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Succeeding or Overcoming Father: Two Ideas on American Cities in *Death of a Salesman* and *Fences*

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I. Introduction

Since the 1910s when urban residents constituted about half of the total population of America[1], city has always been the inescapable reality for Americans, and within their literature, as a mirror of the reality faithfully reflecting the social upheavals that Americans were going through in that period. The city, which called forth the appearance of realism in the history of American literature for "the anxious need of Americans to know what was going on" (Budd 35), was a focal point of American literature in the early 20th century. However, the familism,[2] "which has continued to play such a central role in American culture, as an organizing social institution, lived experience, and a powerful metaphor" (Farrell 15), still occupied a large part within American literature[3] as an ideology that has "guided human conduct

1. According to Charles N. Glabb and A. Theodore Brown, the urban population in the United States increased from 6,216,518 to 44,639,989 between 1860 and 1910. It was in percentage from 19.8 to 45.7 of the total, which meant that the "rise of the city" in America changed the daily reality of America fundamentally (107).
2. David Popenoe, in his "American Family Decline, 1960–1990: A Review and Appraisal," defines the term "familism" as "the belief in a strong sense of family identification and loyalty, mutual assistance among family members, a concern for the perpetuation of the family unit" (537).
3. In "The Lost Father in *Death of a Salesman*," Charlene Fix enumerates the American writers who focused on the theme of family. According to her, various novels such as "Hawthorne's 'My Kinsman, Major Molineux,' Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, and Kerouac's *On the Road*" show concern for the theme, and so do the "poems of Robert Lowell, Sylvia

Trans–Humanities, Vol. 6. No. 3, October 2013, 23–54

in [the United States] for centuries" (Popenoe 528).

Indeed, the theme of city and family are inseparably intertwined in modern American literature. City relegated an individual to a disposable commodity, which seriously undermined the authority of patriarchs, demanding fathers to be alienated from both, the urban environment and his family. Unlike agricultural society, people in cities were not masters of their own lives: they did not own their workplace nor controlled the whole process of production which previously accorded them the sense of being in–control. Their job was allocated, and even this could be taken away from them at any time by more efficient competitors or machineries; they were reduced to marginal beings. Under such circumstances, the fact that one of the main characteristics of modern play, as Rosefeldt argues, is the "absent father"[4] does not seem to be coincidental. City and family are the two axes that the American literature of the early 20th century has been mainly formulated around.

One of the texts, especially within drama, that show this tendency most conspicuously is *Death of a Salesman* (1949) by Arthur Miller. The play depicts a world where gigantic skyscrapers of "an angry glow of orange" (Ibid. 11) tower over the human being reduced to a "measly manner of existence" (Ibid. 22). But in Miller's world, a human does not merely submit, but struggles till the end to restore his rightful status:

> [Willy] is ready to lay down his life, if need be, to secure one thing—his sense of personal dignity. From Orestes to Hamlet, Medea to Macbeth, the underlying struggle is that of the individual attempting to gain his "rightful" position in his society. ("Tragedy

Plath, James Tate, Sharon Olds, Theodore Roethke, John Berryman, Anne Sexton, Frank Bidart, and even Stanley Kunitz" (467).

4. In *The Absent Father in Modern Drama*, Paul Rosefeldt enumerates modern plays in which the father characters do not appear on the stage, e.g., *Glass Menagerie, Hedda Gabler, Miss Julie, Death of a Salesman, Top Girls, True West*, etc. He indicates that though ancient plays such as *Oedipus Tyrannus* also features missing father as important dramatic device, it is only to initiate the protagonist's search for his "divine paternity" (16). On the contrary, the absent fathers in modern plays whose backdrop is set in urban environment are just "voids" (49) that characters "fill with distorted memories of the past or wistful dreams" (49).

and the Common Man" 4)

Willy Loman constantly tries to re–establish his authority as a human being against the ever–dehumanizing city. At the same time, however, this frame is also replicated in the boundary of family. Harold Bloom defines the play as a text about "the death of a father, not of a salesman" (2). Indeed, the purpose of Willy's suicide at the last moment is to procure the seed money which Biff, Willy's first son, will start a business with; he meets his doom as a father for the sake of his son. Besides, just as Willy fought against society to become one he wanted to be, Biff also retorts to his father, shouting: "I know who I am! Why can't I say that, Willy?" (*Death of a Salesman* 131).

What earned Miller the authorial fame of "[one of] the five most important Americans writing for the theatre in the twentieth century" (Corrigan 1), and the play "a phenomenon of American drama" (Jacobus 755) was this organic amalgamation of city and family in it. The public enthusiastically responded to the play, which led to great success of 742 times of performances on Broadway alone, and critics also admitted that the play was the genuine self–portrait of "American kind of suffering" (Bloom 5) that reproduced on the stage "the representative of a large segment of American society" (Porter 127) just the way it was.

However, *Death of a Salesman* was not the only drama that accomplished great success by dramatizing the two most representative aspects of the early 20th century American life. One commensurate text is *Fences* (1987) by August Wilson. Setting Pittsburgh—the city renowned for its steel industry—as the backdrop, Wilson portrays a world where one is prone to fall into the pit of filthy life without vigilance. In a world where nothing but indigence and indignity awaits people who lost the cut–throat competition, a dramatist's aim might well be to depict "struggle to find practical and spiritual havens in an essentially hostile society" (Pereira 3), which is not differentiated from that of Miller. In addition, *Fences* also suggests that the frame of social conflict is deeply embedded in the familial conflict. Just as a city shoves people away to the verge of utter ruin, Troy Maxson stifles his son, Cory's every desire, and finally expels him from his home. A subtle interplay of urban space and familial relationship, as it were, stands out in Wilson's play as notably as in Miller's.

Accordingly, accolades from both public and academia were conferred on Wilson as well. Not to mention various awards such as the Pulitzer and Tony,

Fences also garnered a total profit of 11 million dollars which was the highest record ever for a non–musical play on Broadway at the time. Critics did not hesitate to call him the "major find for the American Theatre" (Pereira ix) or "[t]he most important new American dramatist of the 1980s" (Berkowitz 194). Structured upon the same cross–link of city and family, eliciting comparable fervent acceptance from wide strata of audience, *Fences* was undoubtedly a mirror image of the first half of 20th century America as much as *Death of a Salesman* was. It is even more so when we consider that *Fences* corresponds to the 6th period in the "Pittsburgh Cycle"[5]; both August Wilson and Arthur Miller are illustrating the dynamics between American family and city adopting the same period as the background.

