attitude. Cory's journey towards sublimation is clearly explained through Kevin Jones's "Sublimation, Art and Psychoanalysis" who demonstrates Julia Kristeva's interpretation of sublimation in her theory of 'psychical significance'. He states:

taking up the relationship between the Eros and Thanatos Kristeva describes the release of negativity at the heart of sublimation as an integral part of the development of subjectivity, art and creativity ... she also relocates the importance of the maternal dimension in cultural production through sublimation.

However, Cory's self-realisation and his desire to sublimate his aims in life parallel the many social and cultural changes in the life of the African Americans around the year 1957. The latters "were not to be considered as a race of ex-slaves who must be kept at the fringes of the society where white America used to keep them. They were moving gradually but steadily into the mainstream of the American society" (Abdelsamie 75). Thus, Wilson feels committed to instigating the African Americans' awareness to this fact. Their accompanying sense of inferiority should be healed by sublimation. Cory's desertion of his father's house signals a new beginning to the black boy who will not return till the day of his father's funeral. He joins the Marines and succeeds to find himself a way out of the limitations imposed on him by the older generation (Rabaka,2006).

However, according to Wilson, Cory's healing process is still incomplete. The latter's radical transformation and his new sense of identity will be completed only if he embraces his heritage and tradition. He should adhere tightly to his African roots as expressed by Wilson who states: "It's largely a question of identity. Without knowing your past, you don't know your present and you certainly can't plot your future" (qtd in Abdelsamie 84). The play's final scene embraces Wilson's philosophy concerning the significance of the blues as a unifying medium. Through sharing their father's song with Raynell, Cory is finally able to eclipse his sense of estrangement and be united with his past that defines him (Noggle,2007). Troy's song is the channel that stretches throughout the history of the African Americans to help them sublimate their spirit in an attempt to sustain their culture and identity. Antoine Vergote in his "Ethics and Sublimation" directly connects sublimation to a culture where the psychological entity adapts his negative stimuli towards a decisive goal to elevate his/her spirit to the sublime, to the state where he could reconcile his past to help him move confidently towards the future. He annotates that: (Leader-Chivee,2016).

The objectives of sublimation can be very different, but they all have one feature in common, which Freud indicates by the comprehensive terms 'cultural values' or 'higher values'. In these expressions, one can recognise the appreciation Freud the Enlightenment thinker had for the progress of the 'spirit'.

Wilson aims at a wholly successful cultural transition by concentrating on the psyche of African Americans. His main characters in *Fences*; Troy, Rose, and Cory have been exposed to various social and psychological abuses that separate them as family members. They need to know how to direct and control their repression that might help them lead a healthy and productive way of living amongst the white community (Balkin,1989). Wilson in *Fences* is



trying to accentuate the fact that these same abuses could be healed by the process of sublimation which will, inexorably, implement a higher social and cultural creation of the African Americans' spirit. Through sublimation, these characters, whether consciously or unconsciously, can meet the demands of living the social reality as well as to avoid repression. These characters are finally able to reconcile their inner self by following a mechanism of substitution which is determined by the new cultural standards of the African Americans.



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