

A New Historicist Reading of August Wilson's *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*

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Abstract—The interaction of history and literature has been always an important subject among literary scholars. One of the newest approaches in the field of literary criticism which emerged about three decades ago is New Historicism. In this almost new way of analysis, not only history affects literature, but also literature could be effective in understanding history and thus the relationship between history and literature is reciprocal. The present paper is an attempt to find traces of new historicism in August Wilson's *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* by the help of the theories and ideas given by new historicist thinkers such as Stephen Greenblatt, and Michael Foucault. To achieve this end, a methodical investigation of the plays through the lens of new historicism has been conducted. As for the Foucauldian basis of new historicism, his ideas about distribution of power by a certain medium which he calls *discourse* in a culture is discussed in a way that power circulates knowledge in a specific context and this facts helps to prove the reciprocity of the relation between history and literature. It is shown that the margins of the society, the blacks, have their own discourse as the whites do. There are subversive voices, who resist the dominant culture through which they open a space for the other black men to show up themselves. Power as a social energy does not just belong to the whites who have the imposing discourse but the blacks have their own power too, though being at the margins, through which they resist the governing culture.

Index Terms—Discourse, power, resistance, subversive voice.

I. INTRODUCTION

In this paper, the researcher is going to illustrate a new historicist reading of *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* through which the subversive voices suffocated by the white's society and the way they come up with their own discourse through the power relation they have with the dominant discourse have been analyzed. Since 1980s, the relationship between literature and history have become of crucial significance in studying the literary texts. The thinkers of this approach are unanimously on the belief that all literary texts are woven within the social and political discourses and all literary texts are vehicles of power. Therefore, the critics pay attention to the elements, which affect the writers in creation of their works and affect the readers in their interpretation of the works as well. They want to know how historical and cultural issues lead authors to write a specific piece of art and how these conditions could be influential in the readers' understanding of that piece. In this case, not only the historical condition of the time of the creation of a work is significant, but also the time and conditions of reading a work

is vital. Therefore, no text is produced in a socio-political and historical vacuum. August Wilson as a writer has written and produced his plays within those historical periods, depicting a variety of diverse and complex network of discourses, being the suppressing and the suppressed discourses. The researcher wants to draw the attention that how these complex discourses are interacting with each other and what happens mostly to the ignored-marginalized discourse and how the people in these conditions have tried during the history and ,here specifically, during the course of the plays to have their subversive voice heard through creating and inventing their own statements leading to establish their own discourse. Moreover, in the present study, the researcher tries to present a new historicist reading of the plays. He aims to show how the dominant discourse exerts their power on the black people and how these marginalized parts of the society are influenced by these sociopolitical conditions and how they react toward these dominant ideologies. The characters in *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* through resistance, language, music and dissension seize upon the situation to lead their own black fellow to found their own discourse.

Ma Rainey's Black Bottom is one of the famous plays of August Wilson on which many books and articles have been written, appreciating the work, seeing it from different perspectives. John Impane in his "Filling the Time: Reading History in the Drama of August Wilson" explains about the fact that Wilson's plays are more concerned about history and change as a progress in the lives of black people. He says: In his plays, Wilson portrays individual lives in relation to moments of "subtle yet decisive historical change. Finding they cannot live without reference to the change, these characters evolve various ways of reading it. Knowing the change and its significance is complicated by their position and their wishes"[1]. August Wilson's dramatic works, ranging freely across the decades of American history, perform what Addell Austin terms a "vital function of the black theatre" [2]. Lyrical works of art, his plays operate on another level as well. They hold up a "live mirror for helping black people to see, to cope with, and to redefine their perceptions of their own humanity" [3]. A "very essential part of that humanity, Wilson suggests, comes directly from the influences and inheritances of the southern past"[4]. In what is perhaps one of August Wilson's earliest published interviews following the sudden notoriety thrust upon him by the Broadway success of *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, he told Kim Powers about his aspirations: "My idea is that somewhere, sometime in the course of the play, the audience will discover these are African people. They're black Americans, they speak English, but their worldview is African" [5]. What is of the great importance to him is the idea of Africanness in the community of the whites. However, Sandra G. Shannon in her