However, putting *Death of a Salesman* and *Fences* on the same line gives rise to one peculiar problem. Although both plays display a similar degree of urbanization and they are framed upon conflict in a father–son relationship, the attitudes the fathers take toward the city are completely opposed to each other's, and so are the life paths the sons decide to take at the denouement of the plays. Throughout *Death of a Salesman*, Willy appears maladaptive to urban space. He insists on the necessity of "a law against apartment houses" (*Death of a Salesman* 17) almost as soon as he enters the stage, and dies after he sows flower seeds in the backyard, from which nothing can be seen due to the "whole goddam neighborhood" (Ibid. 127). Willy does not accept reality; all he ever wants is to escape the city. His sons, Biff and Happy, also inherit this escapist tendency at the last moment. Biff decides to move to rural areas and Happy resolves to follow Willy's career. Seemingly different, the brothers are indeed equally succeeding their father one way or another because they are either following their father's anachronistic dream or his unpromising reality.

In contrast, Troy is a character who stands firmly rooted in the harsh reality. After having left the southern farm as a child, his life has been an endless struggle for survival which led him to the perfect adaptation to urban

5. "Pittsburgh Cycle" refers to 10 plays of Wilson each of which represents a decade of 1900s. Though not composed in chronological order, the plays recapitulate Black history from 1900s to 1990s when bound in compilation. The constituents are *Gem of the Ocean* (2004), *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* (1988), *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (1984), *The Piano Lesson* (1990), *Seven Guitars* (1996), *Fences, Two Trains Running* (1992), *Jitney* (1982), *King Hedley II* (2001), and *Radio Golf* (2005).

environment. He bellows "[c]ome on! I be ready for you … but I ain't gonna be easy" (*Fences* 89) in the face of reality with a baseball bat in his hands. He is not succeeded by his children, either. Though Troy appears as a hardhead who repudiates any starry–eyed possibility for the future, his son Cory seeks for a way to move ahead and finally succeeds in it by attaining a decent social position. Cory consciously differentiates himself from Troy. In addition, he actually severs the tie between him and his father twice: at first physically by absconding from the house, and at last symbolically by exorcising his father's memory through forgiveness. Troy grasps the city while Willy refuses it; Cory overcomes his father whereas Biff and Happy succeed theirs. However, despite such differences, *Death of a Salesman* and *Fences* are equally deemed to be the genuine representation of a common period.

Therefore, this paper, upon the assumption that the reflection of different public perspectives on the American city lies behind the two plays' similar acclaim, aims to approach this conundrum through exploring the view on the city inherent in each play. Most previous studies on the two texts have concentrated upon the issue of human alienation by society[6] or Oedipal challenge to fathers,[7] in which the peculiarity of urban space and its literary reflection have often been paid little attention to. As urbanization progressed in America, views pertaining to particular aspects of a certain period were also spontaneously generated, eclectically accepted, and naturally displaced. But as American urbanization was a process that was much more compressed than that of Europe, most perspectives tended to coexist in a short time span despite their disparities, which enabled the publication of "different" books in periods not remote from each other. This essay will firstly concentrate on the textual analysis of each play to examine the perspective reflected, and then explore the correlation of the play and the socio–historical circumstances that

6. Critics such as Alice Griffin, Neil Carson, M. W. Steinberg, Brian Parker, C. W. Bigsby, and William McCollum all approach the texts as social commentary upon society in general, in whose process the traditonality of the texts as social plays are intensified while the spatial features of 20th century American cities and its concrete influence upon characters are omitted.
7. Howard and Margaret Baker, David A. Garfield, Colby H. Kullman, and B. S. Fiedl Jr. are all critics that focused upon the *Death of a Salesman* as tragedy, for which psychoanalytic approaches were utilized mostly. Their studies do not pay attention to the correlation of urban space and familial conflict either.

bred the view. In that process, the author's stance on the perspective itself as well as the city will also be studied.

II. *Death of a Salesman* and Anti–Urbanism

1) Succeeding Willy Loman, the Past–Oriented Father

> Biff: (*crying, broken*) Will you let me go, for Christ's sake? Will you take that phony dream and burn it before something happens? (*Death of a Salesman* 133)

Concerning the scene where Biff explodes his long–endured hard feelings for his father, many critics view it as a scene portraying Biff's painful self–awareness and symbolic separation from his father, through which he overcomes his father's shadow and earns a chance to live his life as a free man.[8] This seems to be confirmed further in the Requiem scene. While Happy proclaims: "I'm staying right in this city, and I'm gonna beat this racket!" (*Death of a Salesman* 138), Biff resolves to leave the city and reside in the pastoral West unlike his brother and his father. However, the direction he steers his life into, indeed, is not really opposite to Happy's. Neither of them looks forward towards the future; Happy clings to the antiquated mirage of the pre–mass consumption era, and Biff desires to return his life back to the pre–industrial age. Biff and Happy similarly choose not to adapt to modern society which is changing far too fast for them. Biff does not mature into an independent man; he, just like his little brother, inherited Willy's fatal flaw which drove him to his own demise: denial of reality and blind dependence upon the past.

Willy is a past–oriented character, which can be constantly witnessed throughout the play. Not only does he always miss the past when there was

8. Critics such as John V. Hagopian, C. W. E. Bigsby, John Gassner, and Louis Broussard all regard Biff as the true protagonist of the play rather than Willy. They insist that Willy's death is meaningless while Biff reaches to meaningful self–realization through intense introspection, thus deservedly is a hero of the play. According to them, Biff is the only character who breaks away from the past in *Death of a Salesman*.

"respect, and comradeship, and gratitude" (*Death of a Salesman* 81), he also wishes that he had followed his brother Ben to Alaska and tested his luck. However, among various textual proofs, what reveals his past–orientedness most conspicuously is that Willy flees to the memories of the past whenever he has to face harsh reality. When he returns home fruitlessly in the opening scene, he falls into his own fantasy and sees the happy moment of his life when kids were simonizing his car and everything around him was comfortable. The scene where he is notified of dismissal by Howard is in the same manner: he goes back to the time when Biff was a promising football player and his filial affection for Willy was heartfelt. This is to say, the memory of the past for Willy functions as a refuge where he feels safer and cosier than in the present reality.

In this context, Ben is the only character who appears on the stage when memory and reality simultaneously become significant. To be specific, though the play is comprised of both the memory scenes and the present scenes, the two do not coincide on the stage: the switch is always hinted by change of stage settings such as lighting, music, costumes, and characters except for Willy, who does not enter the stage before the transition is complete. However, Ben is an exception from this rule:

> (*Uncle Ben, carrying a valise and an umbrella, enters the forestage from around the right corner of the house… He enters exactly as Willy speaks.*)
>
> Willy: I'm getting awfully tired, Ben.
>
> (*Ben's music is heard. Ben looks around at everything.*)
>
> Charley: Good, keep playing; you'll sleep better. Did you call me Ben?
>
> (*Ben looks at his watch.*)
>
> Willy: That's funny. For a second there you reminded me of my brother Ben.
>
> Ben: I only have few minutes. (*He strolls, inspecting the place. Willy and Charley continue playing.*) (*Death of a Salesman* 44–45)

Though Ben belongs to the realm of memory, he just walks in onto the present scene without any sign, thus blurring the boundary between reality and memory. This means that it is with Ben's appearance that the play starts to turn from reality to memory, and conversely, that Ben is the first one Willy

recalls when he starts to recollect his past. Ben is a man who is most closely associated with the past as a safe and comfortable refuge for Willy.

