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STEPPING BEYOND THE VEIL AND BREAKING THE PITTSBURGH CYCLE: THE AMERICAN DREAM,
OTHERNESS, AND GENERATIONAL TRAUMA IN AUGUST WILSON'S CYCLE PLAYS

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A Thesis

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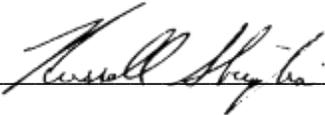
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Abstract:

August Wilson's Pittsburgh Cycle is a series of ten plays that aims to "amend, to explore, and to add to our African consciousness and our African aesthetic" (Wilson qtd. in Gantt 5). Each play is set in a different decade but all share incredibly similar protagonists; all of them are African American men in their mid to late adulthood. The stories are separated by years but all articulate the generational trauma embedded in the African American consciousness in the twentieth century. Wilson's plays span between the generations of African Americans living in the wake of the Emancipation Proclamation to a group of men living at the start of the new millennium. Each character deals with the struggles of his given time period, but they all experience some form of generational trauma.

An essential part of each characters' psyche is torn between their African and their American identities, a psychological phenomenon W.E.B. DuBois calls "double consciousness." Their American identity pushes them to fulfill their role as the provider, embracing notions of masculinity and the capitalist influence of the "American Dream," but it is their African identity that prevents them from flourishing in the white American society. They must work to succeed in spite of their identities, crafting their mannerisms and behavior in the form of the "White Man." These men are also deeply traumatized by their relationships with their fathers. Each man struggles with what Freud would call an Oedipal Complex, attempting to fulfill the paternal role that their fathers failed in. To their own dismay, the generational trauma has already been transposed upon them: they cannot fulfill their fiscal role as the American man because of their blackness. In turn, these men become frustrated, paranoid, anxious, and deeply sad; their self-imposed deficiency separates them from their family, pushing them away from their sons and wives, thereby perpetuating the generational cycle. The Pittsburgh Cycle is truly a cycle of the

effects of DuBois's double-consciousness, demonstrating that these men are always tied to their blackness and the discrimination that is embedded within it.

Wilson's Theater: A Stage for "the human condition"

August Wilson gave a landmark speech at the Theatre Communications Group conference in 1996 that ignited a debate regarding race's role in the American theatre. Wilson gave a cutting critique of the reality of the American theatre, arguing that black playwrights, actors, and productions were severely underfunded and that this underfunding was perpetuating racial grievances that began with the arrival of African slave ships to the New World in the 1600s. Conference director John Sullivan said that they had selected Wilson as a keynote speaker because "multiculturalism" was becoming a fascination in the theater community, gushing that "we just *had* to talk about it." Wilson proposed something bolder than the notion of colorblind casting or racial inclusion, asserting instead that black theatre needed to remain its own entity and stay grounded firmly in its African roots and heritage (Butler 60). To Wilson, theatre practices that worked to forget race were just as problematic as completely eliminating black art all together, explaining that "To mount an all-black production of *A Death of a Salesman* or any other play conceived for white actors as an investigation of the human condition through the specifics of white culture is to deny us our own humanity, our own history, and the need to make our own investigations from the cultural ground on which we stand as black Americans" ("Ground" 8). Essentially, an all-black production of white plays would be insufficient in communicating the true message of black culture because these plays were conceived from the perspective of a white playwright, with an eye towards the white American experience. According to Wilson, the black experience was completely different from what these white plays investigated.

Wilson defines culture as "the behavior patterns, the arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought as expressed by a particular community of people,"

and to him, the whiteness of popular theatre was unable to express the truth of his own black experience (“Ground” 3). He thus called upon black theatre to become a mediator between these two communities by showing the white audience what the black experience is and by authenticating the struggles and beauties that encompass it to the black audiences that know it. He explained that only black playwrights and actors can truthfully tell these experiences because humanity “cannot meet on the common ground of experience,” but only on the “common ground of theatre as a work and endeavor” (“Ground” 5). For Wilson, the purpose of black theatre was to articulate these nuances of the marginalized and to reeducate society, explaining that theatre “can disseminate ideas, . . . can educate even the miseducated, because it is art—and all art reaches across that divide that makes order out of chaos, and embraces the truth that overwhelms with its presence, and connects man to something larger than himself and his imagination” (“Ground” 13). Wilson’s theatre was more than just a performance: it was an expression of the intricacies of his people that only they themselves could write.

August Wilson articulates the twentieth-century African American experience in a series of ten plays called “The Pittsburgh Cycle.” Each play is set in a different decade, tackling a different aspect of the African American experience in relation to its time period and the development of the role of the black man in white America. In his aforementioned speech, Wilson expresses that racial tensions are still incredibly painful and difficult to deal with, explaining that, “The problematic nature of the relationship between whites and blacks has for too long led us astray from the fulfillment of our possibilities as a society. We stare at each other across a divide of economics and privilege that has become an encumbrance on black Americans’ ability to prosper and on the collective will and spirit of our national purpose” (“Ground” 3). To Wilson, the racial divide is a cultural problem based in economics and

privilege. This notion is clearly articulated through all of Wilson's protagonists, most of whom are black men ranging from thirty to fifty years old. Wilson's protagonists provide a snapshot of the development of this racial divide and how it influences each protagonist's psyche. While the stories vary in plot, each protagonist shares problems with the other protagonists in the plays set in the decades both before and after them. Wilson's Pittsburgh Cycle is a story strung through the lives of many, defining the African American experience in the twentieth century.

In 1957, *Fences*' Troy Maxson bridges the gap between segregation and the Civil Rights Movement as he dreams of becoming a major league baseball player. His reality is far from his fantasy, as he works as a garbage man and comes home to a needy but loving family. He grows disdainful towards his reality, yearning for something beyond the monotony of working and paying the bills. He views his failures as an outcome of the racism of the National Baseball League and his tumultuous upbringing. He tries to steer his youngest son, Cory, away from falling into the same pattern, but manages to break his relationship with his son in the process. Troy discourages Cory from pursuing football and pushes him to pick up a trade that no one can take away from him. Cory becomes resentful towards his father, accusing him of not wanting his son to be more successful than him. Cory eventually leaves his home after a bitter argument with his father, just like Troy had left his own father's home. Troy and Cory demonstrate the broken relationship between father and son that is at the heart of the Pittsburgh Cycle—a break that is caused by an attempt to achieve the American Dream.

In 1977, *Jitney*'s Booster and Becker have an equally complex father-son relationship. Becker owns a small gypsy cab company in Pittsburgh that is relatively successful among the African American community. He has worked very hard to achieve a level of financial security and respect within his community, all for his son's benefit. Becker explains that he has worked

so hard so that his son wouldn't "have to follow behind" him (57). Booster, however, does not view his father as successful, but submissive to the systems of the community surrounding him. He does not think that his father has worked hard enough to overcome the "white man." Booster is determined to stand up for his blackness, no matter what the cost. The cost for Booster is a jail sentence; to Becker, however, his son might as well have been served a death sentence. Becker knows that his son will never succeed in life with a felony charge hanging over him, and he sees his life's work evaporated when his son is imprisoned.

In 1997, times have seemingly changed for *Radio Golf's* Harmond Wilks. He is a candidate for mayor of Pittsburgh, working alongside his friend Roosevelt Hicks to renovate the Hill District. The two black men seem to have gained access into the "white man's" world, becoming board members on major commercial companies and playing golf with these business men on the weekend. However, it soon becomes evident that in order for Harmond and Roosevelt to fully cross into this world, they must abandon their heritage and the black community. Harmond struggles with tearing down an old house on Wylie Street belonging to Elder Joseph Barlow, who is Harmond's distant relative. The Wylie house has been a staple of the Hill District for generations, with ancient architecture that has been preserved since the house's construction. During the redistricting process, Harmond must choose between embracing the board's plan for Hill District, which essentially rips down this cultural monument to build a strip mall with a Whole Foods and Starbucks, or fighting to save the Wylie house. When Sterling Johnson, an old schoolmate of Harmond's, asks him, "Is you gonna be mayor of the black folks or the white folks?" (56), he articulates the identity crisis that Harmond is facing: Harmond must choose between embracing the white community, thus abandoning his heritage, or he must abandon his ambitions and dreams.

