

FENCES

By August Wilson

August Wilson was named Frederick August Kittel when he was born to a German father and an African American mother in 1945. Wilson was born and raised in Pittsburgh, PA. His father drifted in and out of his family. His mother and a stepfather, David Bedford, mostly raised Wilson. When Wilson was sixteen, he was accused of plagiarism at school when he wrote a sophisticated paper that the administration did not believe he could write. When Wilson's principal would not recognize the validity of Wilson's work, she suspended him and later ignored his attempts to come back to school. Wilson soon dropped out and educated himself at the local library, reading everything he could find. In the 1960's, Wilson steeped himself in the black power movement while he worked on his poetry and short stories. Eventually, in the sixties, Wilson reinvented himself as a playwright. His work was nurtured through institutions like the Yale School of Drama, where the Dean of the Drama School at the time, theatre director Lloyd Richards, recognized Wilson's talent. Richards later collaborated with Wilson in New York on Broadway. *Fences* was Wilson's second play to go to Broadway and won him the 1987 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. Wilson won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama again in 1990 for his play *The Piano Lesson*.

Wilson has taken upon himself the responsibility to write a play about black experiences in the United States for every decade of the 20th century. Only two decades remain, the first years of the century and the 1990's. *Fences* is his play about blacks in the 1950's. Beginning in 1957, between the Korean and Vietnam wars, *Fences* ends in 1965, but the themes of the play directly place its consciousness in a pre-civil-rights-movement, pre-Vietnam-war-era psyche. *Fences* takes place in a still latent time. Like the popular Sam Cooke song of the day proclaims, "A Change is Gonna Come," but not quite yet.

In *Fences* as in Wilson's other plays, a tragic character helps pave the way for other blacks to have opportunities under conditions they were never free to experience, but never reap from their own sacrifice and talents themselves. This is Troy Maxson's situation. Troy's last name, "Maxson," is a compressed reference to the Mason-Dixon line, considered as the imaginary line originally conceived of in 1820 to define the separation between the slave states and the free states. Maxson represents an amalgamation of Troy's history in the south and present life in the north that are inextricably linked.

Wilson purposefully sets the play during the season Hank Aaron led the Milwaukee Braves to the World Series, beating the New York Giants. When *Fences* takes place, blacks like Aaron proved they could not only compete with white ballplayers, but that they would be leaders in the professional league. Since we can look back on history with 20/20 hindsight, Wilson asks his audience to put together what they know of American history with the way his various characters experience and perceive history through their own, often conflicted eyes.

All of Wilson's plays take place in his hometown of Pittsburgh, and *Fences* is no exception. The Pittsburgh of the Maxson family is a town where Troy and other men of his generation fled from the savage conditions of sharecropping in the south. After Reconstruction failed, many blacks walked north as far as they could go to become urban citizens. Having no resources or infrastructure to depend on, men like Bono and Troy found their way in the world by spending years living in shacks, stealing, and in jail. Wilson clearly draws a linear link between the release of the slaves to the disproportionate number of black men in our jails and in low-income occupations by arguing that the majority of a homeless, resource-less group let loose into a competitive and financed society will have a hard time surviving

lawfully. Wilson's characters testify to the fact that the United States failed blacks after Lincoln abolished slavery and that the government's failure, made effective legally through Jim Crow laws and other lawful measures to ensure inequality, continues to effect many black lives. Wilson portrays the 1950s as a time when a new world of opportunity for blacks began to open up, leaving those like Troy, who grew up in the first half of the century, to feel like a stranger in their own land.

Plot Summary

Fences is divided into two acts. Act One is comprised of four scenes and Act Two has five. The play begins on a Friday, Troy and Bono's payday. Troy and Bono go to Troy's house for their weekly ritual of drinking and talking. Troy has asked Mr. Rand, their boss, why the black employees aren't allowed to drive the garbage trucks, only to lift the garbage. Bono thinks Troy is cheating on his wife, Rose. A college football team has recruited Troy and Rose's son, Cory. Troy was in the Negro Leagues but never got a chance to play in the Major Leagues because he got too old to play just as the Major Leagues began accepting black players. Troy goes into a long epic story about his struggle in July of 1943 with Death. Lyons shows up at the house because he knows it is Troy's payday. Rose reminds Troy about the fence she's asked him to finish building.