Ben's implication for Willy is further clarified when Willy's dependence on him is observed. Willy betrays great anxiety whenever Ben prepares to leave, and constantly chatters, saying: "Am I right? Don't you think I'm right? I value your advice" (*Death of a Salesman* 87). This childlike behavior of Willy is based upon his childhood. Willy's father left him when he was four years old, and he grew up feeling "kind of temporary about [him]self" (Ibid. 51) since then. In other words, he never had the chance to learn from his father how to act as a grown–up, which is why his mind rushes to his elder brother Ben whenever he feels serious anxiety. Namely, Ben functions as a surrogate father, and it is this paternal figure Willy first recalls when he recollects the past, meaning that his past–orientedness originates from his longing for the lost father.

However, the absence of a father figure for Willy is a symbol bigger than Willy's personal history. The father is an embodiment of a certain period in the American history, which extends Willy's longing for him to the nostalgia for, and the desire to return to, the previous era. Notably, what is witnessed about Biff and Happy in the Requiem is this very tendency: whether they decide to leave the city or determine to stay, their choices are equally an outmoded way of life possible only in the past (near or far), which is exactly the kind of life Willy chose to live following his own father's path. In other words, the Loman males share a penchant for the past, and it all starts from the first Loman, Willy's lost father.

In Requiem, Willy is remembered as a man of manual dexterity who was "so wonderful with his hands" (*Death of a Salesman* 138). According to Biff's recall, "[he] had the wrong dreams" (Ibid.) as "there [was] more of him in that front stoop than in all the sales he ever made" (Ibid.). However, Willy's dream was more "outdated" than "wrong": he inherited his talent from his father who could make "more in a week than a man like [him] could make in a lifetime" (Ibid. 49). Ben's recollection offers a more detailed delineation of him, which makes him a social metaphor of the American life before the 20th century:

> Ben: Father was a very great and a very wild–hearted man. We would start in Boston, and he'd toss the whole family into the wagon, and then he'd drive the team right across the country;

> through Ohio, and Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, and all the Western states. And we'd stop in to towns and sell the flutes that he'd made on the way. Great inventor, Father. (Ibid. 49)

Willy's father was a craftsperson who sold his own manufactured goods. This implies that he lived an era when the strict division between production and sales was yet to come. Unlike Willy, his father belonged to the pre–industrial, pastoral world of the 19th century when the professional salesman did not come into fashion yet.

Another point to be observed is the implication inherent in the father's journey to the west. According to Charlene Fix, the itinerary of Willy's father, which is basically wandering "all the Western States" from Boston in a wagon, "recapitulates the geographical expansion of the nation" (465): the trail of his journey tallies with the trajectory of U.S.'s expansion of the frontier to the west, of which final destination is also identical with the location where he ended up, Alaska. Besides, the fact that his journey took place around the 1890s (inferring from Willy's age) means that it was irrelevant to Gold Rush fever. This man was detached from the wave of mercantilism (Ibid. 465–66).

Willy's father is an epitome of the frontier era when city and capital was yet to be consolidated and people ran their wagons across the Great Plains without restrictions. Willy's longing for his father, thus, can be interpreted as the craving for the frontier era itself that can never be restored, and it appears to have been bequeathed to Biff who decides to leave the city for a pastoral life. That is, by adopting the lifestyle of his grandfather who functioned as the core reason of Willy's maladjustment, Biff succeeds Willy and his anachronistic ideal altogether. In *Death of a Salesman*, a son succeeds his father's life, and he in turn bequeaths it to his own descendants.

Ben, Willy's substitute father, can be viewed in the same context. He symbolizes a lost opportunity which Willy might have grasped. If it were not for Linda's objection to the plan, Willy could have followed Ben to Alaska when he was mumbling "nothing's working out. I don't know what to do" (*Death of a Salesman* 85). However, even if Willy were granted that opportunity, the chance must have been very low:

> Ben: (*laughing*) I was going to find Father in Alaska.
> Willy: Where is he?

> Ben: At that age I had a very faulty view of geography, William. I discovered after a few days that I was heading due south, so instead of Alaska, I ended up in Africa.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Ben: Why, boys, when I was seventeen I walked into the jungle, and when I was twenty-one I walked out. (*He laughs*.) And by God I was rich. (Ibid. 48)

Ben's initial success was purely due to his luck. His arriving in Africa and discovering a diamond mine there was an accident, and it is this stereotypical fate of the protagonists in the early Victorian literature who win out in the end through their luck after the vicissitudes of fate. In other words, Ben's success, envied by Willy, is an achievement only possible for the "Ragged Dick"[9] in the 19th century; it is no more than an expired dream in the 20th century when systems subjugate chances. As a salesman in the 20th century, Willy is highly unlikely to have succeeded even though if he had accepted Ben's proposal.

Another evidence which makes it possible to read Ben as a symbol of the past is his morals. William Heyen indicates that Ben's morals are precisely that of Benjamin Franklin whose motto was "[g]old coins were God's smiles" (*Death of a Salesman* 53). The acquisition of capital was proof of his virtuousness granted by God, and this way of thinking encouraged everybody to immerse themselves in the economic activity even if the means was inappropriate:

> But [Willy's] is Benjamin Franklin's dream, and Willy's brother Ben—it doesn't matter whether the name is coincidence or intention—is a walking talking Franklin, sort of a Ghost of America's Past that Willy calls up. Miller knows: Ben says to Biff, "Never fight fair with a stranger, boy. You'll never get out of the jungle that way." (Ibid. 53)

9. *Ragged Dick* (1867) is a novel written by Horatio Alger which has about 120 varied series whose sales record amounted to 20 million copies. The general story of the series are such as these: "The ragged urchin, bootblack or newspaper boy of humble origin capitalizes on his opportunities and, by pluck and luck, rises to the top of the economic heap" (Porter 130). *Ragged Dick* established itself later as a representative symbol of American success dream.

This is to say, Ben as a surrogate father, performs the same function as Willy's lost father. He embodies the 19th century, and represents its worldview, which is too archaic for Willy's age. However, he is a mentor whom Willy puts his full confidence in, and one discipliner whom Willy entrusts his sons upon. His precept of "Never fight fair with a stranger" (Ibid. 49) was too well learned by the Loman brothers, which garnered the result of morally unhealthy youths who frequent the jail or habitually equivocate. The missing father, Ben, Willy, Biff, and Happy are all in the same line.