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"Audience and Africanisms in August Wilson's Dramaturgy: A Case Study" has a different look at the work *Ma Rainey* as she argues, "for the most part, observing the characters of *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* as Africans seems to be less important for Wilson in this play, which hinges upon a black man's more immediate concerns for survival in the racist recording industry of the late 1920s"[6]. Keith Clark in her "Race, Ritual, Reconnection, Reclamation: August Wilson and the Refiguration of the Male Dramatic Subject" explains that, "though *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* may appear to be a treatise on the wages of economic and racial violence as well as black men's destructive responses to oppression, it traverses the tradition of black masculinist protest literature"[7].

II. WHITE DISCOURSE

In the play, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, the black characters are situated in America where racism is infamously rampant. They are breathing under the dominance of the white ideology. It is a "searing inside account of what white racism does to its victims"[8]. In the society that Wilson is depicting, the whites have the dominant discourse and blacks have to accept the rules assigned by the dominant ideology. Thus, the play may be a critique of the exploitation of the blacks by the whites. *Ma Rainey* "dramatizes the production of blues race-records as a critique of commercial and racial exploitation of blacks by whites" [9]. For example, from the beginning of the play we see that the white producer, Sturdyvant, and Ma Rainey's manager, Irvin, do not care about the blacks and are just after money they can attain from them through music. Wilson introduces them as "Irvin enters, carrying a microphone. He is a tall fleshy man who prides himself on his knowledge of blacks and his ability to deal with them. Sturdyvant "preoccupied with money" is "insensitive to black performer and prefers to deal with them at arm's length" [10]. They just care about the money they can earn from them. Ma Rainey in another scene of the play, after having some arguments with the producer, tells Cutler that the whites care about nothing but the money they earn from them, they just want her voice. They do not care about humanity, what is important is money,

"In you colored and can make them some money, then you alright with them. Otherwise, you just a dog in the valley. I done made this company more money from my records than all the other recording artists they got put together. And they wanna balk about how much this session is costing them" [10]. We may not see white's presence on the stage but their presence is felt in the behavior and reaction of the blacks. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., makes the same point: "one of Wilson's accomplishments is to register the ambiguous presence of white folks in a segregated black world—the way you see them nowhere and feel them everywhere" [11]. They need Ma, they respect her but after they are done with her, she is like a dog to them.

The white society decides what you should do and how you can survive in America. They are so much dependent on them that even for recording their songs they have to go to them. As Levee says: "I'm gonna get me a band and make me some records. I done give Mr. Sturdyvant some of my songs I wrote and he says he's gonna let me record them when I get my band together. Mr. Sturdyvant want me to write another part to this

song" [10]. They have made the blacks inferior that even they internalize this regarding themselves subordinate to the whites. They do not like to do anything against them by accepting their present situation as they are being stereotyped by the whites. There is a conversation between Toledo and Slow Drag about the way the whites regard them.

Toledo: Everybody is worried about having good time. Ain't nobody thinking about what kind of the world they gonna live their younguns. "Just give me the good time, that's all I want". It just makes me sick.

Slow Drag: Well, the Colored man's gonna be alright. He got through slavery, and he'll get through whatever else the white man put on him. I ain't worried about that [10].

