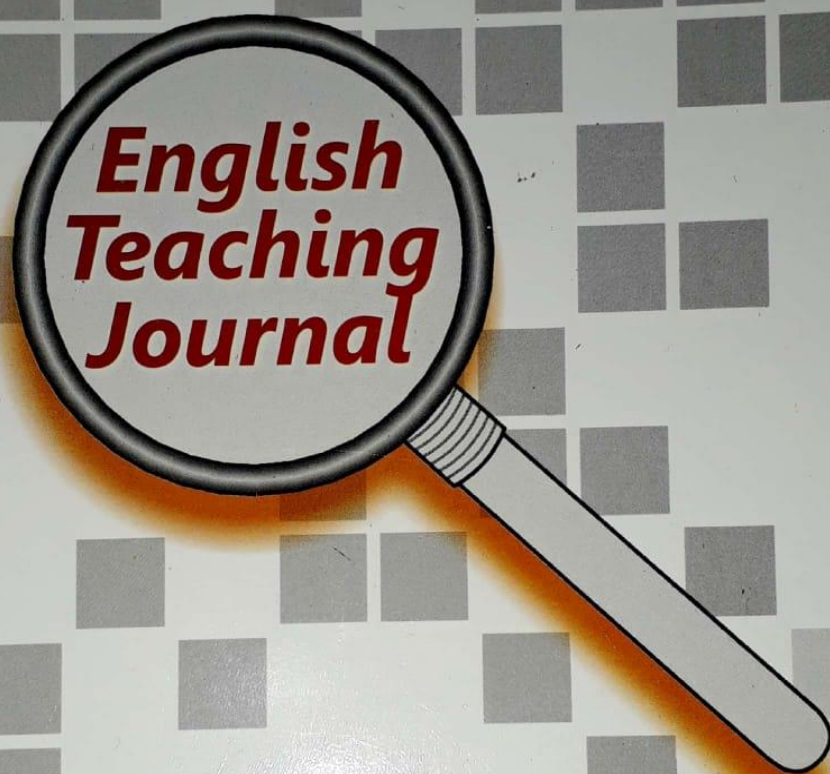


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THE PORTRAYAL OF BLACK AMERICAN PEOPLE IN 1950's THROUGH THE SETTING AND CHARACTER ANALYSIS IN WILSON'S *FENCES*

Th. Cicik Sophia B

ABSTRACT

The objective of this research is (1) to find out that the historical event that becomes the time set in 'Fences' compared to the real life; (2) to find out Troy Maxson's characteristics can be seen as the portrayal of Black American people who live in the same period as happened in 'Fences'. The method used in this research is qualitative by using historical approach. The outcome of this research are (1) The setting used in this drama are (a) historical setting; the drama takes place from the year 1950's until 1960's in America and (b) geographical setting; the drama takes place in Pittsburg, America; (2) Troy as the main character in 'Fences' has characteristics as (a) realistic man and when its compared to the life of black people in that era, it is still hard for the black people to achieve their dream such as the baseball player because he knows the condition at that time is hard for black people who want to be athletes; (b) uneducated, illiterate man and it is appropriate to the education condition in that era for blacks are segregated and very poor; (c) high tempered is as the consequence of the racial tension and discrimination toward blacks at that time.

Keywords: *setting, historical approach, characteristics, Black American people.*

ABSTRAK

Tujuan penulisan penelitian ini adalah (1) untuk mencari kejadian histories yang menjadi seting waktu di drama 'Fences' dibandingkan dengan kehidupan nyata; (2) untuk membuktikan bahwa karakteristik Troy Maxson bisa dilihat sebagai gambaran kehidupan orang kulit hitam di Amerika yang juga hidup pada zaman yang sama seperti di dalam drama tersebut. Metode yang digunakan yaitu kualitatif dengan menggunakan pendekatan historis. Hasil dari penelitian ini adalah (1) Seting yang ada di dalam drama ini adalah (a) seting historis dalam drama ini antara tahun 1950-an sampai dengan 1960-an di Amerika dan (b) seting geografis dalam drama ini terjadi di Pittsburg,

