



Motivations of Safety Needs in Wilson's *The Piano Lesson*

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Abstract. This paper explores motivations in meeting the needs of every human being can arise because of the differences in each individual in a literary text. The selected text is a play from August Wilson entitled *The Piano Lesson*. The study aims to explore the motivations of the characters' safety needs. This study uses the theory of motivation and hierarchy of human needs by Abraham Maslow, by limiting on the motivation of the safety needs. The findings provide the discovery of six characters with different motivations and ways in fulfilling their safety needs. Within this perspective, the play itself become a representation on the way human's motivation to fulfill their needs, especially the safety needs. The safety needs and the motivations of the characters are symbolized by the piano that becomes the center of the play. Although only 6 characters from 8 characters are proven to be developing motivations on fulfilling their safety needs. Based on those findings, August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* has provided the reader and audience a lesson of how a piano can represent not just a musical instrument but also hidden motivations of safety needs of the characters.

Keywords: Motivation · Safety Needs · Hierarchy of Needs · Literary Criticism

1 Introduction

Most people classify needs into primary (food, clothing, shelter, etc.), secondary (access to health, education, etc.), and tertiary (branded bags, expensive cars, etc.) needs. The Holy Qur'an [1] has divided human needs into three parts. Dharuriyat or primary (maintaining religion, soul, lineage), Hajiyyat or secondary (things that eliminate human difficulties, such as vehicles and homes), and Tahsiniyat or tertiary (all items that make human life easier, such as home interior). Challenges are met in fulfilling needs. People often struggle to fulfill their needs and develop conflicts against others because of their different motivations and needs. Such struggle and conflict are introduced by August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* [2].

The Piano Lesson by August Wilson [2] is a play that uses a piano to represent the goals of almost all characters in the play. The play was inspired by a painting by Romare Bearden. The setting of the play is around the 1936s Post-Great Depression in Pittsburgh. This plot begins when a character named Boy Willie came to his uncle's house, Doaker. He knew there was an inheritance piano from their family, which contained an engraving

of their family history. He intended to sell it to buy a land. On the other hand, Berniece, his sister, preferred to let the piano be in her house. In the play, flashbacks are presented by Doaker and Wining Boy, Boy Willie, Berniece, and other characters who had different motivations in fulfilling their needs, especially safety needs within the perspective of Maslow's theory of motivation [3] [4].

As a play, *The Piano Lesson* has been the object of several research. A study by Maulood and Barzani [5] explored on the traumatic events of the characters when they recollected their past. Mohammad and Hasan [6] explored on slavery of the African American. Alvarado [7] found that the ancestor became the ultimate decision makers with regards to the fate of the family heirloom. Bentum [8] discovered the way Wilson draws the reader into the creative meaning making process and make their own judgment. Mashaiekh, M., & Pishkar, K. [9] discussed the absurdity of the female characters' position in Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* and *The Fences*. Subedi, R. [10] and Bissiri [11] exposed the meaning of the piano as the symbol of distinct black people culture from white people culture. Other research by Bryant [12] and John [13] focused on the history of the black people in *The Piano Lesson*. Tackach [14] and Macklin [15] uncovered the relationship between low, power, and race. While Abbotson [16] uncovered August Wilson's teaching through *The Piano Lesson*.

Recent research on the representation of Maslow's hierarchy of needs in arts provide support to this study. Sari, Natsir, Valiantien [17] explored on the hierarchy of needs the main character in *The Blind Side* Movie. Another research by Bahuwa [18] explored on the unfulfilled safety needs and love and belonging needs of the main character in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. Kusuma [19] discussed about Willy Loman who is motivated to achieve a big dream to be a successful man and well-liked by people in Miller's *The Death of a Salesman*. Wardani [20] found that certain positive effects influence the main character's life in Wright's *The Rent Collector*. Nurcholis [21] discover that the main character of Daniels' *The Valley of The Shadow* wanted the trust of others because she found it easier to live a more stable and secure life in the sycamore village, in which provide evidence on the scope of safety needs.