That is the way they regard themselves. Toledo as the educated member of the band is talking about the way they are under the dominance of the white's discourse. He believes that the blacks accept what the whites say. They do not let the blacks escape the discourse. However, Slow Drag accepts the way they are being regarded and believes that they will adopt themselves to the white's discourse and enjoy themselves, "see, we's the leftovers and you can't do nothing with it. You already making you another history... cooking you another meal, and you don't need them leftovers no more. Now what's the colored man gonna do with himself? That's we waiting to find out" [10]. In the discussion of Toledo, he considers the way they have been regarded by the whites. They are just eating them, misusing them and after that, they put them away as they are in their way. The discourse of the whites has imposed its dominance so heavily on the blacks that they are afraid of them despite the fact that they are living in America. As Toledo says to the other member of the bands that Levee" is one of us. Spooked up with the white men"[10]. They do not consider the niggers as human being. In the discourse of the whites the black men are just a bunch of thieves. It is evident when Cutler hates to be given a check since he cannot go to bank cashing his check. "Man give me a check last night... you remember... we went all over Chicago trying to get it cashed. See a nigger with a check, the first thing they think is he done stole it someplace"[10]. In the society of the whites, it is just the discourse of the whites that is ruling through which they have suppressed the blacks. However, as we will see, the blacks are trying hard to have their own voices heard by the dominant ideology as a result of which they can create their own discourse.

III. BLACK DISCOURSE

Ma Rainey's Black Bottom is a play about an African band, which is going to record some songs in a studio. They are all Africans living in America. The time of the play is when racism is high in America. Africans have no say in the dominant discourse run by the whites. They have to follow what the whites say. The whites look down on them and they are in minority. However, this is not the end. Despite the fact that they are under the dominance, they sometimes begins to establish their own discourse. Ma Rainey is a successful and famous blues singer. He is so powerful that she can make the whites surrender. In this play, Wilson "explores how black people have used the blues (and its vernacular) to celebrate, teach, speak, communicate and wage war unbeknownst to the

dominant culture, revealing a living and highly adaptive governance strategy for the survival of a people [12]. As Usekes says "Wilson's cycle of plays proposes to rewrite the white version of American history in the twentieth century" [13]. Nevertheless, Ma Rainey is not the one who is going to establish a discourse of the black people. The members of the band are rehearsing some songs. In their songs, there is some kind of impulses for establishing a discourse. In one of their songs, we see some sparks of asking for change.

SLOW DRAG: (Singing)

Rambling man makes no change in me
I'm gonna ramble back to my used-to-be
Ah, you hear me talking to you
I don't bite my tongue
You wants to be my man
You got to fetch it with you come [10].

In the above song, despite the fact that they are the marginalized parts of the society or as Toledo calls the blacks, leftovers, they show their resistance by the song which will be heard in the country, and they demonstrates that they have their own discourse as well.

Ma Rainey, as said, is very popular but as long as she sings for them they respect her. She knows this and by this, she wants to be the leader of the change for the blacks. She knows that they need her songs:

They don't care nothing about me. All they want is my voice. Well, I done learned that, and they gonna treat me like I want to be treated no matter how much it hurt them. They back there now calling meal kinds of names... calling me everything but the child of God. But they can't do nothing else. They ain't got what they want yet [10].

She knows how to treat them. She has her own power too. She is one of the subversive voices who is now singing loud. She has her own voice as well which is to be respected.

A. Sylvester as a Subversive Voice

Not only does Ma Rainey want to have her voice heard as a subversive voice in the dominant ideology of the time but also she helps the other members to have their voice spread throughout the country. Sylvester is one of these characters who cannot even properly speak. He is always stuttering and cannot spell a word correctly and without pause. Despite all disagreement both from her own band and the white producer about Sylvester singing, she is strongly on the belief that Sylvester can and should do it.

Irvin: He stutters, Ma. They say he stutters.

Ma Rainey: I don't care if he can do. I promised the boy he could do the part... and he's gonna do it! That's all there is to it. He don't stutter all the time. Get a microphone down here for him... If you wanna make a record, you gonna find time. I ain't playing with you, Irvin. I can walk out of here and go back to my tour. I got plenty fans... Just go and get the boy a microphone [10].

Sylvester is one of the subversive voices that Ma Rainey tries to make it known to the world. She believes in him that he can do it, no matter what the others say. The white producer and manager are seriously against this idea but Ma helps him to come into the business. She wants to gradually start a discourse in the racist community of the whites. Since they are the marginalized parts of the society, she wants to make a history out of it and compete with the center.