America; (2) Troy sebagai tokoh utama dalam drama yang berjudul 'Fences' mempunyai karakteristik sebagai berikut (a) realistis dan ketika dibandingkan dengan kehidupan orang kulit hitam pada masa itu, mereka masih kesulitan untuk meraih mimpi mereka, contohnya dalam bidang olahraga baseball karena orang kulit hitam pada masa itu susah untuk menjadi atlet; (b) tidak terpelajar, tidak bisa membaca dan menulis dan hal ini sesuai dengan kondisi pendidikan di masa itu karena orang kulit hitam mengalami segregasi dan sangat miskin; (c) temperamental sebagai konsekuensi dari tekanan rasial dan diskriminasi pada orang kulit hitam pada masa itu.

Kata kunci: seting, pendekatan histories, karakteristik, orang-orang kulit hitam.

INTRODUCTION

Literature can be divided into types and it is called genres. Literature can be classified into three genres, they are Prose, Drama, and Poetry (Kirkner and Mandell ,2000). Literature also can give us something to learn about somebody else's life. But also through literary work we can get the value, the norms, and the life of that particular period of time. It can use to portray all the things that happen in daily life. But now the writer wants to show the reader in this research one genre of literature that is drama.

Like what August Wilson tried to deliver, about the Black American life in 1950's in his Drama, *Fences*. *Fences* won 1987 Pulitzer Award for Drama. Although the historical atmosphere strongly feel in this through his play, but it doesn't mean Wilson tried to teach us about history. But more how we reflect and see that era with nowadays thought. *Fences* it self tells about the struggle of Black American family in 1950's who must deal with the poverty, discrimination and family conflict. So it can give us a brief look toward Black people in that era. *Fences* is full of messages we can get the meaning of love and life but we must put all those messages in order to gain the bigger meaning of life and love.

In this research, the writer will try to analyze the historical factor that work in this drama through historical approach. By using historical approach we can see whether the time set in this drama that happened in 1950's, as the portrayal of the way of life and also we can see how Black people were treated in 1950's, what values work in that time, and what kind of sociological context that influence Black people in 1950's especially in America. In addition we can know and feel what they had been through as Black American people in 1950's.

Statement of the Problems

1. What are the settings in *Fences*?
2. How the characteristics of Troy Maxson as the main character can be seen as the portrayal of black American people in the real life at the same time period?

Definition of the Key Terms

1. Setting is the general locale, historical time and social circumstances in which its action occurs, the setting of a single episode or scene within a work is the particular physical location in which it takes place as stated in *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (1993: p.192).
2. Character is therefore to transform the chaos of the ordinary conception of it into one in which the part of the character are seem to bear a clear and intelligible relation to the whole as stated in *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1956:p.)
3. Characteristics: Pertaining to, constituting, or indicating the character or peculiar quality of a person or thing; typical; distinctive
(<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/characteristic>)

SETTING

The writer concerns about the time setting in this drama that can affect the main character's characteristics based on when he lives and where he lives, so the writer uses the theory of setting. According to *Kirzner and Mandell* setting is divided into three parts, historical setting, geographical setting and physical setting (2000:p.142-144).

1. Historical Setting

Historical setting is a particular historical period, and the events associated with it, can be important in a story; therefore, some familiarity with a period can be useful (or even essential) to readers who wish to understand a story fully. Historically context establishes a social, cultural, economic, and political environment.

2. Geographical setting

In addition to know when a work takes place, readers need to know where it takes place. Knowing whether a story is set in United States, in Europe, or in a developing nation can help to explain anything from why language and customs are not familiar to us to why characters act in ways we find improbable. Even in stories set in our country, regional differences may account for differences in plot development and characters motivation.

CHARACTER

According to Pickering and Hoepfer in book *Literature* stated that in presenting and establishing character, an author has two basic methods or techniques at his or her disposal. One method is telling, which relies on exposition and direct commentary by the author. In telling the guiding hand of the author is very much evidence. We learn primarily from what the author explicitly calls to our attention. The other method is the indirect, dramatic method of showing, which involves the author's stepping aside, as it were, to allow the characters to reveal themselves directly through their dialogue and their actions (1994: p.62). The following are direct methods of revealing character according to Pickering and Hoepfer.