Cory and Troy work on the fence. Cory breaks the news to Troy that he has given away his job at the local grocery store, the A&P, during the football season. Cory begs Troy to let him play because a coach from North Carolina is coming all the way to Pittsburgh to see Cory play. Troy refuses and demands Cory to get his job back.

Act One, scene four takes place on Friday and mirrors scene one. Troy has won his case and has been assigned as the first colored garbage truck driver in the city. Bono and Troy remember their fathers and their childhood experiences of leaving home in the south and moving north. Cory comes home enraged after finding out that Troy told the football coach that Cory may not play on the team. Troy warns Cory that his insubordinance is "strike one," against him.

Troy bails his brother Gabriel out of jail. Bono and Troy work on the fence. Bono explains to Troy and Cory that Rose wants the fence because she loves her family and wants to keep close to her love. Troy admits to Bono that he is having an affair with Alberta. Bono bets Troy that if he finishes building the fence for Rose, Bono will buy his wife, Lucille the refrigerator he has promised her for a long time. Troy tells Rose about a hearing in three weeks to determine whether or not Gabriel should be recommitted to an asylum. Troy tells Rose about his affair. Rose accuses Troy of taking and not giving. Troy grabs Rose's arm. Cory grabs Troy from behind. They fight and Troy wins. Troy calls "strike two" on Cory.

Six months later, Troy says he is going over to the hospital to see Alberta who went into labor early. Rose tells Troy that Gabriel has been taken away to the asylum because Troy couldn't read the papers and signed him away. Alberta had a baby girl but died during childbirth. Troy challenges Death to come and get him after he builds a fence. Troy brings home his baby, Raynell. Rose takes in Raynell as her own child, but refuses to be dutiful as Troy's wife.

On Troy's payday, Bono shows up unexpectedly. Troy and Bono acknowledge how each man made good on his bet about the fence and the refrigerator. Troy insists that Cory leave the house and provide for himself. Cory brings up Troy's recent failings with Rose. Cory points out that the house and property, from which Troy is throwing Cory out, should actually be owned by Gabriel whose government checks paid for most of the mortgage payments. Troy physically attacks Cory. Troy kicks Cory out of the house for good. Cory leaves. Troy swings the baseball bat in the air, taunting Death.

Eight years later, Raynell plays in her newly planted garden. Troy has died from a heart attack. Cory returns home from the Marines to attend Troy's funeral. Lyons and Bono join Rose too. Cory refuses to attend. Rose teaches Cory that not attending Troy's funeral does not make Cory a man. Raynell and Cory sing one of Troy's father's blues songs. Gabriel turns up, released or escaped from the mental hospital. Gabe blows his trumpet but no sound comes out. He tries again but the trumpet will not play. Disappointed and hurt, Gabriel dances. He makes a cry and the Heavens open wide. He says, "That's the way that goes," and the play ends.

Character List

Troy Maxson - The protagonist of *Fences*, a fifty-three year-old, African American man who works for the sanitation department, lifting garbage into trucks. Troy is also a former baseball star in the Negro Leagues. Troy's athletic ability diminished before the Major Leagues accepted blacks. Hard-working, strong and prone to telling compelling, fanciful stories and twisting the truth, Troy is the family breadwinner and plays the dominant role in his over thirty-year friendship with fellow sanitation worker, Jim Bono. Troy's character is the centerpiece that all of the other relationships in *Fences* gather around. Troy is husband to Rose, father to Lyons, Cory, and Raynell, and brother to Gabriel. Troy is a tragic-hero who has excessive pride for his breadwinning role. Troy's years of hard work for only meager progress depress him. Troy often fails to provide the love and support that would mean the most to his loved ones.

Cory Maxson - The teenage son of Troy and Rose Maxson. A senior in high school, Cory gets good grades and college recruiters are coming to see him play football. Cory is a respectful son, compassionate nephew to his disabled Uncle Gabriel, and generally, a giving and enthusiastic person. An ambitious young man who has the talent and determination to realize his dreams, Cory comes of age during the course of the play when he challenges and confronts Troy and leaves home. Cory comes home from the Marines in the final scene of the play, attempting to defy Troy by refusing to go to his funeral, but Cory changes his mind after sharing memories of his father with Rose and Raynell.