Wilson closes “The Ground on Which I Stand” with a mission statement for American theatre, articulating that it is “in its power to inform about the human condition,” as well as “to heal, ‘to hold the mirror as ’twere up to nature,’ to the truths we uncover, to the truths we wrestle from uncertain and sometimes unyielding realities. All of art is a search for ways of being, of living life more fully” (13). Wilson’s theatre was a stage on which to perform these truths and uncover the underlying nature of ordinary life for African Americans. Wilson purposefully creates complex protagonists in order to demonstrate the larger psychological truth of the African American experience throughout the second half of the twentieth-century. Experiencing a play from Wilson’s Pittsburgh Cycle is a study of the mind: it requires the audience to key into the protagonist’s traumatized past and to experience his volatile present.

While Wilson’s protagonists live in different decades, they all share common anxieties, run into similar barriers, and fear the same thing: failure to live the American Dream. Wilson’s protagonists all want to provide for their families and succeed financially, but they are unable to ever attain that comfortable life because of their race. These three plays depict over fifty years of social change, and while their stories may vary, they are united by the fact that all of their protagonists fail to achieve financial stability and career success. The American Dream becomes an obsessional fantasy for the men of the Cycle that drives them to anxiety and irrational behaviors. The financial definition of success stemming from that fantasy becomes a goal for these men to measure themselves against, even though they will never be able to attain that financial comfort that they dream of. The idea of achieving that American Dream is just a product of fantasy that has been stored deep within the unconscious of these characters, and it is on the stage that these characters grapple with the influence of these futile dreams.

The Complexity of Consciousness in Wilson's Protagonists

The Pittsburgh Cycle is about fathers and sons; each play features a challenging relationship between the downtrodden father and the hopeful, rebellious son. Paternal relationships are the foundation of the psyche according to Sigmund Freud. He explains that “The super-ego is . . . not simply a residue of the earliest object-choices of the id; it also represents an energetic reaction-formation against those choices. Its relation to the ego is not exhausted by the precept: ‘You ought to be like this (like your father).’ It also comprises the prohibition: ‘You may not be like this (like your father)’” (641-42). The father becomes the overruling voice of reason, either because he is the voice himself or an internalization of that voice, highlighting what the boy should and should not do as he grows into a man. Freud also argues that this initial relationship between father and son is what will ultimately influence how the ego deals with the Oedipus complex, which stems from the male subject’s need to identify with or against the father figure in order to deal with the loss of the mother, or the object-cathexes. The young boy measures himself against the father as a masculine ideal, but “his identification with his father then takes on a hostile colouring and changes into a wish to get rid of his father in order to take his place with his mother” (Freud 640).

Freud theorized that the human mind was incredibly complex and layered with impulses both apparent and hidden. He argued that human consciousness was split between aspects of the psyche that the subject had control over and large portions that were unconscious. The latter, he argued, was a portion of the mind that the subject was not aware of and could not change. Consciousness merely functions as the surface of the mental apparatus; the unconscious houses the influences that affect the ego’s choices, mannerisms, and personality (Freud 632). Freud argued that the psyche could be split into three levels: the ego, the id, and the super-ego. The ego

is the negotiator of consciousness, dealing with the influences of the id and super-ego as it experiences reality. The id is the portion of the mind that houses the desires and drives, the majority of which are hidden and repressed. The repressed is hidden within the unconsciousness, as it is “only cut off sharply from the ego by the resistances of repression; it can communicate with the ego through the id” (Freud 635). The id thereby becomes the mouthpiece of the repressed desires of the ego.

The super-ego or the ego-ideal is the conscience of the ego, essentially creating goals for the ego in the pursuit of the ideal Self and regulations that fit into that perfect image. Freud argues that all humans have these levels of the psyche and that anxieties can be explained through the analysis of these levels. Freud was primarily concerned with explaining problems by unclinking the id and the repressed, as he believed that the ego’s collapse begins when the repressed escapes (Freud 631). The men of Wilson’s Pittsburgh Cycle all experience this collapse of the ego. They are all frustrated with their inability to meet the demands of the super-ego, but they take out these frustrations in different ways.

The Oedipal Complex is realized in the Pittsburgh Cycle not so much as a sexual drive (there is little to no suggestion of an incestuous relationship between the mothers and sons in these plays), but as a drive to achieve what the father failed to do: achieve the American Dream. The American Dream is the definition of success for the men of the Cycle; it means a comfortable home for their family, a stable job, steady finances, and personal fulfillment. These goals are achievable, and many of the men of the Cycle already have accomplished a good majority of them. These men are able to check their boxes, yet they still seem unfulfilled. They still see that their American Dream has not yet come to fruition. Rather than a set of concrete goals, the Dream transforms into an abstract idea of success, happiness, and triumph for

Wilson's protagonists. The men of the Cycle become attached to what Jacques Lacan would define as an "obsessional fantasy."

Lacan defines fantasy as an ambiguous idea that becomes masochistic to the point of personal desolation to the subject. The fantasy becomes masochistic because, in short, it is unachievable. He explains this notion using the formula of fantasy, which he describes as: $\$ \langle \rangle a$ (Lacan 387). The barred subject, represented by the "\$," is the subject who sees himself as incomplete or insufficient, becoming castrated by the signifier. This subject does not feel fulfillment with his or her reality because he or she has not achieved their object *a*, represented by the "*a*" in the formula. The object *a* is the sublime object the subject desires. It is what the subjects long for in order to feel whole, as Lacan notes in *Seminar V: Formations of the Unconscious*. As Lacan explains, the object *a* is something through which the subject can achieve phallic power: "His relationship to life comes to be symbolized by the phallus signifier, this lure he extracts from forms of life, and it's here that the central point is located, the most tangible and most significant crossroads that we explore over the course of a subject's analysis. The phallus is its pinnacle, its point of equilibrium" (384). The phallic object becomes the literal goal these men in Wilson's plays strive for, such as a promotion or actual monetary gain. The phallic object gains its power because it is signified through the subject's Symbolic. Pittsburgh determines that power only comes from monetary success and capital gain. Yet, in the pursuit of the phallic object, the subject then becomes fixated upon an ambiguous object *a*, such as the American Dream. The desire becomes its own agent, attaching itself to this unachievable object *a*.

This type of desire becomes self-destructive because the subject views himself as powerless unless he is able to acquire his unattainable object *a*. The subject then chases after the

object *a*, a chase represented by the lozenge (<>) in the formula. This lozenge represents all of the subject's actions in his life because they all are centered on the obsessional drive to achieve the object *a*. These fantasies, Lacan notes, are not simple abstractions of the mind but rather real images. He explains that the fantasies "are not blind images of instinct destruction, they are not something in which the subject sees red all of a sudden when confronted with his prey" but instead "something that the subject articulates into a scenario" and "something which the subject puts himself into" (387). This fantasy is something that the subject itself crafts into a seemingly realistic goal or scenario, like Troy's desire to become a baseball player in *Fences* or Becker's desire for his son to become financially successful in *Jitney*. These fantasies alone seem feasible, but it becomes obsessional because the subject is barred, meaning that he sees himself as powerless without the acquisition of the object *a*.

The subject also conceptualizes the object *a* through signifiers from the world around it. The Symbolic is understood through the subject's reality, which for all of the protagonists of the Cycle is twentieth-century Pittsburgh (Lacan 388). The culture of the subject's reality is one of the most influential aspects of the fantasy because it is the culture that determines what grants power. In Pittsburgh, as in most major American cities, this power comes from the fantasy of the American Dream. For these characters, the American Dream means financial stability, a happy family, and a successful and fulfilling career. Each character in the Cycle articulates the fantasy differently through various jobs and choices, but all of their actions are steps to achieve that larger picture of domestic happiness promised by American capitalism. Wilson's protagonists, however, do not seem like optimistic dreamers. They are quite the opposite, often cursing the world and their position in it, lamenting their losses and cursing the "white man" for robbing them of their opportunity. Lacan notes that the obsessional subject is incredibly pessimistic, like

many of the men of the Cycle, describing the obsessional as “someone who speaks to us above all about all sorts of impediments, inhibitions, barriers, fears, doubts, and prohibitions” (389). The obsessional is not someone who is ambitious to achieve his dreams, but who is instead trapped behind the powerless feeling of never being able to achieve them. He or she keeps their eye set on the object *a* as a way to understand their own failures, seeing the object *a* as their one key to happiness. This moment is when the fantasy becomes masochistic drive rather than simple determination.