Another character similar to Ben is David Singleman, a legendary salesman whom Willy reveres. He is an accomplished male who was well–liked and all–around like Willy's missing father, and is another embodiment of the "Ragged Dick" myth. The only difference between him and the other two is that Singleman was alive, and thus functioned as an emulatable father figure for Willy. His occupation was buttressed by Linda as a realistic way of life compared to Ben's, and Willy spent most of his life trying to follow his way which was "the greatest career a man could want" (*Death of a Salesman* 81). Nevertheless, Singleman also is a signifier of the times that has passed, and his values are too tarnished to be upheld in the 20th century.

Willy had his first encounter with David Singleman when he was about eighteen, which means that it was around 1902–03. According to Brenda Murphy, it was a period of transition for the American salesmen: the "Yankee peddler" in the 19th century who had moved from town to town as an independent tradesmen themselves gave way to "the drummer" in the early 20th century, who were hired by large enterprises for the transaction with small retailers in the marginal areas detached from the industrial centers. In this period, the character of salesmen was the decisive element in opening a business deal and they were openly exhorted to develop their character for the success (Murphy 108–09). Indeed, Singleman had his days when he "drummed merchandise in thirty–one states," and the years of "respect, and comradeship, and gratitude" did exist (*Death of a Salesman* 81).

However, Singleman was already 84 years old when Willy first met him, and his epoch was soon to be replaced. In the post–war period of the 1940s, the substantial American war industry was reconfigured into a consumer–goods production system and the advertising business underwent speedy expansion. Soon mass markets solidified their ground in the cities, and it resulted in quick displacement of the salesmen who served as a bridge between the core and fringe area of a city (Spindler 62). In such circumstances, the *Death of a*

Salesman was an inevitable social phenomenon for the American communities in the 1940s. In fact, Singleman's funeral which impressed Willy is no more than a portrait depicting the fall of the whole salesmanship at the time:

> Willy: When he died—and by the way he died the *Death of a Salesman*, in his green velvet slippers in the smoker of the New York, New Haven and Hartford, going into Boston—when he died, hundreds of salesmen and buyers were at his funeral. Things were sad on a lotta trains for months after that. (*Death of a Salesman* 81)

What Willy should have focused on instead of the number of condolers is the fact that he died, and he died in a train. Singleman was a legendary salesman who didn't even have to see the customers himself. But he met his death on a train while he was moving, and it suggests that the situation was not very favorable even for himself. Willy failed to notice this and bequeathed the admiration for the portrait of the obsolete age to his son, Happy, which renders his future unpromising. The consequence is that Willy's inevitable failure also has been succeeded, and Singleman's expired success dream survives.

After all, Willy's maladaptation to the urban reality has a single and triple roots: three father figures that are symbols of the pre–urban past. And these roots are not severed but rather linked to the next generation. The grandfather's way of life is succeeded by Biff, Singleman's career is adopted by Happy, and Ben's morality is taught to both of them. Without making a single step forward to reality, the sons succeed the father's way: Biff, Happy, and Willy himself. However incessantly the age evolves and changes, no matter how fervently a son yells "Will you let me go, for Christ's sake?" (*Death of a Salesman* 133) to his father, he can never escape the shadow of the escapist father. In *Death of a Salesman*, father and sons turn their head from urban reality; they gaze only to the past.

2) Growth of Cities and Remnant of the Jeffersonian Anti–Urbanism

To understand the consistent ostrich attitude in *Death of a Salesman*, we need to examine the incipient stage of the urbanization in the U.S., which was far different from that of Europe. The first American cities were built not by natural concentration of people and capital over ages, but by

artificial plans of the European colonialists. Accordingly, they developed at an unprecedented speed: Between 1820 and 1860, the number of cities that accommodated populations more than 10,000 increased from 12 to 101, and eight of them were populated by about 100,000 people including New York that had roughly a million residents (Glaab and Brown 26). This explosion of cities in the United States was a natural phenomenon as the initial American cities were constructed near the Atlantic coast for the maritime trade, which enabled constant influx of capital.

However, for the Americans of the 19th century, the rapid growth of cities was an unwelcome phenomenon which threatened their agricultural ideal. The city was not considered as natural residence for the elemental man, but rather as an abode of evil which corrupts people. The origin of this view is traced back to the founding father of the nation, Thomas Jefferson; in his letter to John Jay in 1785, he manifested his perspective on the agriculture and other artificial occupations:

> Cultivators of the earth are the most valuable citizens. They are the most vigorous, the most independent, the most virtuous, and they are tied to their country, and wedded to its liberty and interests, by the most lasting bonds… I consider the class of artificers as the panders of vice, and the instruments by which the liberties of a country are generally overturned. ("Letter to John Jay" 377)

Jefferson valued natural, agricultural occupation while detesting "artificial" careers, which led him to aim for building America into a nation run by "democracy of small farmers" (Frisch 130). The city, as an antipode of agricultural region, was seen as "pestilential to the morals, the health and the liberties of man" (Jefferson, "Letter to Benjamin Rush" 459), and therefore big cities such as New York was no more than a "Cloacina of all the depravities of human nature" (qtd. in Glaab and Brown 56) in his view. This anti–urbanism of Jefferson was the result of his faith that the non–agricultural workers were the people who depended on "casualties and caprice of customers" (qtd. in Frisch 131) instead of "looking up to heaven" (Ibid.) for their subsistence granted by God.

To put it simply, Jefferson's agricultural ideal had its root in the Christian belief. As a nation whose religious bedrock was formulated by the Pilgrims, it accepted "Strains of Hebraic agrarianism" that regarded the city as "the home

of vanity, carnal lust, and conspiracy" (Glaab and Brown 53). Therefore, the rapid growth of cities might well have been an unpleasant event for Americans overall, and it evoked strong anti–urban sentiment witnessable in many documents of the time. Historic figures such as Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–82) and William Jennings Bryan (1860–1925)[10] conspicuously displayed their disgust for cities, and most religious writings of the nation also derogated the city, which continued until the late 19th century.[11]

However, it was literary works that the anti–urbanism of the 19th century manifested itself most clearly. The American literary market bristled with popular fictions dealing with the theme of evil metropolises of America,[12] and canonical writers were no exception from this tendency either. Morgan and Lucia White indicate that "the Greek attachment to the polis or the French writer's affection for Paris" is indiscoverable in the American literature of the 19th century (2). The writers such as Herman Melville (1819–91), Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–64), and Edgar Allan Poe (1809–49) all expressed their "bad dreams of the city" (36) through portraying a protagonist—as in *Pierre* (1852)—who is fascinated but at the same time defeated by the city's beauty. While these writers represented cities as places that "should be made capable