Rose Maxson - Troy's wife and mother of his second child, Cory. Rose is a forty-three year-old African American housewife who volunteers at her church regularly and loves her family. Rose's request that Troy and Cory build a fence in their small, dirt backyard comes to represent her desire to keep her loved-ones close to her love. Unlike Troy, Rose is a realist, not a romantic longing for the by-gone days of yore. She has high hopes for her son, Cory and sides with him in his wish to play football. Rose's acceptance of Troy's illegitimate daughter, Raynell, as her own child, exemplifies her compassion.

Gabriel Maxson - Troy's brother. Gabriel was a soldier in the Second World War, during which he received a head injury that required a metal plate to be surgically implanted into his head. Because of the physical damage and his service, Gabriel receives checks from the government that Troy used in part to buy the Maxson's home where the play takes place. Gabriel wanders around the Maxson family's neighborhood carrying a basket and singing. He often thinks he is not a person, but the angel Gabriel who opens the gates of heaven with his trumpet for Saint Peter on Judgment Day. Gabriel exudes a child-like exuberance and a need to please.

Jim Bono - Troy's best friend of over thirty years. Jim Bono is usually called "Bono" or "Mr. Bono" by the characters in *Fences*. Bono and Troy met in jail, where Troy learned to play baseball. Troy is a role model to Bono. Bono is the only character in *Fences* who remembers, first-hand, Troy's glory days of hitting homeruns in the Negro Leagues. Less controversial than Troy, Bono admires Troy's leadership and responsibility at work. Bono

spends every Friday after work drinking beers and telling stories with Troy in the Maxson family's backyard. He is married to a woman named Lucille, who is friends with Rose. Bono is a devoted husband and friend. Bono's concern for Troy's marriage takes precedent over his loyalty to their friendship.

Lyons Maxson - Troy's son, fathered before Troy's time in jail with a woman Troy met before Troy became a baseball player and before he met Rose. Lyons is an ambitious and talented jazz musician. He grew up without Troy for much of his childhood because Troy was in prison. Lyons, like most musicians, has a hard time making a living. For income, Lyons mostly depends on his girlfriend, Bonnie whom we never see on stage. Lyons does not live with Troy, Rose and Cory, but comes by the Maxson house frequently on Troy's payday to ask for money. Lyons, like Rose, plays the numbers, or local lottery. Their activity in the numbers game represents Rose and Lyons' belief in gambling for a better future. Lyons' jazz playing appears to Troy as an unconventional and foolish occupation. Troy calls jazz, "Chinese music," because he perceives the music as foreign and impractical. Lyons' humanity and belief in himself garners respect from others.

Raynell Maxson - Troy's illegitimate child, mothered by Alberta, his lover. August Wilson introduces Raynell to the play as an infant. Her innocent need for care and support convinces Rose to take Troy back into the house. Later, Raynell plants seeds in the once barren dirt yard. Raynell is the only Maxson child that will live with few scars from Troy and is emblematic of new hope for the future and the positive values parents and older generations pass on to their young.

Alberta - Troy's buxom lover from Tallahassee and Raynell's mother. Alberta dies while giving birth. She symbolizes the exotic dream of Troy's to escape his real life problems and live in an illusion with no time.

Bonnie - Lyons' girlfriend who works in the laundry at Mercy Hospital.

Mr. Stawicki - Cory's boss at the A&P.

Coach Zellman - Cory's high school football coach who encourages recruiters to come to see Cory play football.

Mr. Rand - Bono and Troy's boss at the Sanitation Department who doubted that Troy would win his discrimination case.

Miss Pearl - Gabe's landlady at his new apartment.

Character Analysis

Troy Maxson - The protagonist of *Fences*, Troy is a responsible man whose thwarted dreams make him prone to believing in self-created illusions. Troy begins the play by entertaining Bono and Rose with an epic story about his struggle with a personified Death, or Devil, character. Another example of Troy's ability to live in a fictitious world is his denial to his best friend, Bono about the reality of his extramarital affair with Alberta. *Fences* is largely Troy's story. What all of the play characters have in common is a complicated relationship with Troy. Troy's character creates the large and small conflicts with everyone else in *Fences*. Troy instigates conflict as a result of his ability to believe in self-created illusions and his inability to accept other's choices in life when they differ from Troy's own philosophy. Rose often contradicts his stories about himself and versions of what happened in the past. Troy also aggressively disagrees with Lyons' decision to be a musician and Cory's decision to play football in college, as well as Rose's habit of playing the numbers.