Therefore, as we see the white's ideology is not the only discourse in America in 1920s when these events are happening but also black people have their own discourse as well. Here, blacks are regarded inferior in the society and it is then hurtful to Sylvester to be laughed at instead of being supported. As Jerard says: "Blacks were already regarded as inferior, so there was definitely no respect for a young black man that could not speak. Also, it was hurtful to him when other blacks ridiculed him, so he really needed acceptance from society as a whole"[14].

B. Toledo: A Dissident Impulse for Change

Toledo is the most sophisticated man in the band and he is the only one in the group who can read. He has read many books, and is well aware of the situation of the African people living in America. His literacy helps him to have power through, which he tries to make the other members of the band understood that their life is just a mess and they should try to establish their own discourse and he thereby wants his black friends to attain the ability to change. Shannon claims: "In Toledo, August Wilson creates a character who possesses exceptional potential to effect positive change among his people, yet he is never really able to rise to the occasion" [15]. He is like a political leader to them. Toledo: "That's the trouble with the colored folks in America ... Always gonna have a good time. Good times done got more niggers killed than God got ways to count. What the hell having a good time mean? That's what I wanna know" [10]. Here, he is trying to guide his black comrades, pointing out that trying to stick to the old rules is not a proper choice to live on. They have to do something to make their lives better in America. Toledo: "The colored man ought to be doing more than just trying to have a good time all the time" [10]. He believes that everybody should try, every colored man in the world, to establish their own discourse, which has something to say among the white's discourse. Toledo argues: "Each voice is clear and distinctive but, taken together, they tell a story of the struggles, defeats and victories which have defined the experiences of those invited to live on the margins of American life but who have done so much more than merely survive"[16]. Toledo: "It ain't just me, fool! It's everybody! What you think ... I'm gonna solve the colored man's problems by myself? I said, we. You understand that? We. That's every living colored man in the world got to do his share... I'm talking about all of us together. What all of us gonna do"[10]. Toledo, furthermore, draws their attention to what a black man should mean and be. A nigger should not be satisfied with the life given to him by the white discourse. He should always be trying to ask for more. He should ask and want some more from his life. He should be always challenging and not let the whites make them adjust to their will.

Toledo: See, now. I am gonna tell you some thing. A nigger gonna be dissatisfied no matter what. Give a nigger some bread and butter ... and he'll cry cause he ain't got no jelly, and he'll cry cause he ain't got no knife to put it on with. If there's one thing I done learned in this life, it's that you can't satisfy a nigger no matter what you do. A nigger's gonna make his own life dissatisfaction [10].

Toledo is the voice to encourage the other black man to rise up. Toledo, an "intellectual and the voice of Black

Nationalism, maintains that if 'every living colored man' works together, their lives will improve and that it is a mistake to look for the white man's approval" [17].

Subversive forces and impulses can be felt in this story that the white discourse is not the only one discourse. Actually, Wilson through his plays, which are mostly depicting the racist society of 20s, 30s and 40s wants to reread the history again. He wants to draw our attention that at that time it was not only the dominant discourse of the white but there were other minor, marginalized parts who had their own subversive voice through, which they had been able to set up a discourse in America.

IV. BALANCE OF POWER BETWEEN THE DISCOURSES

Power relation is one of the most important issues that has been brought up by Foucault in new historicism. According to him, power does not belong to one specific group, who are imposing it on another group, but it is disseminated through individuals. We can see power in whatever we do during the day. It is exchangeable. It is disseminated throughout the society. It does not belong to one specific discourse. Even the ruler of one country gains his power through the discourses in his government. New historicism tends to discuss how power is disseminated in the society. Power can be defined as the exchange of ideas through the various discourses a culture produces. Likewise, "The stories Wilson's black men impart transmit their mutual histories, as the playwright demonstrates that these narratives are integral to the ritual process of reconstructing black male subjectivity" [7], which shows that they have their own individuality and will not determined by the discourse.