1. Characterization through the use of names.

The use of names can give us the assist in characterization. Some characters are given names that suggest their dominant or controlling traits.

2. Characterization through appearances

In reality appearances are often unreliable. In the world of fiction, however, details of appearance (what a character wears and how he or she looks) often provide essential clues to character.

3. Characterization by the author

In the most customary form of telling, the author interrupts the narrative and reveals directly, through a series of editorial comments, the personality of the characters, including the thoughts and feelings that pass through the character's minds.

4. Characterization through dialogue

In real life we usually talk and communicate with others. We are talking about ourselves and between ourselves, communicating bits and pieces of information, but not all the information important, it tells us about the personality of the speaker, except, perhaps, whether he or she is at ease in social situations. Some light fiction reproduces dialogue as it might occur in reality, but the best authors trim everything that is inconsequential.

5. Characterization through action

The idea that one's behavior is a logical and even necessary extension of one's psychology and personality is widely shared or in brief the single and definitive method of revealing character is through action.

THE BLACK AMERICAN LIFE IN 1950's

The other theory that the writer used is the evidence of black American life in 1950's to answer the third problem formulation. Next it will discuss about the life of black American people "Black Americans faced many disadvantages during the 1950's. In short they were discriminated from public services, to cafes and restaurants.

After the American Civil War in 1865, black people in the American South were no longer slaves. But they had never gained equality with whites. Black had remained second class citizens throughout their movement to America, with the worst paid unskilled jobs in farm and factories.

In most southern towns and cities blacks were not allowed to use the same restaurants, parks, public toilets, transport and schools as whites, "separate" did not mean equal. White facilities were nearly always of a much higher standard, more money spent on making the facilities higher quality" (<http://www.123helpme.com/view.asp?id=122370>).

But for the clearer description of black people's life can see from the next explanation about the discrimination in many aspects of their life as she cited from *Encyclopedia Americana* (1971: p. 72-74).

1. Employment and earnings

Employment opportunities, while greater in the North than in South, were nevertheless far inferior to those accorded whites. There was a steady improvement in Negro job status through depression of the 1930's, when numerous federal programs were undertaken, and during the World War II years because of labor shortages, but the Negroes' share of postwar was not equal. When the depression came, Negroes, as the lowest group on the economic ladder, were the hardest hit, this period yielded definite gains for American Negroes in view of general philosophy of the New Deal period. There was increased concern for the "common man" and minority problems become a recognized sphere of interest of federal government. World War II accelerated these tendencies. Under the pressure of increased war production. Negroes entered industry in large number and achieved higher position and pay. And in 1950's and 1960's numerous cities and states enacted ordinances on fair employment practices.

Nevertheless, discrimination among employers and in labor unions persisted in 1960's, and because of automation there were proportionately fewer demands for unskilled labor. Although many white families fled the core cities for the suburbs, their wage earners became commuters and continued to compete with the Negroes for the available jobs. Many companies were increasing their percentage of Negro employees, but Negro unemployment was twice that of the national rate, and Negro employees with the same qualifications as whites tends to be paid less for the same job.

2. Education

The education of Negroes in the South traditionally was characterized by inequities, and it was in that section of the country that the most dramatic developments took place beginning in the 1950's. Primarily as a result of legal action, educational opportunities for Negroes at the public school level in the South had improved greatly by the early of the 1950's: salaries of Negro teachers were substantially equal to those white teachers, and inequities in curriculum, equipment, and teaching loads were reduced. However, Negro children in the South still were limited to attending all-Negro public school.

3. The Slum Family

Never a strong, cohesive unit because slavery did not foster family living, the Negro family was further disintegrated by urban deprivations. Daniel P. Moynihan in his controversial government paper, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (1965), attributed the violence and disorder of the impoverished slums not solely to lack of civil rights but also to the "highly unstable" American Negro family.