Both Lacan and Freud explain the construction of Self in the personal terms of familial relationships and internal desire. Alone, their theories do not completely encompass the complexity of what drives the men of Pittsburgh in Wilson’s plays. As he mentions in “The Ground on Which I Stand,” black theatre is a stage specifically for explaining the American black experience. These men are influenced by their upbringing and their own internal drives, but these internal factors are rooted in their blackness and community. Their blackness adds a layer to their psyche that a white counterpart simply does not possess. It is because of the characters’ blackness that Freud and Lacan’s theory of the self and the psyche alone are not sufficient. Psychiatrist and philosopher Frantz Fanon connects that gap between psychoanalysis and critical race theory. Fanon personally experienced the influence of British colonization on his black identity, as he was originally from the French colony of Martinique. He identifies this white influence as crippling to his identity in his two esteemed works *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*. As a student of psychology, he connects these terms of Self and identity to blackness in a way that Lacan and Freud simply did not. While Fanon is speaking to the European experience, his theories parallel W. E. B. DuBois’s concept of “double-consciousness” with respect to the African American experience in *The Souls of Black Folk*. The

two thinkers are similar in the fact that their black identity has been truncated because of the overwhelming influence of an empowered white community. In both cases, the black subject is influenced by white notions of success and fulfillment, which both theorists argue will inevitably harm the psyche of these subjects.

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon explains that the black subject is inherently traumatized because of cultural assimilation. He calls the black subject's experience the "neurosis of blackness," which he characterizes as a condition of phobia and paranoia caused by the collective unconscious of the lineage of the black subject. Fanon argues that this neurosis begins as early as childhood for the black subject, because they are raised in a world in which their own cultural heritage is "Other." He draws upon magazines as his specific example of when the black psyche builds himself in terms of the Other, explaining that the magazines devoured by children have depictions of the "Savage [that] are always symbolized by Negroes or Indians; since there is always identification with the victor, the little Negro, quite as easily as the little white boy, becomes an explorer 'who faces the danger of being eaten by wicked Negroes'" (146). Fanon argues that these cultural representations are the lens through which black subjects understand themselves. The magazine that Fanon specifically references depicts the divisive manner of these cultural representations; the Savage is depicted as dark skinned, while the hero is a white man. The subject looks at these two pictures, craving the admiration of the hero. This desire creates a differentiation between good and evil, so much so that the black child will inherently want to become more like the white hero that they look at in these pictures. Representation in culture creates the basis for the subject to create definitions of good versus bad.

Fanon further articulates that this representation creates an inability for the black child to see himself in a positive manner because they see whiteness as good and themselves as representations of bad. These representations then hinder the black child to honor his own lineage because he sees his past as damaged or lesser than their white counterparts. Fanon argues that identifying with one's lineage is an essential part of the Self, especially when people who share his physical characteristics are represented as Savage or Other. The black child will then identify with the Other while attempting to join the normalized group, splitting the psyche between these two identities. This is a psychological break that occurs early on, as Fanon explains:

When the Negro makes contact with the white world, a certain sensitizing action takes place. If his psychic structure is weak, one observes a collapse of the ego. The black man stops behaving as an *actional* person. The goal of his behavior will be The Other (in guise of the white man), for The Other alone can give him worth. That is on the ethical level: self-esteem. (154)

The black man will experience a collapse of ego in a "white world," as like Troy does throughout *Fences*. Troy spends the entire play as a broken man, speaking to Death directly, verbally abusing his wife and son, constantly lamenting his own disappointing life, and victimizing himself. Troy is the black subject who fails to become an actional person, instead embracing the definitions of the "Othered" black man rather than a successful person.

W. E. B. Du Bois explains the influence of these othering factors on the African American psyche in *The Souls of Black Folk*, arguing that the African American man is inherently split between two identities. According to Du Bois, as the African American man creates his black identity, he develops a "double consciousness," aware that he is both inside and

outside of this world into which he has been thrown. He articulates this notion as follows: “One ever feels his twoness,--an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (54). Double consciousness exists within what Du Bois calls a psychological “Veil of Color,” which he defines as a separating force between an African American and “Opportunity.” Du Bois argues that the Veil is a racial barrier between the black subject and success, explaining that some may “lift the Veil and set the prisoned free” or they “shall die in their bonds” (56). Behind the Veil, the black man is inherently attached to his double consciousness, existing in a world from which he is barred. Du Bois describes the world of the Veil as follows: “I have called my tiny community a world, and so its isolation made it; and yet there was among us but a half-awakened common consciousness, sprung from common joy and grief, at burial, birth, or wedding; from a common hardship in poverty, poor land, and low wages; and, above all, from the sight of the Veil that hung between us and Opportunity” (57).

Wilson’s protagonists are salient examples of Du Bois’s double consciousness, as they spending these plays behind the Veil in the “grief” of their “half-awakened” consciousness. Fanon argues that it is within this double consciousness that the black man is inherently traumatized. He develops an “inferiority or superiority complex” or even becomes very aware of his own “feelings of equality” (150.) Wilson’s protagonists develop both an inferiority and superiority complex, as they attempts to achieve the American Dream. They are both victims and perpetrators of trauma, pitying their own economic and masculine inadequacies while also perpetuating those same boundaries created by the Veil, double-consciousness, and trauma to their sons.

The Pittsburgh Cycle is a cycle of fantasy conceived by the pursuit of the American Dream and then perpetuated by the influence of the paternal authority. The subject recognizes that he must be financially stable in order to fill this hole in their self-esteem created by the super-ego, thus becoming the barred $\$$. The American Dream becomes the object *a* for all of Wilson's protagonists in the Cycle. The American Dream becomes a pattern of hard work and disappointment because they cannot step past the Veil to accomplish their goals. The Veil reifies the lozenge in Lacan's formula for fantasy. They are unable to ever cross into that comfortable way of life that they seek, but they never stop working for it. Even in death, these men manage to perpetuate the Cycle by transmitting the dream onto their sons, hoping that their life's work will help their sons become better than they are.

“Find me the strength to carry me through to next Friday”: The Realization of the Oedipus Complex through African-American and Masculine Identity in *Fences*

Race has always been a focal point in Wilson's plays as well as for scholars of his work. Many scholars focus primarily on the Pittsburgh Cycle as a timepiece, looking at each play as an emblem of a specific decade with an eye towards the racial grievances of that particular time. John Timpane, for instance, explains that in the Pittsburgh Cycle, “history passes in the form not of a progress but of a crisis of reading.” Timpane articulates that the conflict of the Cycle is that many of these characters are stuck in the past as the present moves forward towards progress. The 1957 Pittsburgh in *Fences* is set on the precipice of the Civil Rights Movement, so Troy Maxson plays a role as the “sacrifice” to the history that is about to follow his moment on stage. Baseball is that sacrifice for Troy; in his perception, he was denied his chance at the major leagues because of his blackness. Timpane points out that Troy's wife Rose retorts that times

have changed and that there are many more opportunities for African American men than there have ever been, but for some reason Troy cannot deal with this note of hope. Timpane argues that the conflict of the story is because Troy will remain the racial sacrifice for the next part of history, and that the anxiety stems from Troy's *post facto* desire for resolution that he will never get (68). It is hasty to look at Troy as simply a symbol of sacrifice, as the argument completely ignores his individual trauma and his personal drives, instead viewing him as a symbol of a more progressive time to come. Wilson would also demonstrate that this progressive time to come is another faulty assumption in his last play of the Pittsburgh Cycle, *Radio Golf*.

Troy works a typical Monday to Friday job, beginning early and starting late. His dreams were much different than his reality, as he quite often laments to friends and family. His true dream was to become a professional baseball player after playing for years in the prison leagues. In a discussion between his son and Bono, he criticizes "the system," claiming that he was better than most of the men playing Major League Baseball. When someone claims that the league has become much more inclusive because of Jackie Robinson, Troy laughs in his face and retorts, "I done seen a hundred niggers play baseball better than Jackie Robinson. Hell, I know some teams Jackie Robinson couldn't even make! What you talking about Jackie Robinson. Jackie Robinson wasn't nobody" (1193). Bono tells him over and over again that Troy's rejection was not a matter of skin color, but rather because a matter of him being too old to run with the young baseball stars, but Troy cannot accept this. He is fixated upon his role as "Other," ultimately finding identity in that struggle. It is easier to be a man with talent who was discriminated against than a man who failed to get a better job. Bono and Lyons completely deny his claims, but, again, he is fixated upon his dream to play baseball, explaining, "I'm talking about if you could play ball then they ought to have let you play" (1194). Troy feels trapped behind the Veil, aware

of his Otherness in the world, and in turn victimizes himself and clings to his oppression.