10. The Secretary of State in the early 20th century, Bryan is designated as the last historical figure in the American history who advocated agricultural fundamentalism with explicit hostility towards the city. His anti–urbanism is obviously revealed in his famous "Cross of Gold Speech."
11. In "The City in American Thought," Glaab and Brown offer an extensive study on the American religious writings that denigrates the city as the testing ground for the faith of a Christian (64–68). They present Amory D. Mayo's *Symbols of the Capital*; or *Civilization in New York* (1859) as the most representative religious writing of the early 19th century. In the book, Mayo argues: "The most unnatural fashions and habits, the strangest eccentricities of intellect, the wildest and most pernicious theories in social morals, and the most appalling and incurable barbarism, are the legitimate growth of city life" (qtd. in Glaab and Brown 66).
12. Numerous fictions of the time had somewhat formulated plot: a naïve country girl goes to the city, be seduced by attractive but evil city boy, and get corrupted irrevocably. *The Belle of the Bowery* (1846), *Female Depravity, or, the House of Death* (1852), *The B'Hoys of New York* (1849), and *The Gambler's League or the Trials of a Country Maid* (1857) are the representative works of this fashion.

of purification by fire, or of decay within each half–century" (Hawthorn 65), the country and the nature were suggested as "the perfect mould of a delicate and poetic mind" (Melville 4).

What we see in *Death of a Salesman* are the remnants of this negative view on the urban space of which heyday was the 19th century. Though the initial explosive growth of the cities stimulated the fundamental anxiety of Americans toward cities in the 19th century, the ever–ongoing expansion led to the advent of the metropolis, and it was an irrevocable reality now. In other words, the Jeffersonian anti–urbanism by the early 20th century was no more than helpless sentiments. Raising voice of apprehension and anxiety was all it could do, and showing nostalgia for the agricultural era of the past was the only possible way of expression allowed for more "traditional" Americans, one of whom Willy Loman who resents the building of the skyscrapers and misses the bucolic past:

> Willy: They should've arrested the builder for cutting those down. They massacred the neighborhood. (*Lost.*) More and more I think of those days. Linda. This time of year it was lilac and wisteria. And then the peonies would come out, and the daffodils. What fragrance in this room!
>
> . . . . . .
>
> There's more people! That's what's ruining this country! Population is getting out of control. The competition is maddening! Smell the stink from that apartment house!" (*Death of a Salesman* 17)

Willy is an anachronistic agricultural man living in a city, and Jeffersonian anti–urbanism is an ideology fated to be displaced. In the end, *Death of a Salesman* is not merely about the death of one salesman; it depicts the termination of one era, and expiration of one perspective. *Death of a Salesman*, therefore, is indeed a self–portrait of the age, but rather a dismal one: Miller's focus is on the last disciples of the dying ideology that are finally coming to their end.

III. *Fences* and Deterministic Naturalism

1) Overcoming Troy Maxson, the Reality–Bound Father

> Cory: You ain't never gave me nothing! You ain't never done nothing but hold me back. Afraid I was gonna be better than you. All you ever did was try and make me scared of you. I used to tremble every time you called my name. (*Fences* 86)

Just like *Death of a Salesman*, August Wilson's Fences also has a pivotal scene where conflict between a father and a son explodes, after which their relationship is reconfigured. However, the content of the son's protest greatly differs. While Biff yells "I never got anywhere because you blew me so full of hot air" (*Death of a Salesman* 131), Cory cries "[y]ou ain't never done nothing but hold me back" (*Fences* 86). His outcry is true indeed; unlike Willy who encourages his son to have a dream as big as possible even though it might be preposterous, Troy thwarts his son's even the most earnest dream of being a football player, asserting: "…you get nowhere with that football no way… work yourself up in that A&P or learn how to fix cars or build houses or something" (Ibid. 35). Troy dismisses his son's dream so easily only because it is impractical in his view; only pragmatic dreams are to be had, and only tangible goals are to be set.

Therefore, despite obvious similarities, Troy is more than a black Willy. Whereas Willy is a nomadic idealist who always looks back to the irrevocable past, Troy, as his name implies, is an adamant realist deeply rooted in the urban area. While Willy retreats to the past of "respect, and comradeship, and gratitude" when faced with threat of dismissal, Troy aggressively confronts the risk and wins the better position in the end. When Willy yells, "[t]he door of your life is wide open!" (*Death of a Salesman* 132), Troy growls, "[w]hat kind of foolishness is that to let somebody take away your job?" (*Fences* 36) Willy adheres to the end of past memories while Troy struggles to hold on to the center of the reality for survival's sake. Thus, Willy's maxim of "[b]e liked and you will never want" (*Death of a Salesman* 33) is completely reversed by Troy: he exhorts to his son, "[d]on't you try and go through your life worrying about if somebody like you or not" (*Fences* 38).

Still, Troy's relationship with Cory goes equally, or even more seriously amiss. Not only do they get into a fierce tussle with each other in which Troy

almost crashes down Cory, but their emotional ties are severed as well due to Cory's expulsion from home. He comes back only after his father's death, and refuses to attend the funeral at first for the long–harbored grudge against his father. Namely, Troy's family is even more seriously devastated than Willy's though he tried the opposite. Why is this so? It is because he replaced the principle of "be liked" not with "be yourself" but with "be indifferent." Troy's principle of being callous to other people's feelings and its application to his own family are where the core reason for the family's discord lies; Troy does not care if his son likes him or not, and does not even bother himself to like his son, either:

> Troy: I ain't got to like you. Mr. Rand don't give me my money come payday cause he likes me. He gives me cause he owe me. I done give you everything I had to give you. I gave you your life! Me and your mama worked that out between us. And liking your black ass wasn't part of the bargain. (*Fences* 38)

Troy refuses to like his own son; parental affection for Troy is more business than natural feeling. Though he can take the responsibility of feeding his children because it is his duty, liking them is just further hard labor necessitating emotional energy, and it "wasn't part of the bargain" in the first place. Thus, Troy rejects to do so; his son is just an object of responsibility and burdensome duty.

In addition, when their conflict reaches its climax, Troy betrays his even more frostbitten—almost inhumane—view on Cory. He regards his own son as a potential plunderer of his achievements, not even as an object to be obligatorily looked after:

> Troy: Around here in his own house and yard that he done paid for with the seat of his brow. You done got so grown to where you gonna take over. You gonna take over my house. Is that right? You gonna wear my pants. You gonna go in there and stretch out on my bed.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Nigger! That's what you are. You just another nigger on the street to me! (*Fences* 85–86)

While there was a kind of connection—though no more than impersonal duty—between Troy and Cory, even that is denied now, and Troy views his son as a complete stranger who is trying to take his properties away from him. Indeed, they get into a brawl right after this scene and the loser gets thrown out of the house, losing everything he had. It means that the principle of capitalistic competition is replicated inside the boundary of family. The most private realm of family is not different from desolate urban space in Troy's mind.