4. Racial Tensions

Despite the enlargement of civil rights, American Negroes in the late 1960's still found themselves at the bottom of the standard living ladder. This time they were not content to remain there without protest. It was clear that whatever the cause of their impoverished condition, unusual and perhaps desperate measures were needed if they were to fully participated in American life.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study deals with Historical Approach in which it sees a literary work essentially, if not entirely, as a reflection of its author life and time of the work, because a historical novel is likely meaningful when either its background or its author is understood as cited in *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature* (p.25).

We can analyze of literature in many aspects, first we can see the time set, the values and how people live at that time through a literary work. But we can also compare the reality and what we see in the drama, those can be the reflection of the society or presently the history as the theme or also can describe what happen during the given time in *Fences*.

ANALYSIS

1. The setting of *Fences*

1.1. Historical Setting

Historical setting is a particular historical period, and the events associated with it, can be important in a story; therefore, some familiarity with a period can be useful (or even essential) to readers who wish to understand a story fully. Historically context establishes a social, cultural, economic, and political environment. In *Fences* we can see from the dialogue and we can compare the dialogue with the exact time the drama takes place, which is year 1950's in America. In prologue of *Fences*, it is clearly stated that this drama takes place in 1957 as shown by the next line "It is

1957” (p.170). As we know through the early of 20th century, Black American people are treated differently with the white ones. But I only found the discrimination in *Fences* in economic, social, and cultural matter.

a. Economic

In the early of 20th century, the black American people are treated differently in economical circumstances. In 1950’s Black people tend to be the working class or at the bottom of the working classification. The evidence we can see from these lines. “It is Friday night, payday The men carry lunch bucket and wear or carry burlap aprons and dressed in cloths suitable for they job as the garbage collectors” (p.170) From that line the writer concludes that the main character in this drama works as garbage collectors, the job has low income, the main character’s family are located in the bottom of the society as the working class family, because Troy works as garbage collector, a job that is not pleasant at all. His salary as the garbage collector is very little to support his family, a family of three members, he is paid less than a hundred dollars a week “There it is Seventy-six dollars and forty-two cents..... (p.179).”

The main character in this drama is described as Black American people, so in the society the main character’s family is seen as the lower class society. In this drama the description of Troy’s family is poor and labor class family, because of the poverty his family doesn’t have TV even Troy’s son, Cory really wants to have a TV, because of the financial condition, his family doesn’t have television or enough money to fix the broken roof .

Troy: Naw’, it’s just two hundred dollars. See that roof you got over your head all night? Let me tell you something about that roof. It’s been over ten years since that roof was last tarred. See now. . .the snow come this winter and sit up there on the roof like it is...and it’s gonna seep inside. It’s just gonna be a little bit...ain’t gonna hardly notice it. then the next thing you know, it’s gonna be leaking all over the house. Then the wood rot from all that water and you gonna need a whole new roof. Now how much you think it cost to get that roof tarred?
Cory: I don’t know

Troy: Two hundred and sixty four dollars...cash money. While you thinking about a TV, I got something to be thinking a bout the roof...and whatever else go wrong around here. Now if you had two hundred dollars, what would you do....(p. 186)

b. Social and Cultural

Culture in America at that time was very racism. At that time black is not allowed to do many things, American people at that time are separated according their skin. In *Fences* the discrimination also undergoes by the main character Troy Maxson, he is not allowed to drive a truck

“why? Why you got the white mens driving and the colored lifting? Told him, whats the matter, don’t I count? You think only white fellows got sense enough to drive a truck. That ain’t no paper job! Hell, anybody can drive a truck. How come you got all white driving and the colored lifting?” (p. 171)

The other kind of discrimination is in sport which is in this drama happened toward Troy’s son Cory, Cory really wants to join the football team in his school but his father, does not allow him to join. Because Troy thinks that if a colored boy wants to join a football team he must be treated differently than the white boy.