V. MUSIC AS MA RAINEY'S POWER

Music, especially Jazz and blues, is the embodiment of African culture through which one can come to get familiar with their culture. As Shafer argues: "If you did not know anything about Africans, if all you had was this music, it would inform you of their grace, their passion, their logic and everything is all contained in the music" [18]. Ma Rainey is a black woman singer, who is referred to as the mother of the Blues. In the society of the whites, she has her own power. Although the dominant discourse is that of the whites but it is through the communication that they assert their power. In this interaction, they need blacks by which they can communicate. Here, in this play, music acts as a means of power for the black community. There is power relation between them. At the beginning of the play, there is a conversation between Irvin, the white manager, Sturdyvant, and the producer that shows how Ma Rainey has imposed her power on them, which makes the producer furious, as he cannot stand a black woman comes by, ordering him:

Sturdyvant: I don't care what she calls herself. I'm not putting up with it. I just want to get her in here... record those songs on that list... and get her out. Just like clockwork, huh?...

Sturdyvant: Yeah... yeah... you handled it last time. Remember? She marches in here like she owns the damn

place... does not like the songs we picked out... says her throat is sore... does not want to do more than one take [10].

Sturdyvant is dependent on Ma and he cannot tolerate this situation to be ordered by a black woman. "Sturdyvant, don't you go trying to tell me how to sing. You just take care of that up there and let me take care of this down here" [10]. He cannot say anything in front of her as she is the most powerful one now. He makes fun of her, calling her the Queen of bullshit. Sandra Adell suggests, Sturdyvant "finds it particularly irritating to have to put up with one who comports herself as if she were a queen" [19]. She has attained power through her music. Elam asserts: "Ma will not be objectified; instead, she uses her position as a desired musical commodity to legitimize her authority"[20]. As the conversation continues, it is clear that "Sturdyvant finds Rainey's personality and behavior unacceptable and totally inappropriate given the customary societal norms that dictate how a black woman should address a white man" [12]. Moreover, when Sturdyvant wants her not to waste her time on Sylvester, stuttering boy, as she has been late and that the boy cannot do it as he stutters, Ma Rainey replies: "Sturdyvant, don't you go trying to tell me how to sing. You just take care of that up there and let me take care of this down here" [10]. She is the one toward whom the power has shifted now. As long as she has the voice and sings, her music is her power: "They don't care nothing about me. All they want is my voice. Well, I done learned that, and they gonna treat me like I want to be treated no matter how much it hurt them" [10].

They are not the only ones about whom she demonstrates her identity. Even when she has some arguments with a police officer, she brags about her identity that who she is. The way she talks about her identity, it seems, she is the most powerful one in the society of whites. She wants them to respect her.

Ma Rainey: Tell the man who he's messing with!

Irvin: Do you know this lady?

Ma Rainey: Just tell the man who I am! That's all you gotta do.

Police officer: Lady, will you let me talk, huh?

Ma Rainey: Tell the man who I am! ... Tell him who he's messing with!

Irvin: Okay! Okay! Give me a chance! Officer, this is one of our recording artists... Ma Rainey.

Ma Rainey: Madam Rainey! Get it straight! Madam Rainey! [10].

She does not allow her identity to be questioned. She does not let them to look down at her. She is a black person but she is powerful enough to fight them back. She wants her manager to call her madam. She wants the police officer who is one of the forces of the dominant culture to respect her and her identity as a black woman. Even in some parts, she threatens the producer to keep the studio warm; otherwise, she will not sing for them anymore. Ma Rainey: "Why you all keep it so cold here? Sturdyvant try and pinch every penny he can. You all wanna make some records, you better put some heat on in here or give me back my coat" [10]. She shows that it is not just the white person and society who is ruling and has the dominant discourse but power is not just in their hands and it is spread through the minor discourses as well, as the white people need her to sing for them. Thus, here, they have to follow what she says. They have to follow her lead since she

listens to her heart and knows his fans better than them. She does not want to change her song, as they want her to do that.