This peculiar characteristic of Troy appears to be rooted, partly, in his time spent in the city as an impecunious youth. In 1918, when he was an early teenager, Troy moved up to the northern city of Pittsburgh to leave his father. Pittsburgh by the early 20th century was a city which "had already acquired its reputation as the 'large workshop' of America" (Glaab and Brown 85); a land of opportunity, as it were. However, this belief soon proved to be a naïve one. For the descendants of the slaves, the city neither offered a job opportunity nor a place to live. Being a highwayman was their frequent choice, and jail was the place where the majority of the black males were accommodated. The situation was not very favorable either for the blacks who were not involved in the crime. Wilson depicts the general situation of the blacks in the 1910s in the preface of *Fences* as follows:

> The descendants of African slaves were offered no such welcome or participation. They came from 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 in shallow, ramshackle houses made of sticks and tar–paper. (*Fences* xvii)

Troy was no exception from this racial adversity the blacks had to endure in the cities. He had to make his residence under bridges in a rickety hut where filthy life awaited, and had to find any means by which to support his family.

In such circumstances, Troy could neither afford time to look back nor look forward; only harsh reality was granted for him. He had to steal, kill, and give up on baseball, which resulted in life where he had to murmur "I can't taste nothing" (*Fences* 89). Indeed his confession is true: "I done locked myself into a pattern trying to take care of you all that I forgot about myself" (Ibid.

69). Therefore, it can be inferred that Troy's highly pragmatic characteristic appears dominant in his family for a reason. African Americans had to dissolve themselves into the urban area and absorb its code for survival's sake. More competitive and more calculative; they had to be more urban than the urbanites. Thus it is matter of course that Troy dismisses Lyon's love for music as a useless joke, and shatters Cory's dream for sports as good–for–nothing. In the eyes of Troy who lived the era of 1910s in urban environment as a black, both music and sports are luxuries he cannot afford. Through the experience in his youth, he made inclemency his faith, and capitalism his creed.

However, at the same time, the origin of Troy's cold–hearted attitude can also be traced back to his father whose image presented in Troy's recollection resembles Troy himself greatly. A sharecropper who stayed in the southern farm around in the early 1900s, Troy's father was free to go anywhere thanks to the Emancipation, but did not take the "walking blues" (*Fences* 51) for his 11 children. Feeding them as a parent was the overriding duty, thus "[t]he only thing [he] cared about was getting them bales of cotton in to Mr. Lubin" (Ibid.) so that he could make their living. Therefore, whether he "treated [them] the way [Troy] felt he should have" (Ibid.) did not matter to him; they were no more than objects of duty and responsibility, just like Cory is to Troy. Only if it could help them with their immediate reality, he did not mind forcing his children to start working as soon as they learned how to walk, and whipped them without hesitation whenever he saw disobedience. Moreover, his whipping meant attack on the competitor as well as discipline for the children. When he whipped little Troy until he passed out, it was all to "take over" Troy's girlfriend from Troy. To put it differently, Troy's regarding Cory as a potential enemy in zero–sum game is the revival of his past experience with his father. Surely, one root of Troy's callous belligerence stretches from his father.

So, the reason for the ruined father–son relationship in the Maxson family, i.e., Troy's turning his home into frigidly calculative space, has dual roots. One is his experience of the city which implanted the urban principle as a prerequisite of survival into Troy's head, and another is his ruthless father in the southern farm who engraved his image as the only form of father in Troy's head. However, these two origins are indeed interconnected. The life of the African Americans did not differ fundamentally whether they were the southern sharecroppers or the northern dayworkers. As Troy says, "the only thing that separated [them] was the matter of a few years" (*Fences* 53). The

northern city and the rural south imposed the fate of slaves on the black people all alike. As Kim Pereira indicates, "slavery to white masters was replaced by slavery to poverty" (40); What Troy encountered in the northern city was no more than another version of slavery which was still in effect in the south despite formal declaration of the Emancipation. Just like his father who was bound in the status of practical slave having to give away most of his harvest to the white landowner, Troy found himself in the position obligated to sell his muscle at a measly reward to the white city. The urban area was the extension of the rural south in that the blacks were still placed at the bottom of the social stratification, the summit still monopolized by the whites, and the barrier between those two still insurmountable. Namely, what penetrates Troy's two separate roots is the morality of slavery, which epitomizes dehumanization, which is reproduced as it was in the logic of urban capitalism.

Hence, it is no wonder that Troy could "feel him kicking in [his] blood" (*Fences* 53) wherever he was when he thought of his father. Their lives as practical slaves were equally full of struggle for their survival, which did not allow them to look anywhere else than pressing reality. Unlike Willy and his father whose eyes are fixed at the past, Troy and his father's gazes are riveted on the ground they stand on. Therefore, everything is secondary other than to survive the reality for Troy and his father: parental affection is unimportant, pleasure is unaffordable, and most importantly, seeking the better future is unavailing. The reality was an unbreakable glass ceiling for African Americans in Troy's time. Troy has an experience of challenging baseball only to be defeated by social prejudices, which further solidified Troy's idea that nothing but failure awaits if you avert your eyes from the immediate reality. This is why he enforces his son to do the same as himself: "I don't wish him a thing else from my life" (Ibid. 39). However, "[t]imes have changed a lot since then," (Ibid. 9) and no matter how hard Rose tries to convince him this, all that Troy says is: "How in hell they done changed?" (Ibid.); he has "been standing in the same place for eighteen years" (Ibid. 70). Just like his father was "trapped" (Ibid. 51) in reality, Troy is also "locked" (Ibid. 89) in his own reality. The reality–orientedness surely stands out as the main characteristic of the Maxsons.

However, Cory is an exception from this cast of mind. He is the one person in the Maxson family "(whose) head was always in the right direction" (*Fences* 94). He successfully unfetters himself from the yoke of the unconditional engrossment in reality, and moves forward to the better future. Even though

he failed in fulfilling his dream of being a football player, at least he surpasses Troy's humble expectation of himself through becoming a U.S. marine, a social position that focuses on honor rather than profits, well–being of the whole nation than his self and the family. Though Troy asserted that looking forward to the future would get him "nowhere," Cory reaches "somewhere" that Troy could never have imagined. Cory's social achievements are far greater than Troy's.