Troy: if they got a white fellow sitting on the benchyou can bet your last dollar he can’t play! The colored guy got to be twice as good before he get on the team. That’s why I don’t want you to get all tied up in them sports. Man on the team and what it get him? they got colored on the team and don’t use them. Same as not having them. All them teams the same (p.187)

From the lines above they proved how segregation happened even in the sport field. The white men get bigger chance to play than the black ones.

1.2. Geographical Setting

In *Fences* the geographical setting was clearly mentioned. The play is set in the dirt yard of the Maxson house. We're told that it's a two-story brick house, set off a back alley. Two junky chairs sit on a porch that's in bad need of a paint job. All this seems to communicate that the Maxsons aren't exactly the rich family (<http://www.shmoop.com/fences-august-wilson/setting.html>). But the other aspects that affect the geographical setting will be shown by the next lines.

The descendants of Africa slaves were offered no such welcome or participation. They come places called the Carolinas and the Virginias, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi and Tennessee. They came strong, eager searching. The city rejected them and they fled and settled along the riverbanks and under bridges.....(p. 169)

The drama took place in Pittsburgh, America. In Pittsburgh at that time, 1950's, the main character and the family experienced such a hard time. Because the drama took place in Pittsburgh at 1950's, the racial segregation still occurred at that moment. By examining where the story took place we can know how and why the main character act, as they required to, according to where they live. The white and black people at that time are treated differently. Including in sport, the white men get more opportunity and black men get less opportunity. That's why the main character in this drama does not want if his son plays baseball because of that reason.

Troy: I told that boy about that football stuff. The white man ain't gonna let him get nowhere with that football. I told him when he first come to me with it. Now you come telling me he done went and got tied up in it. he ought to go and get recruited in how to fix car or something where he can make living.

2. The Characteristics of Troy Maxson can be seen as the portrayal of black American people in 1950's until 1960's

Troy Maxson as the main character in this drama holds the significant role to the story of this drama. He is a black American man that must struggle with his life, through the discrimination, family conflict and poverty.

1. Characterization through the use of names.

The use of names can give us the assist in characterization. Troy's last name, Maxson, is an amalgamation of Mason and Dixon, after the Mason-Dixon line, the name for the imaginary line that separated the slave states from the free states. Troy's name symbolically demonstrates Troy's character as one who lives on a line between two opposing ideas. Troy's history is equal parts southern and northern, half-full of hope and half-filled with disappointment. He was once at the top of an exciting career opportunity as a ball-player that nose-dived into a life in a dead-end job

(www.wikipedia.com/fences). Troy is a man who does not believe everything we could reach if we only dream about it. This is similar to his dream when he was younger, he wanted to be a baseball player, but when he was young, Major League did not accept black player thus when his son wants to be a baseball player he is very opposing his son choice. His reason to oppose his son's desire is that Troy does not want his son end up like him, a man who becomes a garbage collector. From the next line we can see his disagreement when he talks to his wife, Rose, about Cory's idea who wants to join the baseball team.

Troy: I don't want him to be like me! I want him to move as far way from my life as he can get. You the only decent thing that ever happened to me. I wish him that. But I don't wish him a thing else from my life. I decided seventeen years ago that boy wasn't getting involved in no sports. Not after what they did to me in sport.

The used of name in *Fences* for the main character Troy Maxson can be said that he is a portrayal of the black man at that time, who must survive in discrimination country and society. But in the other way from the lines above we can see how he tries to oppose Cory's opinion shows that he is a realistic man who does not want his son to undergo what he had in the past.

2. Characterization through action

The idea that one's behavior is a logical and even necessary extension of one's psychology and personality is widely shared or in brief the single and definitive method of revealing character is through action.

In *Fences* Troy is described as illiterate man that can be seen from the next lines.

Troy: I told you I ain't signed nothing, woman! The only thing I signed was the release form. Hell, I can't read, I don't know what they had on that paper! I ain't signed nothing about sending Gabe away (p. 208).

It is something uncommon because Troy illustrate as a fifty-three years old man in 1950's that mean he was born in 1900's, Troy Maxson lives before the development of education in 1950's he is unable to attend school. And the other explanation is he left his house and his father that made him to think

about how at the age fourteen to survive first than to attend school we can see from the next lines.