Troy's last name, Maxson, is an amalgamation of Mason and Dixon, after the Mason-Dixon line, the name for the imaginary line that separated the slave states from the free states. Troy's name symbolically demonstrates Troy's character as one who lives on a line between two opposing ideas. Troy's history is equal parts southern and northern, half-full of hope and half-filled with disappointment. He was once at the top of an exciting career opportunity as a ball-player that nose-dived into a life in a dead-end job.

The son of an unsuccessful sharecropper, Troy provides a bridge to the Maxson family history in the south and to the effects slavery had and continues to have on generations of black lives. The south and the north define Troy's history and this duality drives a dividing line between him and his sons, Lyons and Cory who grew up believing that they could achieve their dreams without unjust restraint. Through song and story-telling, Troy's character serves as the family grit, a traditional role in African cultures as a paternal oral historian whose stories provide an understanding of the context of their loved ones' lives.

Another duality is Troy's hypocrisy. Troy demands that his loved ones live practical, responsible lives while he has the freedom to have an affair, rebel against racist practices of his employers by protesting the limitation of black workers as lifters not drivers on the trash trucks. Troy refuses to see life in any way presented to him but the way he perceives events in his own head.

Troy Maxson is a classically drawn tragic-hero. He begins the play loved, admired and getting away with his secret affair. But eventually, Troy's death leaves many negative attributes as an inheritance for his family to sort out and accept.

Rose Maxson - Rose's name, like August Wilson's mother's name, Daisy, is the name of a flower. Flowers, seeds and planting comprise a motif that Wilson uses in *Fences* to represent nurturing, loving, kindness, and care because of the parallel qualities these attributes share with all living things that need nurturing to grow or change, like love and patience and forgiveness. Rose Maxson exemplifies these traits of compassion in all of her relationships, especially as a parent. Unlike Troy, Rose is a fair judge of character. She puts her faith in her husband and son and hopes for a better future while not begrudging the stagnant present situation.

Gabriel Maxson

Similar to characters like the Fool in *King Lear* or other Shakespearean plays, Gabriel is the wise fool, a character who often sounds silly or nonsensical, but who often knows more about the characters around him than they know about themselves. When he talks to his brother Troy in riddles about hellhounds and St. Peter in Act One, Scene Two, Gabe seems to observe Troy's fates with clarity. He tries, in his playful language, to warn Troy of his tragic fate.

Themes, Motifs, and Symbols

Themes

Coming of Age Within the Cycle of Damaged Black Manhood

Both Troy and Bono relate stories of their childhood in the south and tales of their relationships with difficult fathers to Lyons in Act One, scene four. Their often-painful memories provide a context for understanding the similarities and differences of the generations separating Troy and Bono from Lyons and Cory. Troy's father, like many blacks after the abolishment of slavery was a failed sharecropper. Troy claims that his father was so evil that no woman stayed with him for very long, so Troy grew up mostly motherless. When Troy was fourteen, his father noticed that the mule Troy was supposedly taking care of had wandered off. Troy's father found Troy with a girl Troy had a crush on and severely beat Troy with leather reins. Troy thought his father was just angry at Troy for his

disobedience, but proving Troy's father was even more despicable, his father then raped the girl. Troy was afraid of his father until that moment.

At that moment, however, Troy believes he became a man. He could no longer live under the roof with a man that would commit these unacceptable acts, so he left home to be on his own, though he was homeless and broke, with no ties or family elsewhere. Manhood, to Troy, meant separating from his father because of conflict and abuse. The one attribute Troy respected and proudly inherited was a sense of responsibility. Troy's father provided for eleven children, and Troy too became the sole breadwinner for his family.

Bono however, remembers a different type of father. Bono's father was equally depressed about life as Troy's father, but unlike Troy's father, Bono's dad never provided a fathering or providing role to Bono and his family. Bono describes his father as having, "The Walking Blues," a condition that prevented his father from staying in one place for long and moving frequently from one woman to the next. Bono could barely recognize his father and knew little about him. Bono says his father, like many other African Americans of his father's generation, were "searching out The New Land." As blacks were freed from slavery and wanted to escape the often slavery-like conditions of sharecropping, many walked north in what history calls The Great Migration, to pursue a better life in the north, particularly in urban centers. Because of Bono's father's unreliable personality, Bono chose not to father children, to insure he would not abandon a child like his father. But, contrary to Bono's fears, his father's personality was not a family trait, but a choice he made to cope with his particular circumstances. Bono has been loyal to his wife, Lucille for almost eighteen years.