Moreover, his inner achievements also outstrip that of Troy: through forgiving, he breaks the vicious cycle the Maxson fathers have bequeathed to the sons. Troy copied what his father had done to himself though he knew that it had been wrong and his father had been "just as evil as he could be" (*Fences* 51). Even though Troy's moving to the northern city in the first place was to cut the ties between him and his father,[13] the tie was incredibly tough that he succumbed in the end to his father that was "kicking in [his] blood" (Ibid. 53). And in turn, Troy himself also haunts his son nightmarishly just like his own father did:

> Cory: The whole time I was growing up … living in his house … Papa was like a shadow that followed you everywhere. It weighed on you and sunk into your flesh. It would wrap around you and lay there until you couldn't tell which one was you anymore. That shadow digging in your flesh. Trying to crawl in. Trying to live through you. Everywhere I looked, Troy Maxson was staring back at me … hiding under the bed … in the closet. (Ibid. 96–97)

Nevertheless, Cory succeeds in overcoming his father's shadow in the end. Unlike Troy who kept ruminating over his father till he resembled the one he hated, Cory resolves to forgive his father, through which he truly severs the tie

13. In *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution* (1988), Eric Foner indicates that that the desire to reunite the separated family was the most "poignant … of all the motivations for black mobility" (82) after the emancipation. However, Troy's travel is somewhat opposite to the normality; the purpose of his migration is to cut the tie with his father, not to reconnect it. This aberrance of Troy's moving testifies how inhumane Troy's father was with his family.

that persisted in the Maxson family. Though persistently refusing to condone his father at first, Cory realizes that Troy's blood flowing in his vein cannot be denied, and he has to just accept it in order to be free from it; between "grow into it or cut it down to fit [him]" (Ibid. 97), Cory chooses not to "grow into it" through accepting and forgiving. Turning the family into an arid urban space through treating its member with callous indifference or wary animosity, which devastated the Maxsons for two generations, eventually stops with the absolution from Cory. He does not surrender, but breaks away from "the sins of our fathers":

> When the sins of our fathers visit us
> We do not have to play host.
> We can banish them with forgiveness
> As God, in His Largeness and Laws. (Ibid. x)

Cory is not black Biff as much as Troy is not black Willy. Whereas Biff succeeds his past–oriented father while seemingly pursuing separation from Willy's shadow, Cory overcomes his reality–bound father through cutting off the fathers' chains that were "digging in [his] flesh." Of course, to focus exclusively on the urgent reality must have been helpful for the African Americans' initial survival in city. However, the age has changed, then the direction their lives are headed must change, too. Moreover, as long as the reality–focused attitude has its root reaching from the spirit of the slavery, Troy's preoccupation with immediate reality is no more than a stepping stone for the humanity's progress, and an object to overcome for the future generation. After all, *Fences* is similar to, but at the same time very different from *Death of a Salesman*: fathers gaze on the reality locked in the fences, and a son looks to the future beyond the fences.

2) Formation of Ghetto and the Emergence of American Naturalism

In order to understand the reality–obsessed attitude of Troy, the early 20th century urban space needs to be explored, and as the protestant tradition of agrarianism and African Americans are hardly correlated, the approach has to be more sociologically focused than in the case of *Death of a Salesman*. According to federal census, the urban population multiplied seven times as many between 1860 and 1910, which was in percentage an increase from

19.8 to 45.7 of the total.[14] The number of the cities itself also skyrocketed: cities over 100,000 residents increased from 9 to 50, and the cities of ten to twenty–five thousand habitants increased from 58 to 369 (Glaab and Brown 107–08). Namely, the rise of the city was an irrevocable reality for the early 20th century Americans. Looking back to the agricultural past nostalgically was none of their options.

Although there were many complicated elements that boosted this expansion of the American cities, the influx of foreign immigrants and the migrants from the rural area were the two most contributory factors. According to John M. Gillette and George R. Davies, of total 11,826,000 new city dwellers in 1910, 41 percent were immigrants from abroad, 21 percent were native rural–to–urban migrants, 21.6 percent came from natural increase, and the residual 7.6 percent were the result of incorporation of new territories (642–53). In other words, more than 60 percent of the urban population increase was the consequence of migrant influx; more than five million foreign immigrants arrived in the U.S. in the decade of the 1880s alone, and about eleven million of the forty–two million city dwellers of 1910 were of rural origin.

However, the expansion of the cities was not speedy enough to catch up with the population increase, which caused the overall degeneration of standard of living in the overpopulated city. More than 500,000 migrants resided in tenement houses[15] in New York alone in 1864, and as majority of these tenement houses were concentrated on a certain area of a city, the migrants were naturally segregated creating their own district. For example, most tenement houses in New York were built below the Harlem River, and the population density in the area amounted to 143.2 per acre in 1894 whereas the average density of New York was 58.7[16] (Glaab and Brown 139–

14. The urban population increased from 6,216,518 to 44,639,989 during the period while total population of the U.S. grew from 31,443,321 to 91,972,266. In percentage, the urban population multiplied sevenfold when the total population increased threefold (qtd. in Glaab and Brown 107).
15. Invented in 1850s, the tenement house was a small room of which average size was 15 by 9 1/2 feet. It was offered to one family, and most tenement houses accommodated around 500 people in a single building without provision for plumbing or heat (Glaab and Brown 139–40).
16. Even in the most compactly built European cities, the density was lower than this: it was 126.9 per acre in Paris, and 100.8 per acre in Berlin (Glaab and

59). Namely, the racial ghetto appeared in the history of the United States, and it was soon equated with "slum."

Indeed ghetto was another name of the slum. The lack of sewage systems deteriorated public sanitation and caused the rampancy of plague,[17] and lack of job opportunities produced class of extreme poverty in masses, which led to the increase of crime rate and violence.[18] As it is well illustrated in Alfred T. White's observation, the ghetto of the early 20th century was the breeding ground of all kinds of social ills:

> [It is] the nurseries of the epidemics which spread with certain destructiveness into the fairest homes … hiding–places of the local banditti … cradles of the insane who fill the asylums and of the paupers who throng the almhouses; in fact [the ghettoes] produce these noxious and unhappy elements of society as surely as the harvest follows the sowing. (qtd. in Lobove 34–35)

Hence, the appearance of ghetto was the turning point in the American's perspective on their life in cities. The overwhelming reality in which half of the city dwellers were being scourged by appalling pauperism and all sorts of consequential social vice effectively discredited their previous view that poverty, like disease, was the result of an individual's moral failure. Though they previously believed that "[b]y a just and inflexible law of Providence … misery is ordained to be the companion and the punishment of vice" (Heale 174), what they faced was an outrageous phenomenon that swept half of the nation. It could not be explained solely by individual's moral failure.

Naturally, what eventualized was the "recognition of society as a rule–bound entity that was greater than the sum of its individual parts" (Budd 31). The responsibility for one's life, most of which is full of failures and misery, was neither in the given individual's hands, nor in the hands of God. People started to believe that their life "was (and continues to be) artfully, artificially

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Brown 159).