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. And it was a long time before I could cut it down to where I could handle it. (p. 196)

That is why Troy depicts as uneducated and illiterate man. Next is the evidence that black American treated differently in education circumstances. "The education of Negroes in the South traditionally was characterized by inequities, and it was in that section of the country that the most dramatic developments took place beginning in the 1950's. Primarily as a result of legal action, educational opportunities for Negroes at the public school level in the South had improved greatly by the early of the 1950's: salaries of Negro teachers were substantially equal to those white teachers, and inequities in curriculum, equipment, and teaching loads were reduced. However, Negro children in the South still were limited to attending all-Negro public school."

3. Characterization through dialogue

Troy as the main character definitely said the important thing and tries to judge him self as the right ones. The next dialogue is about the disagreement of Troy Maxson if his son, Cory joins the baseball team.

Troy: You damn right you are! And ain't no need for nobody coming around here to talk to me about signing nothing

Cory: Hey, Pop... you can't do that. He's coming all the way from north Carolina.

Troy: I don't care where he coming from. 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 house or something, get you a trade. That why you have something can't take away from you. You go on and learn how to put your hands to some good use. Besides hauling people's garbage. (p. 187-188)

From the above quotation about the Troy's disagreement with Cory's choice shows how Troy as the main character and as a father said something that he thinks right. Furthermore from the dialogue above we can notice that Troy is a high tempered man, we also can see from the next lines when he is mad toward Cory still about his disapproval "*(shoves him on his shoulder)*: Nigger! That's what you are. You just another nigger on that street to me!" (p. 214) The use of exclamation marks show his anger and his action shoved Cory's shoulder demonstrates how anger Troy was.

The differentiation in economic circumstances also occurs in the amount of wage Troy is receiving every week. He only receiving small amount of money to support his family to survive another week can be seen from the next line stated by Troy " There it is, Seventy-six dollars and forty two cents ..." (p. 179). That line show how little money Troy accepted every week for his hard work as a garbage collector. And also from that lines show Troy gives his salary toward his wife and can be said that he is a responsible man. But also can be said that because of the economic matter and the racial segregation, Troy becomes a high tempered man if he is talking about the injustice and the opportunity in many ways such as in his work area. Although black people in the America were no longer slaves, they had never gained equality with whites (<http://www.123helpme.com/view.asp?id=122370>).

"Employment opportunities, while greater in the North than in South, were however far lower to those accorded whites. There was a steady improvement in Negro job status trough depression of the 1930's, when numerous federal programs were undertaken, and during the World War II years because of labor shortages, but the Negroes' share of postwar was not equal. When the depression came, Negroes, as the lowest group on the economic ladder, were the hardest hit, this period yielded specific gains for American Negroes in view of general philosophy of the New Deal period. There was improved concern for the "common man" and minority problems become a recognized

sphere of interest of federal government. World War II accelerated these tendencies. Under the pressure of increased war production. Negroes entered industry in large number and achieved higher position and pay. And in 1950's and 1960's many cities and states enacted ordinances on fair employment practices. On the other hand, discrimination among employers and in labor unions persisted in 1960's, and because of mechanization there were proportionately fewer demands for untrained labor. Although many white families fled the center cities for the suburbs, their salary earners became commuters and continued to compete with the Negroes for the available jobs.

Many companies were increasing their percentage of Negro employees, but Negro unemployment was twice that of the national rate, and Negro employees with the same qualifications as whites tends to be paid less for the same job" (Encyclopedia Americana: p. 71).

CONCLUSION

The writer concludes that the portrayal of Black American people in 1950 can be seen through the setting, namely; historical setting and geographical setting, and the characteristic of Troy as the main character, namely; (1) realistic man and when its compared to the life of black people in that era, it is still hard for the black people to achieve their dream such as the baseball player because he knows the condition at that time is hard for black people who want to be athletes; (2) uneducated, illiterate man and it is appropriate to the education condition in that era for blacks are segregated and very poor; (3) high tempered is as the consequence of the racial tension and discrimination toward blacks at that time.

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