Ma Rainey: I don't care what you say, Irvin. Levee ain't messing up my song.... I am singing Ma Rainey's song... I'm gonna tell you something, Irvin... and you go up there and tell Sturdyvant. What you say don't count with me. You understand. Ma listens to her heart. Ma listens to her voice inside her. That's what counts with Ma [10].

Music here acts as a social energy, which is spread among all the members of the society, both the dominant and the marginalized parts of the society. Power is disseminated among both the whites and the blacks. As Bellamy argues: "Ultimately, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* play explores the delicate balance of power that shapes American culture" [12]. She creates a balance for both sides.

VI. LEEVE'S POWER RELATION

Levee's past has had a great impact on his present situation. At the young age of eight, Levee witnessed white men assaulting his mother. He watched as his father sold his land to one of these men, and then went after them to avenge this assault. His father was killed by these men. This was the lesson of being powerlessness, one feels being in the white society. As a man, he continues to be oppressed by those around him. He is controlled by his boss, Ma Rainey. His future career in music is dictated by white men, and even his fellow black men try to push him down. He continues to feel powerless in his life, and he does what he can to overcome this oppression he feels from other people and rise up to find his own power. The harder he tries to gain control of his life, the more he leads himself and others to destruction. Peter Wolfe's comments on the role of oppression in male subject formation shed further light on Levee's psychosocial trauma: "Oppression confers an identity. For members of an oppressed group to recognize that they are oppressed is crucial", because that is the moment when they perceive that their experience is not the result of their "own specific nature or the nature of the world, but the result of an alterable state of things" [21]. As Arnold argues: "His misplaced anger at all his problems and all the injustices he has encountered increases until he is at the point of committing murder. His injustices that have silenced him have led him to silence another and refuse this person his own future" [22].

VII. LEEVE'S POWER RELATION WITH OTHER BLACK MEN

Levee's relationship with other black men shows a major struggle for power. He works with other black musicians, and it is within this interaction that one can see the oppression and powerlessness that Levee feels. In the article "Blues on Broadway: *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*," Sandra Shannon says, "Certainly racial oppression and the emasculation it seeks permeates all facets of these black musicians' lives, and racism is largely responsible for their inability to progress. These men are forced to prostitute their wonderful musical talents for mere pocket change and pats on their backs" [15]. He does what he can to prove himself powerful and try to bring the others around him down so that he can feel superior.

The recording session begins with Levee walking in late.

He has bought a new pair of shoes and makes a big show over pulling them out of the box and putting them on. The shoes symbolize power for Levee. He bought them with his own money, part of which he won in a lucky game of craps. The shoes are the one thing that Levee refers to with pride. The other men feel that these shoes are too expensive and a waste of money, but Levee feels powerful, more important, and better than these men because of these shoes. He puts them on and says, "Yeah! Now I'm ready! I can play some good music now!" [10]. The other band members could care less about his shoes and what they mean to him. Slow Drag, early in the play, even steps on his shoes, and when Levee calls him on it, Slow Drag sees no significance in what he has done.

Levee works hard to insult the other members of the band in order to bring them down and make himself feel better. Toledo is the one band member that Levee feels the most hostility towards. Toledo is a black man that lives within the same circumstances as Levee, but he is much different. Toledo is an educated black man who can read and seems to have a different outlook toward life and on the way in which black men should live in this world. He is insightful and magnifies Levee's own flaws, which makes Levee feel even more furious. Levee says, "That's what the problem is with Toledo... reading all them books and things. He done got to the point where he forgot how to laugh and have a good time. Just like the white man" [10]. Though this conflict with Toledo is a verbal one, it is escalated later in the play after Levee is brought down by the white men, not accepting him to have his band's performance recorded. Levee: "Mr. Sturdyvant, sir ... I done got my band picked up and they's real good fellows. They know how to play real good. I know if the peoples hear the music, they'll but it. Sturdyvant: Well, Levee, I'll be fair with you ... but they're just not the right songs" [10]. He turns down his songs, which is a breakdown for him. He is not satisfied by the way he is being treated by the white producer as he has promised him to record his performance. He has always tried to attract their attention but it has always turned out to be a fiasco.