Based on those circumstances, this study, thus, focuses on discovering the characters' motivation in fulfilling their safety needs in Wilson's *The Piano Lesson*. This study limits itself only on the motivation of safety needs of the characters since the study only discover small data on other needs of Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

2 Method

This study is categorized into literary criticism as the object is in the form of a literary work [22]. Literary criticism is the discipline of interpreting, analyzing, and evaluating works of literature. This study focuses on examining the relationship between aspects in the work and find out the effects of these relationships. The case under study is an examination of the character's relationship with safety needs and the effect of this relationship on literary works.

In collecting the data, the researchers highlighted and selected the words, phrases, sentences, and dialogues by taking notes, classifying, and interpreting. After collecting the data, the researchers carried out the analysis within the perspective of Maslow's

theory of motivation and hierarchy of needs. The first step of the analysis was determining the motivation of the characters. Then, the researchers explored on understanding the process of fulfilling the safety needs.

3 Findings and Discussion

The concept of Maslow's theory of motivation is that humans are motivated by unsatisfied needs [3]. Those unsatisfied needs can be seen based on the levels on the needs pyramid. The lowest needs are physical needs, namely food, air, water, sleep, etc. The second need is safety and security, namely a sense of security, a safe place to take refuge, economic stability, etc. The third need is the love and belongings needed, such as bonds and relationships with family, friends, etc. The fourth need is the need for self-esteem in the form of self-confidence, respect, competence, knowledge, etc. The peak need is called self-actualization. Maslow believes that everyone has the motivation to fulfilling every level of needs to reach self-actualization. Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* reveals a story about people who have already fulfilled their physiological needs but are still struggling to fulfill their safety needs.

After thorough reading and data collection, the study finds that only 6 characters of the 8 characters provide data on motivations and the process in fulfilling the safety needs. The characters are Boy Willie, Berniece, Avery, Lymon, Doaker, and Wining Boy.

3.1 Boy Willie

As a former slave, Boy Willie is realized as a character who has the highest motivation in fulfilling his needs of property. The datum below provide evidence on his motivation of farming as a symbol of having personal property to work on.

Datum 1

BOY WILLIE: "You stay! I'm going back! That's what I'm gonna do with my life! Why I got to come up here and learn to do something I don't know how to do when I already know how to farm? You stay up and make your own way if that's what you want to do. I'm going back and live my life the way I want to live it." (Page 46)

This datum above leads the researchers to the finding that Boy Willie's strongest motivation was not to go home and garden on the land he used to live on, which is Berniece's house and land. He wanted his own land and the harvest from the plantation to be his own, not working for someone else (Berniece). As in the drama script, Boy Willie denied his two uncles who said the piano has a family history. Boy Willie chose not to think about the piano and focused on his passion for gardening. The plot that brings this rising action is a flashback to the history of slavery in their family. Supporting the character of Boy Willie, the researchers found that Boy Willie does not feel safe by keeping the piano property which became the history of slavery. Therefore, Boy Willie's motivation of his safety needs in the form of having his own land property. In this play, Boy Willie seemed to be motivated to achieve the freedom from the slavery memories, however his motivation was actually related to selling the piano because he needs the

money to buy his own land property. The evidence of Boy Willie's motivation is later reinforced by datum 2 below, when he had an argument with Berniece.

3.2 Berniece

Berniece is described as someone who is still grieving over her husband's death. In some parts of the play, other characters supported Berniece, who insisted on keeping the piano. To her, the piano was a symbol of her life during the slavery era. In the rising action, Berniece repeatedly refused to sell the piano. Her refusal in selling the piano represents Berniece's safety needs because of its history. Datum 2 below provides evidence of Berniece's refusal and the reason she did not allow the piano to be sold.

Datum 2

BERNIECE: "Boy Willie .. You gonna play around with me one too many times. And then God's gonna bless you and West is gonna dress you. Now set that piano back over there. I done told you a hundred times I ain't selling that piano."

BOY WILLIE: "I'm trying to get me some land, woman. I need that piano to get me some money so I can buy Sutter's land."