Troy cannot cope with his reality and has trouble seeing himself as a slave to his bills, his job, and familial duties rather than a happy person. He has a loving family, a home, and a job, yet he cannot seem to find any type of joy in the life he worked so hard to build for himself. He cries to Rose to just “Find me the strength to carry me through to next Friday” (1208). He is exhausted, running nonstop on the spinning wheel of capitalism: trying to keep food on the table and the lights on with a measly paycheck. Because of this, Troy only has the emotional capacity to deal with the weight of the financial burden of having a family and cannot fulfill his fatherly role in terms of love or loyalty. After a fight with Cory over chores, Rose asks Troy why he cannot be more understanding, to which he replies: “I carry a sack of potatoes and a bucket of lard. You all line up at the door with your hands out. I give you the lint from my pockets. I give you my sweat and my blood. I ain’t got no tears. I done spent them” (1208). Troy’s physical and mental exhaustion are all side-effects of his neurosis of blackness. The economic weight he carries derails his ability to enjoy his life and his family, eventually pushing them away from him with his cruel behavior and his infidelity to Rose.

Troy’s financial stability is dependent upon the capitalist hegemony, run by the primarily white men who occupy a higher position than him. He is paranoid about the men who are “higher” than him in this capitalist hegemony, feeling as though he needs to be perfect in order to avoid demise. He relies on his job to provide for his family, getting paid by the white Mr. Rand each Friday. He teaches his youngest son Cory that he needs to find a trade job, “That way you have something can’t nobody take away from you” (1206). He sees his financial stability as an object that can be taken away, becoming the phobic object that Fanon argues is essential in the neurosis of blackness. Troy is also paranoid about bills to companies run by white men, such as

the banker who loans Troy money for furniture. Troy had no furniture and an empty house, so he was met by a man who wanted to give him credit if he would pay a higher interest rate. Troy explains the situation to Lyons: “Say send ten dollars, first of every month to the address in the book and everything will be all right. Say if I miss a payment the devil was coming back and it’ll be hell to pay” (1196). The “devil” bill collector hangs in the back of his mind each month, as he sends off the little bits of his economic gains to these men. He villainizes the bill collector and makes himself subservient to Mr. Rand; none of his finances and possessions make Troy feel masculine or fulfilled, he simply feels anxious.

Troy’s anxieties surrounding bills and his career is common for people of all races, but he has an obsessive fear of death that only he possesses in the play. He equates Death to an enemy who has been chasing after him his entire life. He once had a case of pneumonia and thought that he was going to die. He tells Lyons, his eldest son from another marriage, that he fought death in the hospital. Troy describes Death very specifically, saying that when he overcame the pneumonia: “Death stood up, threw on his robe ... had him a white robe with a hood on it. He threw on that robe and went off to look for his sickle. Say, ‘I’ll be back.’ Just like that. ‘I’ll be back.’ I Told him say, ‘Yeah ... but you gonna have to find me!’” (1195). Troy’s image of Death is much different from typical depictions, such as the Grim Reaper, who is typically dressed head to toe in a black gown. Instead, Troy’s image of Death is instead a figure dressed in white, similar to the garb of the Ku Klux Klan. Death is a figure of Whiteness in the Cycle, replacing the typical association of whiteness with purity and innocence with a new depiction of a deadly enemy following Troy’s every step.

He looks at his life as a battle, often threatening Death in apostrophic speeches: “You stay on the other side of that fence until you ready for me.... I’ll be ready for you” (1226). In Act

Two, Scene 2, Troy speaks directly to Death, in what the stage direction describes as “a quiet rage that threatens to consume him” (1225). He tells Death that he’s going to “build me a fence around what belongs to me” in order to take care of himself (1225). His rage embodies the paranoia associated with the neurosis of blackness; he is fearful that someone will take away his possessions and life, so he meets this paranoia by constructing a physical barrier to separate himself from Death, which is essentially his projection of the “White” figures looking to steal from him, like Mr. Rand, the devil bill collector, or any other white person who might do him wrong. These characters never appear onstage, so they become more symbols of a system of oppression rather than actual people. Troy is constantly “vigilant” against Death, prepared for a fight at any moment. He says that it dominates all of his behavior, referring to the Bible, which says “be ever vigilant, adding, “That’s why I don’t get but so drunk. I go to keep watch” (1194). This type of paranoia is obsessive and neurotic.

Troy’s paranoia is generational, passed on to him from his own absentee father. He tells Bono, Lyons, and Rose that “The only thing my daddy cared about was getting them bales of cotton to Mr. Lubin” (1213). Mr. Lubin was a cotton farm owner, essentially the predecessor of Mr. Rand. Like Troy, his father was preoccupied with financial stability behind the Veil, but instead of paranoia, Troy’s father took out his neurosis in angry rants and neglect, just as Troy acts toward his own sons, thus reiterating the Cycle again. Troy reflects on his troubled childhood, explaining to Lyons that “Sometimes I wish I hadn’t known my daddy. He ain’t cared nothing about no kids. A kid to him wasn’t nothing. All he wanted was for you to learn how to walk so he could start you to working” (1213). Troy speaks openly about the trauma of his childhood, providing a rationale for why financial stability was so important to him. His father instilled in him that hard work was a necessary part of life, which Troy internalized, turning his

father's neglect into his own morals via his superego. Troy's father neglected him, especially when it came time to provide as a father, as Troy explains: "When it come time for eating ... he ate first. If there was anything left over, that's what you got. Man would sit down and eat two chickens and give you the wing" (1213). In retaliation to his father, he forms an image of himself as the ideal father: a man who provides for his family. For Cory, this definition proves to be less than ideal; despite how much Troy works to provide for his family, he is never emotionally supportive.

Troy also recalls a terrifying and meaningful moment in his childhood that began the cycle of his neurosis. Troy had been tasked with watching a mule, and he had snuck off to see a girl. His father caught him and beat him, but Troy then noticed that "he was chasing me off so he could have the gal for himself. When I see what the matter of it was, I lost all fear of my daddy" (1214). In that moment, Troy loses the fear of his father, banishing him from the authoritative role that he had once filled. Troy realizes that he must go out on his own and make a living for himself away from his abusive home; however, he could never completely part with his father. He reflects that "part of that cutting down was when I got to the place where I could feel him kicking in my blood and knew that the only thing that separated us was the matter of a few years" (1214). He understands that his father is a permanent part of his psyche, residing in the superego via his morals, but also in his heritage and blackness. He knows that there is not much difference between him and his father; he sees himself as a mirror image of him in his blackness, suffering, and oppression. He has his own Mr. Lubin and a family to feed, as well as his own drives and desires. He, too, sees that his father was the victim of circumstance, but also a guilty party in his own suffering.

Troy tries as best he can to separate himself from the paranoia that his father had caused him, but instead he perpetuates the Oedipus Complex within the Pittsburgh Cycle. His first son, Lyons, was born right before Troy went to prison. Troy had begun to steal in order to provide for the new baby, since he had to “steal three times as much” (1215). Then, Troy went to jail for fifteen years, leaving Lyons alone with just a mother to care for him. Troy has no real part in Lyons’s life outside of occasionally loaning him money. Lyons comes by weekly, asking for ten dollars to support his music career. When Troy says no, Lyons reminds him of his absence, taking advantage of his need to be a provider for his family.

Troy perpetuates his neurosis onto his son Cory through his demeanor and unloving parenting style. He continues the same type of stoic relationship that he had with his own father in an effort to provide for Cory, unlike his absentee father. Troy is forthright in his belief in working hard, often telling Cory to stop wasting time with sports and to take up a trade, explaining to Rose that “The white man ain’t gonna let him get nowhere with that football” (1193). Troy indicates the “white man” as the gatekeeper to Cory’s future. While his judgment might be riddled with the shadow of his own neurosis, Troy’s actions come from genuine love. His paranoia centers on the notion that the fantasy of the American Dream is unreachable for him and his family because of their blackness. He cannot support Cory’s dreams of playing college sports because he cannot see past the Veil. He is convinced that, like himself, Cory will always be Other in the world and that he needs to have a job that the white man will allow him to have. Cory begins to rebel from Troy’s rules by quitting his job and going to football practice. Troy tells the coach that his son will not be playing football in an attempt to maintain his authority, which Cory does not take lightly. Cory storms out of the house, angrily telling his father that he only treats him so poorly “Just ‘cause you didn’t have a chance! You just scared I’m gonna be

better than you, that's all!" (1217). His totalitarian parenting style also nods to an inner breakdown of self-esteem, the end product of the neurosis of blackness.