17. For example, Memphis was struck by the yellow–fever epidemic in 1878 which resulted in about 5,000 casualties.
18. The railroad strikes in 1877, the Haymarket Riot in 1886, the Homestead Strike in 1872, and the Pullman Strike in 1894 all reflected the vulnerable economic circumstances of the American urbanites in the 19th century.

constructed by human beings, within certain given limits, in the course of their social development" (Ibid.). It was the appearance of social determinism:

> They believed that contemporary America was a closed rather than an open society and life in this society was characterized by a struggle to survive materially rather than to prevail morally. Great industrial and financial combinations and self-serving national political parties appeared to control the fate of the nation as a whole, while the destiny of the common man of city and town—a destiny powerfully influenced by his personal and social background—appeared to be equally beyond individual control. The feeling was that man was limited, shaped, conditioned—determined, if you will. (Pizer 4)

And this concept of determinism shared its trajectory with naturalism in that both theories saw human fate as dismally predetermined. Both theories postulate "man caught in a net from which there can be no escape," and believe that humans have nothing to do but "degenerating under those circumstances" (Howard 13). Indeed, determinism is "a defining, if not the defining, characteristic of naturalism" (Giles 1).

As a reflection of society, literature also quickly accepted this change of perspective. According to Giles, "more obviously than any other literary genre, naturalism in the United States was . . . a literary reaction to the rise of the city" (3). This claim is validated when we associate the birth of American ghetto with Lars Ahenbrink's indication that "a naturalist believes that man is fundamentally an animal without free will" (qtd. in Howard 36). The migrants who endlessly flooded into the ghettoes were "a mélange of humankind" (Budd 35) that were "squalid, dangerous, but exciting—even exotic" (Howard 88) to the WASP Americans' eyes. In other words, the ghetto residents were seen as incomprehensible mobs, which made it easy for the "traditional" American writers to connect them to the animal imagery which was an icon of naturalism: "a constant and pervasive referent which constantly downgrades every thought and act of the human" (Ibid. 18). Besides, as their difficult lives were extremely susceptible to the exterior conditions compared to those of the non-ghetto residents, they were nice object of the deterministic naturalists' observation. Consequently, the ghetto migrants—whether they were from abroad or rural areas—had to live lives where their future seemed to be already determined, and had to suffer the animalistic representation of

the naturalism.[19]

Troy Maxson is an epitome of this fate that the ghetto residents had to endure. A brutal father who thwarts his son's dream because he does not believe in the better future, Troy is naturalism's typical character who is "conditioned and controlled by environment, heredity, instinct" (Giles 8). Locked up in his fate formulated by the environment of city and heredity from his beastly father, Troy is no other than a stock character of the naturalism which "penetrated to levels of the American population never before reached by any formal philosophy save Christianity" (Howard 33) in early 20th century America. However, though Troy might be the typical reflection of naturalism, Fences is not. Cory is neither swayed by the environment, nor defeated by heredity. That is to say, *Fences* escapes the naturalistic representation of the African Americans as Cory overcomes his father, which is exactly what August Wilson intends to do via his work:

> The importance of history to me is simply to find out who you are and where you've been. **It becomes doubly important if someone else is writing your history.** I think Blacks in America need to re–examine their time spent here to see the choices that were made as a people. I'm not certain the right choices have been made. (qtd. in Powers 52, emphasis mine)

For Wilson, playwriting is history rewriting. History of the black people was written by the whites, and the era when the racial ghetto was formed was no exception, either. Through the lens of the white naturalism, African Americans were depicted as "lesser breeds" (Giles 3) who were locked in the trap of "pessimistic materialistic determinism" (Howard 13), and Wilson is firmly against such representations. He dismantles the logic of white naturalism through exposing its error that the origin of black brutality indeed lay in the white institution, the slavery, and also breaks down the representational custom by portraying the next generation who moves forward overcoming

19. In his book, James R. Giles enumerates naturalistic novels in which the migrants in ghettoes are represented in beastly imageries. *Jews without Money* (1930), *Native Son* (1940), *The Man with the Golden Arm* (1949), *Last Exit to Brooklyn* (1964), *City of Night* (1963), and *Them* (1969) are all examples where such representations by WASP's eyes manifest themselves.

"the sins of our fathers." *Fences* is reflection, and at the same time unseating of American deterministic naturalism.

IV. Conclusion

Both Willy Loman and Troy Maxson are fathers who lived in the urban space of the same age. They both passed their youth trying to make a living in a city of 1910–20s' America, and have reached their late middle age in 1940–50s. But their attitudes toward the city are diametrically opposite to each other, behind which lies Jeffersonian anti–urbanism and deterministic American naturalism, two stances coexisting despite disparities. This difference in perspective arises from the fundamental gap in the way they experienced cities. Willy, a white descendant of the Pilgrims who had agricultural ideal, lamented in nostalgia watching the construction of dense apartments and skyscrapers that blocked his view on the plains and sky. Meanwhile, Troy, a son of Black slaves who had been ripped off from their own lands to be transported to alien environment, had to accustom himself to harsh reality such as ramshackle houses or unending suppression and defeats. The results are one past–oriented father and another reality–bound father. Therefore, *Death of a Salesman* and *Fences* can be approached as interesting references which show how similarly urbanized spaces were differently experienced depending on the race.

Still, however disparate their experiences were, most representation of it was done by single race. African Americans were accordingly trapped in the frame of negative representation that endlessly reproduced the same biased imagery, and Wilson expresses his rejection to the unfair situation by creating a son who refuses to succeed his father. While to succeed his father for the white son delivers pathos and sympathy to the readers, it means "to play host" to the "sins of our fathers" and to reaffirm his defeat for the black son. That is why Cory refuses to succeed his father in *Fences*; if fathers show the difference in the experience of cities, the sons and their decisions reveal the different attitude toward the representation. After all, *Death of a Salesman* and *Fences* are very similar, but very contrasting two texts that explore the urban experience and its representation through father–son relationship.

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Abstract

In this essay I illuminate two disparate but concurrent ideas on the American cities of 1940–50s reflected in the stories about father–son relationship, Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and August Wilson's *Fences*. The urban space appears as irrevocable reality in both texts, and it functions as the main reason for the tragic demise of fathers and the problematic father–son relationship. Nonetheless, the protagonists as well as their sons in each play react to the city space in a diametrically opposed way: Willy Loman eludes the city, but Troy Maxson indulges in it; Biff and Happy succeed their father, but Cory defies and overcomes his. This essay explains this difference stemming from the same urban condition through interdisciplinary study of literature and socio–historical research of the American cities of mid–twentieth century. I begin by textual analysis of each play, of which aim is to manifest the gap in the characters' attitudes, and in expansion, the plays' standpoint concerning cities. Then I move on to explore the history of urbanization in America, and the influences of its particular phases on the discordant perspectives on American cities. Accordingly, Jeffersonian agrarianism originating from the 19th century that still held negative stance on the city in the 20th century is discussed in relation to the birth and expansion of American cities, which is clearly reflected in *Death of a Salesman*. On the other hand, the appearance of naturalism to which social determinism was an intrinsic element is discussed in step with the American ghetto formed by massive influx of foreign and local immigrants, which is vividly depicted in *Fences*.

Keywords: *Death of a Salesman, Fences*, father–son relationship, urbanization, anti–urbanism, naturalism, ghetto

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