BERNIECE: "Money can't buy what that piano cost. You can't sell your soul for money. It won't go with the buyer. It'll shrivel and shrink to know that you ain't taken on to it. But it won't go with the buyer." (Page 50)

The first sentence of datum 2 above shows that Berniece refused to sell the piano. This finding can be interpreted that Berniece did not need security in the form of money from the piano since she had already felt that the piano provided her security due to the legacy and history of the piano. Thus, the researchers found that Berniece's safety needs are represented in the form of inherited piano that can provide her with personal security. The datum 2 above also shows that Berniece perceived that the piano had souls and the soul mentioned is actually the soul of her mother, who was exchanged for this piano, and the rest of the family who died during slavery when this piano was with them, narrated by Doaker and Wining Boy in the rising action section until the climax of this drama. The traumatic events of the slavery provide motivations to Berniece to keep the piano as her property because the piano reminds her of the traumatic events that happened to her mother and her family. As found by Maulood and Barzani [5] that *The Piano Lesson* provides evidence on traumatic events of slavery, these traumatic events also provide findings on Berniece's motivations to fulfill her safety needs. On the other hand, within Maslow's theory of motivation, her need to keep what she thought as a personal belonging can also be perceived as a motivation in fulfilling her safety needs.

3.3 Avery

In the exposition of the play, Avery is described as a black man, a priest in his uniform, a suit and tie crossed around his neck, and a small bible in his hand. Apart from being a priest, he is also described as a running elevator in the Gulf Building. In datum 3 below,

Avery established his motivation to fulfill his personal security of employment, which is being a preacher.

Datum 3

AVERY: "Well, it come to me in a dream. See . . . I was sitting out in this railroad yard watching the trains go by. The train stopped and these three hobos got off. They told me they had come from Nazareth and was on their way to Jerusalem. They had three candles. They gave me one and told me to light it . . . But to be careful that it didn't go out. Next thing I knew I was standing in front of this house. Something told me to go knock on the door. This old woman opened the door and said they had been waiting on me. Then she led me into this room. It was a big room and it was full of all kinds of different people. They looked like anybody else except they all had sheep heads and was making noise like sheep make. I heard somebody call my name. I looked around and there was these same three hobos. They told me to take off my clothes and they give me a blue robe with gold thread. They washed my feet and combed my hair. Then they showed me these three doors and told me to pick one. I went through one of them doors and that flame leapt off that candle and it seemed like my whole head caught fire. I looked around and there was four or five other men standing there with these same blue robes on. Then we heard a voice tell us to look out across this valley. We looked out and saw the valley was full of wolves. The voice told us that these sheep people that I had seen in the other room had to go over to the other side of this valley and somebody had to take them. Then I heard another voice say, "Who shall I send?" Next thing I knew I said, "Here I am. Send me." That's when I met Jesus. He say, "If you go, I'll go with you." Something told me to say, "Come on. Let's go." That's when I woke up. My head still felt like it was on fire . . . But I had a peace about myself that was hard to explain. I knew right then that I had been filled with the Holy Ghost and called to be a servant of the Lord. It took me a while before I could accept that. But then a lot of little ways God showed me that it was true. So I became a preacher." (Page 24-25)

The datum 3 above provides evidence that Avery used religious revelation as the support to his motivation of having employment as a preacher. The datum above shows how people use rationalization as a means to cover the motivation of fulfilling their needs, in this case Avery in fulfilling his safety needs. Avery's rationalization of spiritual motivation makes everything into a unified and meaningful perception within Avery's psyche, thus impacting on the fulfillment of safety needs [3]. Thus, this finding is included in the motivation to gain personal security, since Avery not only wanted to fulfill his safety needs for himself, but also invited others to join him.

3.4 Lymon

Lymon is characterized as Boy Willie's friend who had a property truck, which is assumed to be a symbol of safety needs that have been met previously. Furthermore, Lymon is a

character who also had the motivation to fulfill his safety needs in a different form from the previous three characters as shown in datum 4 below.