Troy needs to assert control over the private sphere of the home to combat the powerlessness he feels as a black man in the public sphere. Troy is domineering over Cory's actions and his career path, but focuses primarily on making sure that Cory does his chores regularly and holds a job at the local A&P. One day, as Cory helps his father build a fence around their yard, Cory has a moment of insecurity and asks his father if he likes him, a question to which Troy replies as follows::

Like you? I go out of here every morning....bust my butt...putting up with them crackers every day... 'cause I like you? You about the biggest fool I ever saw. It's my job. It's my responsibility. You understand that? A man got to take care of his family. You live in my house...sleep you behind on my bedclothes...fill you belly up with my food... 'cause you my son. You my flesh and blood. Not 'cause I like you! 'Cause it's my duty to take care of you. I owe a responsibility to you. (1207-8)

Troy has a different notion of what love is because of the morals he built in retaliation to his father. He has constructed an image of fatherhood that relies solely on taking care of his family. His tone is accusatory, reminding Cory of all the ways he has provided for him, including food, clothes, all because he has a "responsibility" to him.

Troy anchors his definition of fatherhood to the ability to provide for his family. The men of the Pittsburgh Cycle are attempting to fit into a stereotypical masculine role of the American Dream. To be a man in Pittsburgh is to provide for one's family and to succeed in work. Cynthia L. Caywood defines this role as the "fiction of archetypal masculinity," arguing that these men are measuring themselves according to a collection of hegemonic definitions of masculinity that

actually become far more damaging to both the subject and the family. Caywood explains that this “fiction of archetypal masculinity” is “characterized by such measures as oppression of women, the glorification of violence, the struggle for dominance, and the embrace of the capitalist agenda that measures success through the accumulation of money and material goods” (79). This definition becomes the mark of manhood and success in America, which the fathers will inevitably pass onto their sons, thus becoming the perpetuating Oedipal Complex in the Pittsburgh Cycle. Wilson agrees that his plays examine the influence of American capitalism on the black subject, explaining that, in America, “If you can’t buy anything, you’re worthless. You don’t count if you don’t consume” (qtd. in Caywood 82). The fictional archetype of masculinity embodies the struggle between Self and Other, because the ideal Self is crafted in terms of the American archetype of masculinity. Troy cannot see a positive Self in an American image because he cannot fulfill the requirements to be a successful man. Caywood also contends that “in embracing the assumption that monetary power is at the root of what it means to be a man, the American experience of African American men has been to disconnect from traditional, culturally rooted African definitions of masculinity” (83). The African definition of masculinity has been muddied by the American Dream and its financial crises. Without economic success, these men are deemed worthless in their reality. The pressure to provide becomes a central drive of the Pittsburgh Cycle: all of the fathers try to get their sons to do better than themselves.

In the beginning of the play, Troy’s object *a* is the dream to play baseball in the pro leagues, but once this option becomes completely unfeasible, he begins to look for fulfillment in other ways. Troy begins to sneak around with a woman named Alberta, who makes Troy “laugh” unlike anything else in his life. Troy breaks the news to Rose that he has gotten Alberta pregnant. Rose is destroyed by the affair, as Troy explains his actions to Rose in baseball metaphors,

distancing himself from his actions. He tells her, “Maybe I come into the world backwards, I don’t know. But...you born with two strikes on you before you come to the plate. You got to guard it closely...always looking for the curveball on the inside corner. You can’t afford to let none get past you. You can’t afford a call strike. If you going down....you going down swinging. Everything lined up against you” (1222). Even in his own apology to Rose, he is explaining his actions through the metaphor of his object *a*. For him, his affair with Alberta was a moment where he felt like he could have the life he wanted, filling the void left by his inability to fulfill the masculine role he dreamed he would. He explains that “when I saw that girl....she firmed up my backbone. And I got to think that if I tried...I just might be able to steal second” (1222). The baseball metaphor works to reify the notion that the American Dream is so deeply embedded in Troy’s subconscious that he cannot see other fantasies in separate terms. This is the moment when Troy unveils the true state of his psyche. He had not been an actional person for so long because he lived behind the Veil, but Alberta became a desired object outside the realm of his reality. In accordance with Lacan’s aforementioned theory of fantasy, Troy is a barred subject in search of the object of fantasy, which gives the subject what he is “symbolically deprived of” (Lacan 15). Troy’s drive to “steal second” comes from an inability to achieve power in his life. Lacan asserts that what the subject is deprived of is the phallus and that the object fulfills the fantasy that the subject has crafted. Alberta became Troy’s object *a* in place of baseball because she was a forbidden desire. His desire drove him to cheat on his doting wife, despite the potential impact on his life. Troy felt that if he could possess the object, Alberta, then he could get his phallic power back. As Lacan later explains, the cycle of fantasy is useless. The object will never fulfill the hole in the barred subject. He is caught in the timeline of hysteria, which Lacan explains as a phenomena of inaction because the subject feels that “It’s not the hour of the

Other” (18). Troy only takes action to fulfill his desire to “steal second,” but not to better his life in any other way. Troy cannot escape his demons because they are imprinted upon him by the generational trauma.

Troy becomes the perpetuator of trauma onto Rose and his son, Cory, aligning him with the Lacanian conception of the obsessive neurotic: “The obsessive neurotic always repeats the initial germ of his trauma” (Lacan 17). Like Troy, Cory overtakes his father in the role of authority in his household. He literally steps over Troy in the yard to get to the door and angers Troy. Cory gives a scathing response to his fallen father: “I ain’t got to say excuse me to you. You don’t count here no more” (1229). The fight escalates, and Cory eventually goes after Troy. Troy tells Cory that he has crossed a line and has become “just another nigger on the street to me!” (1230). As Cory leaves, Troy apostrophizes Death again, telling him to come “any time you want” (1231). In an attempt to protect Cory from suffering from the neurosis of blackness, Troy inadvertently perpetuates it onto him. Troy tries to overcome his own father’s inadequacies, but through his actions he actually replicates them. He is absent from Lyons’s life like his father because he goes to jail and misses time raising Lyons. He is emotionally abusive to his son like his father was to him because he cannot give that emotional support. Troy cannot escape the Cycle, nor can Cory or Lyons, because it is buried within them at a psychological level in their superego. Kim Pereria explains that this was a moment for Troy’s life to come full circle: “The realization that he is fated to be like his father increases his sense of helplessness, for he knows there is no eluding the drudgery of his destiny” (42). He has completed the process of internalization, fully absorbing his past trauma into his psyche.

In an attempt to get his phallic power back from the white world, Troy loses all of his closest relationships and dies alone. The play ends with his funeral and a reunion of all of his

family members. Rose has cared for Alberta's daughter, Raynell, since she died in childbirth. Raynell is now the only child in the house. Lyons had failed as a musician and served time in prison, just as his father failed at becoming a professional baseball player after his prison stint, further articulating the continuity of the neurosis of blackness. Cory comes back to the house he grew up in for the first time since the fight with his father, but he is now a decorated Marine. Cory is a stranger to Raynell, but he comes on the day of the funeral to remember his dead father. Cory listens to the story of his father's death, but tells his mother that he will not be attending the funeral. He explains to her, "I can't drag Papa with me everywhere I go. I've got to say no to him. One time in my life I've got to say no" (1235). Denying his father is clearly very important to Cory, and the funeral is his only opportunity to do it. Cory evidently feels that he needs to reject his father in order to save himself from suffering the same fate.

Rose is taken aback by Cory's actions, asking him to explain his thinking. He reflects back on the feelings his father gave him during childhood, calling him "A shadow that followed you everywhere.... It would wrap around you and lay there until you couldn't tell which one was you anymore. That shadow digging in your flesh" (1235). Cory experiences the manifestation of his father's influence on his identity. The rejection of the father is a way for Cory to distance himself from the hereditary neurosis. Rose, however, sees this moment as a demonstration of the mark of his father. She tells him, "You Troy Maxson all over again" (1235). The process is already complete, perpetuating the mark of neurosis again. Whether he wants to or not, Cory is unfortunately tied to his father via his unconscious. Like Troy, he crafts his sense of Self in his father's terms. Whether or not he perpetuates the neurosis of blackness is within his own action. In order to avoid this clash of Self and Other, he must view himself in terms of success. Cory symbolically comes to terms with the continuity, recalling a song on the day of the funeral.