Lyons and Cory had very different upbringings, though their development into men does not fall too far from the tree of their father's experience. Lyons spent his entire childhood growing up with only one parent, his mother, while Troy was in jail. Lyons feels he has the right to make his own life decisions and pursue his own dreams in music because he had more familial support and fewer hardships than Troy. Troy was not around to mold him into a responsible person, so Lyons tends to need to borrow money, though he does pay Troy back respectfully. Cory ends up leaving home in a similar conflict with Troy that Troy had with Cory's paternal grandfather. To Troy and Cory, becoming a man comes to mean leaving the man that raised you because of a violent conflict. This painful process of coming of age is confusing. For both Troy and Cory, the creation of their own identity when their role model is a creature of duality—part responsible and loyal, the other side, hurtful, selfish and abusive, proves a difficult model with which to mold their own identity as grown men with a more promising future than the father who threatens their livelihood.

Interpreting and Inheriting History

Much of the conflict in Wilson's plays, including *Fences*, arises because the characters are at odds with the way they see the past and what they want to do with the future. For example, Troy Maxson and his son, Cory see Cory's future differently because of the way they interpret history. Troy does not want Cory to experience the hardship and disappointment Troy felt trying to become a professional sports player, so he demands that Cory work after school instead of practicing with the football team. Cory, however, sees that times changed since baseball rejected a player as talented as Troy because of the color of his skin. Cory knows the possibility exists that the professional sports world will include, not exclude him. In Act One, Scene Three, Cory provides examples of successful African American athletes to Troy. Cory says, "The Braves got Hank Aaron and Wes Covington. Hank Aaron hit two home runs today. That makes forty-three." Troy responds, "Hank Aaron ain't nobody." Cory's sport, football, integrated its players years before baseball. For Troy to accept this change in the world would cause Troy to accept the death of his own dreams. Troy refuses to see Cory's potential because it would mean accepting his own misfortune. Troy and Cory see history in a way that benefits their worldview. Unfortunately this conflict pushes father

and son away from each other. Troy, who learned a responsible work ethic from his otherwise abusive father, means well when he insists that Cory return to work at the A&P because he sees the job as fair, honest work that isn't at the mercy of powerful whites' sometimes arbitrary decisions, as in Major League baseball. But by attempting to insure Cory of a harmless future, Troy stifles his son's potential and prevents Cory from having a promising future.

Troy's perception of what is right and what is wrong for Cory, based on Troy's refusal to perceive a historical change in the acceptance of blacks, tragically causes Cory to experience a disappointing fate similar to Troy's. Troy passes his personal history on to his family in other ways throughout the play with sayings that represent his philosophies of life like, "You gotta take the crooked with the straights." His children also inherit Troy's past by learning songs he sings like, "Hear It Ring! Hear It Ring!" a song Troy's own father taught him. Cory tells Rose in Act Two, scene five, "Papa was like a shadow that followed you everywhere." Troy's songs and sayings link his family to the difficult life in the south that his generation was free to run away from, though penniless and without roots in the north. Troy's purposefully and inadvertently passes on his life experience to his children and family, for better and for worse.

The Choice Between Pragmatism and Illusions as Survival Mechanisms

Troy and Rose choose divergent coping methods to survive their stagnant lives. Their choices directly correspond to the opposite perspectives from which they perceive their mutual world. In Act Two, scene one, Troy and Rose say that they both feel as if they have been stuck in the same place since their relationship began eighteen years ago. However, Rose and Troy handle their frustration and disappointment with their intertwined lives differently. This difference in their viewpoints is evident early on in the play. In Act One, scene one, Troy proves through his story about his battle with Death that he is a dreamer and a believer in self-created illusions. To Troy, his struggle with Death was an actual wrestling match with a physical being. Rose, on the other hand, swiftly attempts to bring Troy back to reality, explaining that Troy's story is based on an episode of pneumonia he had in July, 1941. Troy ignores Rose's pragmatic, realistic perception of his fight with death. Troy brags about his wrestling match with Death. Rose unsuccessfully refutes his story by mentioning that every time he tells the story he changes the details. Troy is unmoved by Rose's evidence against his illusion. Rose, as pacifier of the Maxson family, relents, making a final comment, "Troy, don't nobody wanna be hearing all that stuff." Later, when Troy weaves a story about encountering the devil, Rose buttons his long account with two simple words, "Troy lying."