Datum 4

LYMON: "I get me a job and a little place and get set up to where I can make a woman comfortable I might get married. Avery's nice. You ought to go ahead and get married. You be a preacher's wife you won't have to work. I hate living by myself. I didn't want to be no strain on my mama so I left home when I was about sixteen. Everything I tried seem like it just didn't work out. Now I'm trying this." (Page 79)

The datum 4 above provides finding on Lymon's motivation to fulfill his safety needs. Even though he talked about trying to have a wife, his choice of word is "comfortable" which can be interpreted to relate to health and personal security. His thought about being a preacher's wife would provide security also can be interpreted as a motivation to fulfill his personal security. His motivation on leaving his house and his mother also comes from his motivation to fulfill his personal security and find employment. Herewith, by having those motivation, the study found that Lymon seemed to struggle doing several things in fulfilling his safety needs.

3.5 Doaker

Doaker is characterized as someone who, from the beginning, had succeeded in meeting his safety needs, in the form of a steady job and stable income. It is also an indication that Doaker had an independent nature and could support himself. Additionally, he is also described as wise as in some parts of the plot he tried to mediate the conflict between his nephew and niece, Boy Willie and Berniece. In datum 5 below, the researchers found Doaker's motivation in helping his brother, Wining Boy.

Datum 5

DOAKER: "I'm cooking now, but I used to line track. I pieced together the Yellow Dog stitch by stitch. Rail by rail. Line track all up around there. I lined track all up around Sunflower and Clarksdale. Wining Boy worked with me. He helped put in some of that track. He'd work it for six months and quit. Go back to playing piano and gambling." (Page 18)

In the Datum 5 above, Doaker's current job was as a cook on a train. In the past, he was a line tracker. His job as a line tracker made him unify the existing train lines in Pittsburgh (Sunflower and Clarksdale). The datum above shows that even though Doaker had got what he needed, he still needed to help his brother, Wining Boy, to work with him, to help him to earn more money. Doaker's motivation seems to be related to love and belonging needs, however, the motivation can also be interpreted to relate to safety needs especially to resources and property. His way of telling that Wining Boy "worked with him", can imply his position on employment and resources. The way he told others about Wining Boy and his ignorance also can be interpreted as Doaker's idea on the

importance of resources and employment. He also mentioned the piano as a place for Wining Boy to go back and thus making the piano represents safety needs for Wining Boy in Doaker's perspective.

3.6 Wining Boy

Wining Boy is described as Doaker's older brother and also Boy Willie's and Berniece's uncle. Wining Boy is also described as successful musician and gambler. Based on this characterization, the researchers found that Wining Boy is an adaptable person, as explained in the Datum 6 below that Wining Boy does not live in one place. This also indicates that wherever he was, he could still survive. As explained Abraham Maslow [3], people are able to survive if their needs for water, food, air, and shelter are met. The researchers found that Wining Boy still was still motivated to return home to Berniece's house (where the piano stays).

Datum 6

WINING BOY: "I ain't worried about no place to lay down. I can always find me a place to lay down in Berniece's house. Ain't that right, Berniece?"

BERNIECE: "Wining Boy, sit down somewhere. You been out there drinking all day. Come in here smelling like an old polecat. Sit on down there, you don't need nothing to drink." (Page 100)

The Datum 6 above provides evidence that Wining Boy was always motivated to return to Berniece's house. This can be interpreted that Wining Boy felt that Berniece's house provides safety and health. Even though his perception that Berniece is still a part of his family as his niece is related to love and belonging needs, his need to play music and his sense of belonging on the piano provide evidence on his motivation of the property needs. His motivation on having the piano later become the exposition of the climax of the play.

4 Conclusion

The noteworthy insight from the findings is that motivations of safety needs materialize in different forms. These differences provide evidence that humans translate their motivations of safety needs in accordance with their personal background and psyche. As a play, *The Piano Lesson* has provided a reflection to the readers and audience that even people who are assumed to have similar history and sociocultural backgrounds may have different materializations of motivations of safety needs. The play has also provided the readers and audience a certain lesson of how a piano can represent not just a musical instrument but also hidden motivations of safety needs of the characters. This study thus suggests that other researchers would investigate the characters' efforts in fulfilling their safety needs in Wilson's *The Piano Lesson*.

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