Throughout the play, Troy sings a song about “Blue the Dog” to his family, explaining, “That was my daddy’s song. My daddy made up that song” (1210). At the funeral, Cory begins to sing the song with Raynell, fulfilling a loving fatherly role to Raynell that Troy never could for him. The ending seems hopeful as the two stand beside each other singing the “Blue the Dog” song: Cory is successful in the army and the family is unified. Cory seems to have learned a lesson from his half-brother and his father, so it is optimistic to think that he will be the one to break the Cycle. The ending, however, is purposely ambiguous, nodding to the fact that the Cycle will influence Cory’s life forever.

Frantz Fanon’s theory of the neurosis of blackness is a crisis of the Self. Troy cannot find happiness in his life because he cannot define himself in terms of the American success. He sees himself as Other and strives to fulfill the archetype of masculinity, but he cannot because of the trauma from his father and his heritage. He is never able to lift the Veil; he lives in it and uses it as a fence to protect himself from his disappointment. He internalizes his oppression and reifies the very hegemonic structure that he cannot psychologically escape from. Troy perpetuates the neurosis of blackness onto his sons Lyons and Cory. Lyons mirrors Troy in his life choice, failing to achieve his dreams of becoming a musician and ending up in prison for theft. Cory, despite his best efforts, cannot escape the cycle of the father either. He does not yet exhibit symptoms of paranoia, but he still has the mark of the neurosis that Troy had. He still measures himself in terms of economic success. By joining the Marines, he attempts to trick the system by serving the country. He is not a slave to a trade nor a lowly garbage man, but instead a soldier with benefits and guarantees. He, like Troy, could not pursue his athletic dreams because his father stole the opportunity from him in order to protect Cory from the white man. Cory, however, is in a good place to attempt to break the neurosis of blackness by embracing his

identity in terms of Self rather than Other.

“I wouldn’t let nothing make me small”: Overthrowing the Paternal Authority in *Jitney*

The Pittsburgh Cycle articulates the problematic influence of masculinity on racial tensions. Scholar Kimmika L.H. Williams-Witherspoon takes a gendered approach to reading the Pittsburgh Cycle. She furthers ideas like Timpane’s notions of racial influence on the Cycle, articulating that the main conflict is the role of manhood in the plays. Wilson, she notes, furthers his characters beyond “problematic definitions of ‘black manhood’” evident in American popular culture, such as the “the contended slave ‘Tom,’ the comic ‘Coon,’ the brute, and the tragic mulatto” (41). Wilson pushes his characters past what white writers had concocted for black male characters, a formula of “socially constructed manifestations of race and maleness” rather than honesty from true experiences of black men. This quest for truth in his protagonists is evident by his words in “The Ground on Which I Stand,” but Williams-Witherspoon takes this notion of black manhood and explains it through the protagonists’ connection to the community. She explains that plays in the Cycle are shaped more by the influence of the community than by personal definitions of identity, arguing that it is communal rituals and ideals of black manhood that steer these characters’ choices. According to Williams-Witherspoon, Wilson keeps his characters grounded through “the lines of communication and the connection to community” (45). These characters may be grounded momentarily in these plays, but there is always a significant break from the rules of Pittsburgh. The communities work to reign the protagonists in, but these protagonists always seem to come back to their own personal struggle. Their individual anxieties come from a much larger definition of success and failure that extends past the network of African American support that the characters might have around them. It is a larger,

systematic pressure that pushes these black men to the point of Fanon's neurosis. This is not to say that the community connections do not matter, but rather that they push the protagonists to the point of anxiety, anger, and aggression at some point. The black communities depicted in the Cycle are important to these protagonists, but there is something beyond the external conflict that pushes these men to snap.

The play *Jitney* is the best articulation of the different types of men trapped within the Cycle. The men in the play are very different in age, experience, and attitudes, but they all are tied together through Pittsburgh. The play is set twenty years after *Fences* in 1977, in a small gypsy cab company run by Jim Becker, who started the company to provide rides predominantly to African Americans who had trouble hailing white cab drivers. The business is illegal, but relatively lucrative and busy. He keeps the company under the radar of the City Council for years and earns the respect of the black community through his efforts. Becker oversees a group of African American men who drive for him, all of whom are incredibly different with regard to their personalities and the problems they each face. There is the twenty-something Vietnam veteran, Youngblood, who is trying to establish a life in Pittsburgh for his girlfriend, Rena, and their young son. There is the elderly Doub, who fought in the Korean War and is now trying to make a quick buck off of the company. Then, there is ex-tailor and drunk of the station, Fielding, and Turnbo, who's noisy and has a loud opinion. All of these men are experiencing the Pittsburgh Cycle in different stages; some have accepted the unavoidable hardships that the Cycle presents, while others remain hopeful. Youngblood is a young man who is hopeful and optimistic about his future. He is particularly focused on earning money for his young family, working two jobs and trying to go to college on the GI Bill. Other men, like Turnbo, have learned the reality of the Cycle, claiming that these young boys will "take a lifetime to find out"

what they actually need to do in order to succeed in a community stacked against them (31).

For scholars like Dana Williams, the conflict of the Pittsburgh Cycle lies in the responsibilities of the black men in the plays. In her article, “Contesting Black Male Responsibilities in August Wilson’s *Jitney*,” she aligns with critic David Krasner, who argues that the main ethical theme of the play is responsibility (31). She argues that this issue of responsibility paired with their experiences is the central influence on the protagonists’ identity formation in the Cycle. Williams explains that *Jitney* is an essential play to explore the influence of masculinity in the African American community because of its colorful cast of characters, explaining that the play explores “varied facets of black male identity” and “interrogate[s] the experiences that have shaped [Wilson’s] characters’ identity formation” (35). She looks to the men’s experiences in jail and the war to explain their identities, but she does not provide an explanation for why these experiences have impacted these characters. To Williams, the Pittsburgh Cycle is more of an interrogation of the systems of morals and values that influence the characteristics than a demonstration of the protagonists’ internal conflict.

This analysis begins to pull at the conflict of the Cycle, but it limits the scope of examination for the internal action of the characters. Williams is correct to say that these characters are intensely influenced by their culture, their past, their maleness, and their blackness, but these scholars do not connect these aspects of the protagonists’ identity together. The men of the Cycle are a compilation of all of these factors: it is because of their blackness that they feel disenfranchised. It is because of their maleness that they feel the responsibility of providing for their family. It is because of their experiences that they feel angry and marginalized. It is because of their culture that they feel unable to deal with any of these feelings. The moments of anger and frenzy throughout the Cycle are not simply outbursts of angry black

men, but are instead moments of honesty flowing from their unconscious. The Pittsburgh Cycle is an internal struggle of identity and fulfillment that is not separate from the external culture and its influence, but it is essential to look at what lies below the surface of the conscious of these men in order to determine what drives them to their seemingly inevitable struggle.

Becker is the character that best articulates the internal trauma of the Cycle in *Jitney*. The other men speak of Becker as a well-respected man, but in the first scene in which he speaks, he breaks the news that the city wants to tear down the entire block. The men are shocked and worried about how they are going to make ends meet without the station. Doub confronts Becker for keeping the news from the drivers for so long, but Becker just seems downtrodden and broken. He explains to Becker that “every man in here depending on this station for their livelihood. The city’s gonna board it up...you’ve known for two weeks...and you ain’t bothered to tell nobody. That ain’t like you Becker” (36). Doub’s accusation denotes a change in Becker’s demeanor, even his own values. Becker’s response sounds similar to Troy’s complaints about his own life. Like Troy, Becker is tired of the race of the American dream, lamenting to Doub, “I’m just tired Doub. Can’t hardly explain it none. You look up one day and all you got left is what you ain’t spent. Everyday cost you something and you don’t all the time realize it” (36). Becker is devoid of energy and drive to continue to fight against the board. He has based his manhood on Caywood’s definitions of masculinity and capitalism, realizing that if he did not earn and consume, he would be nothing. Becker recognizes that the chase after the American dream, his object *a*, is ultimately fruitless. He has worked tirelessly his entire life to build up the jitney station and now the city council, composed of mainly white business men, look to tear down his life’s work. Becker has lived modestly and honestly, attempting to make a life for his son, Booster, and his wife. His son killed a white woman who falsely accused him of rape and was

sentenced to the death penalty. Becker's wife dies of grief before Booster's sentence changes from the death penalty to a prison sentence. Now, alone in his sixties, Becker sees that the fruits of his labor are a torn down business and an incarcerated son. He realizes that none of his efforts have brought him or his son beyond the Veil.

