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Love Languages in *Fences*

A Tower of Broken Pieces

August Wilson, an American playwright reveals a portrait of an African American family in the 1950's who experienced many of the stormy norms of black families in those days, such as racial discrimination, shattered hopes and dreams, hyper masculinity, betrayal, lack of hope and opportunity, all of which could birth indignation and toxic generational cycles into a family.

Troy Maxon, the main character was a former baseball player whose talent had been overlooked and ignored because of colorism. Troy was a bitter man. As a result, Troy lacked fulfillment and joy in his Pittsburg, PA home with his family, Rose, his wife, and his son Cory. Troy's discontentment was fueled by his hardships in life, which unfortunately provoked his *inability* to express an emotional kind of love towards his family, beyond financial responsibility and achievements. Troy Maxon made an honest living working as a garbage man. Each week that he was paid, Troy would bring all his money to Rose to delegate the financial responsibilities of the home. Troy did this as if it were a ritual. Troy believed that providing for his family was an acceptable language of love towards them. In the third scene of the play from *Fences. Literature: A Portable Anthology*, Cory experienced his father's toxic energy to the point that he asked him a heartfelt question., "How come you ain't never liked me?" "Troy responded to his son as if paying the bills was equivalent to the expression of love, "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 your behind on my bedclothes -- fill your belly up with my food -- 'cause you my son (1052)." When Cory questioned his father, he was feeling un-supported and un-loved. According to Troy's response, he believed that his love *was* extended towards Cory by how he provided for his family. Another example of Troy placing emphasis on how providing was his example of love is when he told Rose that he is doing the best that he could as a father and husband. Rose was trying to convince Troy to allow Cory to play on the high school football team when Troy responded, "Woman...I do the best I can do" *"I come in here every Friday." "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." "We go up-stairs in that room at night -- and I fall down on you and try to blast a hole into forever." "I get up Monday morning -- find my lunch on the table." "I go out. Make my way." "Find my strength to carry me through to the next Friday." "That's all I got, Rose." That's all I got to give." I can't give nothing else"* (1054). When Rose and Troy discussed the affair he was having with another woman, he compared his emotional availability to *what* and *how much* he brings home to Rose. Troy expressed, "Rose -- don't mess up my pay." "You know that now. I take my pay and I give it to you" I don't have no money but what you give me back." "I just want to have a little time to myself -- a little time to enjoy life" (1073). Troy clearly conveyed that life with his family was unsatisfying, and after he provided for them, his work was done. Troy revealed that he had nothing else to give.*

According to the Five Love Languages, Gary Chapman describes the varying ways to express love between couples, according to their partners preferred love language. He expounds clearly on appropriate types of love, as he stated, “But it seems so sterile,” some may contend. “Love as an attitude with appropriate behavior?” “Where are the shooting stars, the balloons, the deep emotions?” “What about the twinkle of an eye,” ... “What about the emotional security” ... (Chapman). Rose and Cory yearned for these emotions from Troy. “Everything that boy do - he do for you. He wants you to say, “Good job, son.” That’s all,” pleaded Rose (1053). “I stood on first based for eighteen years and I thought ...well, god-damn it...go on go for it” (1071). Troy makes this declaration to Rose when she simply suggested that Troy should have held *her* tight. “You should have held me tight.” “You should have grabbed me n held on” (1071), denotes that she desired much more than his paycheck on Fridays.

Troy’s struggle with discontentment, failures, insecurities, and brokenness resulted in a torrential floodwater of lack of emotional care for his family. “He was haunted with the thought of his failure to be inducted into professional baseball. His reason for not allowing Cory to play football was attributed to his own emotional struggles. “I decided seventeen years ago that boy wasn’t getting involved in no sports.” “Not after what they did to me in the sports (1053).” This statement was Troy’s own fears and failure in the flesh. According to Susan Koprince, in an *American Journal Article, Baseball as History and Myth in August Wilson's Fences*, Koprince exclaimed that Troy’s “American dream has turned into a prolonged nightmare” ((Koprince 353). Troy Maxon’s obvious disdain for family life and negative attitude towards sports certainly supports Koprince’s statement.

The way we choose to communicate love towards others is so important. Love stems further than financial stability within the home. The role of the head of the family is to provide,

despite any failures. It is also to love, correct and create a safe emotional space. If this does not occur, it can create perpetual cycle of brokenness within the family for generations to come. It's not completely Troy's fault! His own father expressed love for Troy in the same way. Troy expounded on how his dad's biggest concern was providing for him and his 10 siblings. Troy passionately described how his father had a responsibility toward them that superseded how he treated them. Troy witnessed his father work hard for the family which, to Troy, demonstrated his father's love (1059-1061). Troy continually emphasized his ability to maintain shelter and feeding his family above being emotionally available to them. Perhaps there is a connection between Troy's father being emotionally unavailable to him, an Troy being emotionally unavailable to Rose and Troy.

Work Cited

Chapman, G. D. (1995). *The five love languages: how to express heartfelt commitment to your mate*. [New ed.]. Chicago, Northfield Pub. (*Sample book*)

Koprince, Susan. "Baseball as History and Myth in August Wilson's 'Fences.'" *African American Review*, vol. 40, no. 2, 2006, pp. 349–58. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40033723>. Accessed 4 Oct. 2022.

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