VIII. LEEVE'S IDENTITY AND POWER

Levee is a complicated character whose life from the beginning has been in the hand of the white people and in order to revenge himself on them, he tries to attach himself to the white people. Instead of revenging, he tries to imitate them, which causes him to lose everything he has. When he is introduced to the reader, he is wearing a pair of new shoes. He has bought it to look like the white men, to impress them through which he may attach himself to them but does not realize that "these shoes are going to lead him into an uncertain future" [23]. As Slow Drag says: "That's why Levee run out to buy some shoes. He's looking to make an impression on that gal", Cutler: What the hell is he gonna do with his shoes? She can't do nothing with the nigger's shoes" [10]. Although he has bought the new shoes to impress them, his friends already know that he is not getting anywhere with them. The shoes also stand as a means of power for him whereby he can attract the attention of the white to give him some parts in their world, "you all go and rehearse, then. I got to finish this song for Mr. Sturdyvant" [10]. Toledo believes that as long as the black man is trying to sell his identity to a

white man, he has lost his identity and is just imitating the way they are acting and it does not get him anywhere. Toledo: "See, now... I'll tell you something. As long as the Colored man look to white folks to put the crown on what he say... as long as he looks to white folks for approval... then he ain't never gonna find out who he is and what he's about. He's just gonna be about what white folks want him to be about. That's one sure thing" [10]. He is arguing that as they are marginalized in this country as long as they attach themselves to the whites' values they will lose their identity as the black man and should follow what they order him to do. However, Levee believes that they cannot change anything and they should follow their rules with which the other members, especially Toledo disagrees. Levee tells them to wear the same stuff as the whites wear, Levee: "Nigger, why don't you get some decent shoes? Got nerve to put on a suit and tie with them farming boots.... I don't care what the nigger wear. I'll be honest with you. I don't care if he went barefoot" [10]. He wants to follow the ideology and behavior of the whites to acquire power because they are the dominant ideology but through this imitation he loses his identity and gets baffled as who he is. Toledo: "We done sole ourselves to the white man in order to be like him. Look at the way you dressed... That ain't African. That's the white man. We are trying to be just like him. We done sold who we are in order to become someone else. We's imitation white men" [10]. "His means of salving his pain and avenging a racially violent childhood are severely wrongheaded, rendering him a mimetic subject — one determined to define himself within the constricting construct of patriarchal masculinity" [7]. Levee has become just imitation of the white men, whom do not give a shit to him, always looking down on him, rejecting him.

To Levee, his new shoes which attach him to the world of the whites, mean power and when Toledo at the end of the play unintentionally steps on his shoes, it seems that he has lost his power which causes his fury, thereby Toledo. Levee: "Hey, watch it... shit Toledo! You stepped on my shoe... Nigger gonna step on my goddam shoe! You done fucked up my shoe! Look at that! Look at what you done to my shoe, nigger! I aint stepped on your shoe! What you wanna step on my shoe for?" [10]. He kills Toledo for just putting his foot on his shoes because he has trampled his means of power and identity. He has earned them by imitating the whites, which does not last for a long time, bringing him frustration and instability. As Nadel Says: "When Toledo accidentally steps on Levee's new shoes, that trivial incident becomes the focus for Levee's frustration, disappointment, and rejection" [16]. His imitation at the end brings him frustration and rejection.

IX. CONCLUSION

According to the text, we see in the play, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, that how the black characters gain their own power and discourse. Although they are living in America in which racism is rampant, they try to establish their own discourse through their music and the resistance they show in the encounter they have with the white community. Power is not just in the hand of the whites, but it is scattered among all members of the society in different ways and by different means. Wilson acquires us to reread the history through this play and look again at the marginalized and subversive forces

hidden under the dominance of the ruling community.

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