Booster and Becker articulate the complexity of the Pittsburgh Cycle's paternal relationships. Unlike Troy, Becker did everything right by his family to provide for them. He accepted his responsibility and put his drive towards his work rather than into an affair or in anger. To Booster, however, his father's honesty was not enough to rectify the injustice done to their family. Booster saw his father as weak and unwilling to challenge the overreach of the "white man." He explains his feelings to his father when he is first released from prison:

That day when Mr. Rand came to the house it was snowing. You came out on the porch and he started shouting and cussing and threatening to put us out in the street where we belonged. I was waiting for you to tell him to shut up ... to get off your porch. But you just looked at him and promised you would have the money next month. Mama came to the door and Mr. Rand kept shouting and cussing. I looked at mama ... she was trying to get me to go in the house ... and I looked at you ... and you had just got smaller. (57)

Booster wanted his father to overthrow Mr. Rand, the white landlord, in order to protect his family. He sees his father as a cog in the system that Mr. Rand built, rather than a strong, independent man who could provide for his family. He explains that this interaction was a moment that changed his life entirely, articulating that this was "when I told myself if I ever got big I wouldn't let nothing make me small" (57). Becker thought that by working hard in white America that he could get by, but it was this very action that altered his son's perception of him.

Booster and Becker's strained relationship articulates the very strain of the Oedipal Complex in the Pittsburgh Cycle in that the son will attempt to overthrow the father in some way. Like Cory, Booster sees his father as a failure because he did not escape from behind the Veil. He believes that he can do better than his father had in his life. Booster sees his crime as a victory because he was able to "stay big" in the face of the white society. The white girl had falsely accused him of rape so as not to sully her reputation by sleeping with a black man, so Booster did what he felt was retribution for her lie. Turnbo explains what happened when Booster was arrested:

To get to the short of it ... the police come and the gal said that she was driving downtown on her way home from a movie, and when she stopped for a red light, Booster jumped into her car and made her drive up there on the dead-end street ... where he raped her. They arrested Booster and Becker got him out on bail cause he knew the gal was lying. The first day he was out ... the first day! ... he went over to that gal's house and shot her dead right on the front porch" (41).

Turnbo's recounting of the murder indicates that Booster's actions were purposeful and vengeful. The girl had lied about their relationship in order to escape judgement from her father and the community. Booster saw her lie as another blow by the white man, another moment when he would be made small. He refuses to acquiesce to this punishment in the way he thinks his father would, so he makes a conscious decision to meet the girl's lie with violence to rectify the situation. Booster is unapologetic about his actions, explaining, "I did what I had to do and I paid for it" (55). He is even angry with his father for not being proud of the murder because he was acting as a "warrior," one who "deal[t] with the world in ways that you didn't or couldn't or wouldn't" (57). Booster thinks that, unlike his father, he has rectified his position behind the

Veil, refuting the rejection that the white world has dealt him.

Becker sees his son's choice as hasty and reckless. Similar to Troy, he wanted to make sure that his son would do better than him, so he based his decisions off of this goal. Becker sees Booster as the only beneficiary to his hard work, explaining, "You could have been something. You had every advantage.... I tried to fix it so you didn't have to follow behind me ... so you could go on and go further. So you could have a better life. I did without so you could have" (58). Becker took his position as father very seriously so that he could save his son from the inequality that he had fought against his entire life. He built a business in retaliation to white society because he saw an opportunity to provide for his fellow black folk. He understood that he would never get beyond the Veil, but he could make a semblance of financial security behind it. He saw Booster as an opportunity for the advancement of both his own personal lineage and for all black men in society. He did not believe that his financial success would benefit him as much as it would boost his own child beyond his own position in society. This dream became his true American Dream. He became fixated upon this dream, silencing his own feelings of anger and frustration with the inequality he experienced every day, all so that his son would have a different life.

Booster denies his father's dream, thus perpetuating the Cycle. Becker understands that his son has disenfranchised himself, berating him for his decisions and asking him, "So what you gonna do with the rest of your life now that you done ruined it?" (53). Booster, however, cannot see past his father's decision to stay "small" and does not apologize for killing the girl. Becker meets Booster's criticism with anger, explaining that everything he did was for him to succeed. According to the stage direction, Becker works himself into a frenzy, exclaiming that he did everything so that the world would "Watch out for Becker's boy!" (59). This statement

articulates that Becker tried so hard to break the Cycle by putting his hard work and money into bettering his son's life rather than himself. His frenzied tears demonstrate that he recognizes that his entire life is fruitless because neither he nor his son could break the Cycle. He understands that he did his absolute best, but as his friend Doub explained to him earlier, "Sometime your best ain't enough" (37). Booster is free from his sentence at the end of the play, but similar to Cory, it is unclear whether or not he will ever stop fighting to remain "big" against the world he so vehemently feels opposed to.

"It's all a house of cards": The Dissolution of the Pittsburgh Cycle in *Radio Golf*

In 1997, Harmond Wilks and his longtime friend and business partner Roosevelt Hicks seem to have moved beyond the Veil and into the financial success that the previous protagonists of the Pittsburgh Cycle fought so hard to achieve. Harmond is at the top of the social ladder, running to become the face of Pittsburgh as its mayor, while Roosevelt has recently been promoted to Vice President of Mellon Bank. These men are making good money and moving up in their careers. Harmond is notably optimistic, explaining that "This is 1997. Things have changed. This is America. This is the land of opportunity. I can be mayor. I can be anything I want" (21). Times seem to have changed for these two, but it is evident that times have not changed for all.

Harmond and Roosevelt are heading up the funding for the minority redevelopment of the Hill District. To them, it is obvious that the area is run-down and "not fit to live in," as Harmond says (12). Harmond is representing the effort for the City Council and Roosevelt is representing Mellon Bank, which has took on the initial costs of the redevelopment. The two men are working hard, but seem to be financially comfortable and fulfilled, unlike the other men

of the Cycle. In the play's opening scene, they discuss the movement on the redistricting and its impending success, but the conversation quickly turns to Roosevelt's love for golf. For Roosevelt, golfing is the mark of his manhood. He explains that hitting a golf ball was the first time he "felt free. Truly free" (13). Roosevelt even continues to explain that golf is something that "will set you on a path to life where everything is open to you. You don't have to hide and crawl under a rock just 'cause you black. Feel like you don't belong in the world" (13). As Roosevelt sees it, he is not successful and black; rather, he is successful in spite of being black. This statement demonstrates that the neurosis has not simply gone away because these men have had opportunities, but that it has changed into something far more damaging. The sport articulates the complex duality of the "progress" made in this play. The men play golf, which is a remarkably more expensive and bourgeois sport than playing baseball in the alley like Troy did. The fact that the men play the sport indicates that they have made significant financial progress than the previous men of the Cycle.

Harmond is confronted with his opposing identities, his "double consciousness," during the demolition for the redevelopment. The Wylie House is set to be torn down to make room for a strip mall. According to Harmond's knowledge, the Wylie House had been repossessed by Pittsburgh because of unpaid taxes. Demolition is set to begin any day, but Old Joe will not stop painting his old home. Roosevelt complains about his determination to maintain the house to Harmond, explaining that Old Joe refused to give up the Wylie House. Harmond claims that the house belongs to Pittsburgh and that the renovations will improve the living quality of the city, but Old Joe sees his actions as Harmond's attempt to become a mayor that white people can get behind. Harmond, still optimistic in an era of the newer, more tolerant Pittsburgh, does not think that he has to change his identity to achieve his dreams, explaining, "I'm going to be the mayor

of everybody. It's not about being white or black, it's about being American" (56). Old Joe, however, is disillusioned to the truth. He understands that the only way for a black man to get close enough to the Veil to see beyond it is to act accordingly in the Pittsburgh economy, eternally paying bills to the white men who hold their positions of power above him. Harmond's chance to become mayor is closer than any other black man in the history of Pittsburgh, but Old Joe still sees that Harmond will have to pay the price to someone in order to maintain the power in Pittsburgh. Whether the bill is paid in loyalty to the police department's wishes or in silence to the redistricting office as they tear down historic pieces of the city, Harmond's success is not free. Old Joe understands this, and offers money to Harmond in order to keep the Wylie House, attempting to fill the identity of the man in the American Dream. Old Joe does not accept the loss, even after Harmond offers him a large compensation package after Harmond realizes that the city was technically stealing the house from Old Joe. Old Joe still does not accept losing the house, instead trying to pay Harmond for the taxes on the house because the heritage of the home is worth more than anything.

After going to the house for the first time, Harmond changes his position on the Wylie House. It is instantly clear to him that this house has been kept by generations of Old Joe's family. The architecture is historic and rare, as Harmond remarks: "It's a Federalist brick house with a good double-base foundation. I couldn't believe it. It has beveled glass on to the landing. And the staircase is made of Brazilian wood with a hand-carved balustrade. You don't see that too often" (61). For the first time, Harmond is recognizing the value of the historic Wylie House; Old Joe is fighting so fiercely to protect it because he knows that it is an essential part of his heritage. Until this moment, Harmond is detached from his roots. In the Wylie House, he understands that it is wrong for him to abandon his connection to his black heritage simply to

pursue the project, which has become his own *object a* of the American Dream. It is also the moment that the Oedipal Complex is realized in *Radio Golf*.

In the Wylie House, Harmond begins to recall the influence of his family for the first time in the play. Harmond's father is not on stage at all, nor is he mentioned until Harmond brings him up as a memory, explaining that "Not many speak well of my father," but that he had "talked a lot about family" (65). After his realization in the Wylie House, Harmond explains to Old Joe that his brother's death was a formative moment in life. He explains his brother's death in terms of his father:

He planned for Raymond and me to go to Cornell, then take over Wilks Realty. But Raymond didn't follow the plan. He wanted to go to Grambling and play football. My father said he wouldn't pay for it. Raymond joined the Army to pay for it himself. I followed the plan and went to Cornell. They sent Raymond to Vietnam and he got killed. My father turned blood into vinegar. He didn't even go to Raymond's funeral. I never look at my father the same after that. Even though he betrayed those values I still clung to them. But what I can't figure out is why my family was paying the taxes on your house.

(65)

Harmond's father has become an internalized voice in Harmond's psyche. While he does not respect the man he became, Harmond still regards his father as the source of his morals. In retaliation for his disappointment, Harmond forms his own identity against his father's shortcomings. Harmond embraces his father's dream for him and "follows the plan" (65). Following this plan meant following in his father's footsteps of pursuing the object a, attempting to gain access into the successful realty community.

Under the guise of progress, Harmond has found success for quite some time. He and Roosevelt live within the <> of the fantasy, working hard to campaign or close a deal for the bank, but what they do not see is that the object a keeps getting further away from them. When Harmond realizes the value of the Wylie House and the reality of the lives of most of the black men in Pittsburgh like Old Joe, Harmond realizes the change is merely a façade. He laments this when he confronts Roosevelt about the redistricting with a new plan to maintain the old Wylie House. He explains to Roosevelt that:

After a while that center starts to give. They keep making up the rules as you go along. They keep changing the maps. Then you realize you're never going to get to that center. It's all a house of cards. Everything resting on a slim edge. Looking back you can see it all. Wasn't nothing solid about it. Everything was an if and a when and a maybe. Of course ... but not really. Yes ... but not really. I don't want to live my life like that, Roosevelt. (79)

In this moment, Harmond traverses the fantasy of the American Dream. He recognizes the hopeless circle of his pursuit to be equal to “them” as he notes. He realizes that the only way he will become fulfilled is if he abandons the “house of cards” for his own community that has always embraced and protected him.

Roosevelt rejects Harmond's realization. Unlike Harmond, Roosevelt has never gone to see the Wylie House, claiming, “I ain't that brave. I'd be afraid it would collapse on me” (61). Roosevelt says this in passing to Harmond as a joke, but the diction is purposeful. Roosevelt might pose the worry that the Wylie House will physically collapse on him, but it is evident that he detects it will collapse something within his psyche. The Wylie House would collapse the fantasy of equality, as it did for Harmond. It is Sterling Johnson who articulates the difference

between Roosevelt and other black men in the community, explaining, : “I know the truth of it. I’m a nigger. Negroes are the worst thing in God’s creation. Niggers got style. Negroes got blindyitis. A dog knows it’s a dog. A cat knows it’s a cat. But a Negro don’t know he’s a Negro. He thinks he’s a white man. It’s Negroes like you who hold us back” (76). Sterling’s accusation articulates the connection between the Veil and the cycle of fantasy. The pursuit of the American Dream is such a powerful *object a* because to the black subject it seems to offer a way to move past the Veil. Roosevelt thinks that he has moved past his blackness, but all he has really done is embrace the neurosis, by becoming a “Negro.” He cannot create an identity that allows him to embrace his blackness and the success because he does not think that these identities can co-exist. He cannot see the truth of his own reality because his double consciousness is so blinding. The black men in the play like Sterling, Old Joe, and Harmond traverse the fantasy by embracing what they are, which Sterling names “niggers.” The moment is incredibly powerful because for the first time these black men are unabashedly proud of their heritage and their true identities.

Harmond and Roosevelt become foils to each other, each representing one option of the Pittsburgh Cycle. Roosevelt chooses to stay in the cycle of fantasy, chasing after equality under the guise of becoming more like the white men of Pittsburgh. Harmond recognizes the cycle instilled in him by his father and relinquishes the fantasy, thereby becoming more fulfilled and satisfied with his own identity and truth. Harmond realizes that his success came from abandoning his true self because he viewed himself as Other in Pittsburgh. The play ends with the two men splitting off down their own paths: Harmond by leaving both the mayoral and redistricting campaigns, and Roosevelt securing his position as what Harmond calls the “black face on the enterprise” of Mellon Bank (80). The two share a “genuine and painful good-bye,” as noted in the stage directions, and the stage goes to black (81).

“To the truths we wrestle from uncertain and sometimes unyielding realities”: The True Impact of the Pittsburgh Cycle

As noted earlier, August Wilson explains that the African American theater has “in its power to inform about the human condition,” as well as “to heal, ‘to hold the mirror as ’twere up to nature,’ to the truths we uncover, to the truths we wrestle from uncertain and sometimes unyielding realities. All of art is a search for ways of being, of living life more fully” (“The Ground on Which I Stand” 13). Wilson recognized the power of the stage as a mirror to the consciousness, articulating the intricacies of the formation of self, dreams, and disappointments. The protagonists of the Pittsburgh Cycle share one quest despite being separated by decades: they want to achieve the American Dream. Through that one goal comes the quest for the *object a* of the American Dream, a never-ending chase for financial stability in an economy that eternally moves the goal posts for African Americans. In that one quest comes the debilitating double-consciousness of that “otherness” in Pittsburgh, as Troy depicts in his anxieties, infidelity, and deep despair. It is an otherness so powerful that it drives fathers to push their sons to embrace the fantasy of the American Dream, all so that they may one day acquire the phallic object to fill the void left by their own otherness, as both Booster and Troy do to their own boys. The sons of the Cycle have two choices, as presented by Harmond and Roosevelt: continue to chase the fantasy or to traverse it.

The Pittsburgh Cycle becomes unescapable for some, like Troy, Becker, and Roosevelt. What is made evident by these three plays is that while the force of the Cycle is incredibly strong, there does come a choice. This choice only comes from a reckoning with the reality of the subject’s race and heritage. By recognizing the true impact of the former upon his life, he can see whether he has treated the latter with respect and dignity. Individuals who ignore the impact

of race have no means of properly dealing with its consequences, as Roosevelt demonstrates. Individuals who cling too much to the impact thereby limit their own agency, falling into neurosis, as Troy does. The true “victors” of the Cycle are the men who are able to understand their blackness, to see the Veil, deal with their double-consciousness, and understand how this all impacts their own goals. It is only when the men begin to create goals that are for themselves rather than to fill some type of void left by their feelings of insecurity that they begin to find true joy. It is only then that the men are able to be at peace with Pittsburgh, rather than fighting against it. The Pittsburgh Cycle holds a mirror to the “uncertain and sometimes unyielding realities” that the African American community faces every day. Such realities are complex, unforgiving, and sometimes unescapable. It is only when they are able to hold a mirror to themselves and their own psyche that they are able to free themselves from the chains of their reality.

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