The one impractical activity Rose takes part in is playing numbers. She has dreams and hopes for the future, like Lyons who also plays the numbers and wants to be successful in a difficult profession, jazz music. In Act One, scene two, "Troy says to Rose, "You ain't doing nothing but throwing your money away." And when Cory proposes that they buy a television in Act one, scene three, Troy makes an excuse that they need to spend the money on a new roof. When it comes to other characters' impractical decisions, Troy suddenly becomes a realist, selfishly reserving the right to dream for him only. This response comes across hypocritically from a man who later, in the same scene, will refuse to admit Hank Aaron gets enough playing time or when Cory proves a point about Sandy Koufax, Troy's futile response is, "I ain't thinking of no Sandy Koufax," as if not thinking about him will make Koufax nonexistent.

Later, in Act Two, scene one, Troy admits his affair with Alberta to Rose, excusing his behavior by expressing to Rose that spending time with Alberta allowed him to provide an illusion of accomplishment and escape from responsibility. Troy says, "Then when I saw that gal...I got to thinking that if I tried...I just might be able to steal second." Troy

perceives his relationship with Alberta as a laudable move in a baseball game, as a personal accomplishment. Rose sees Troy's lies and deception about the affair as simple and straightforward self-absorbed betrayal. She says, "We're not talking about baseball! We're talking about you going off to lay in bed with another woman...[w]e ain't talking about no baseball." In the final scene, Rose copes with the death of Troy with her typically pragmatic view. "...I do know he meant to do more good than harm." Troy dies, swinging a baseball bat, still attached to unfulfilled dreams of his past while Rose serves as peacemaker and practitioner of love with her family while they grapple with Troy's confrontational legacy.

Motifs

Death and Baseball

In Act one, scene one, Troy Maxson declares, "Death ain't nothing but a fastball on the outside corner." With this line, the former Negro League slugger merges his past experience as a ballplayer with his philosophy. Troy, Bono, and Rose argue about the quality of the Major League black ballplayer compared to Troy when he was in his prime. A fastball on the outside corner was homerun material for Troy. Though Troy feels beleaguered from work and deeply troubled by coming along too early to play in the Major Leagues because they were still segregated when he was in top form, Troy believes he is unconquerable and almost immortal when it come to issues of life and death. Troy knows he overcame pneumonia ten years ago, survived an abusive father and treacherous conditions in his adaptation to surviving in an urban environment when he walked north to live in Pittsburgh, and jail. Baseball is what Troy is most proud of and knows he conquered on his own. In this first scene of the play, Troy is afraid of nothing, values his life, and feels in control. Troy's attitude toward death is proud and nonchalant. Troy says, "Ain't nothing wrong with talking about death. That's part of life. Everybody gonna die. You gonna die, I'm gonna die. Bono's gonna die. Hell, we all gonna die." He has not recently experienced a personal loss so great that it humbles and weakens his spirit. In the same scene, Troy compares Death to an army that marched towards him in July 1941, when he had pneumonia. He describes Death as an army, an icy touch on the shoulder, a grinning face. Troy claims he spoke to Death. Troy thinks he constantly has to be on guard against Death's army. He claims he saw Death standing with a sickle in his hand, spoke to Death and wrestled Death for three days and three nights. After the wrestling match, Troy saw Death put on a white robe with a hood on it and leave to look for his sickle.

Troy admits, "Death ain't nothing to play with. And I know he's gonna get me," but he refuses to succumb to Death easily. Troy follows the Bible quotation, "Be ever vigilant," in his attitude towards Death. In his perception of Death, Troy mutates the form of Death many times, from fastball, to a sickle-carrying, devil-like figure and finally composting the devil into a Ku Klux Klan member in his white hood ceremony regalia. His image of Death being composed of a marching army or leading an army transforms into this KKK leader image that has camp followers.

As the play progresses, Troy repeatedly merges his baseball metaphors with his Death rhetoric. In the last lines of numerous scenes Troy speaks to Death out- loud, taunting Death to try to come after him and/or warns Cory that his behavior is causing him to strike out. Cory makes three mistakes in Troy's eyes and when he strikes out, Troy kicks him out of the house. Troy's death and baseball metaphors are inextricably linked. Admitting that he was too old to play baseball when the Major Leagues integrated would kill Troy's belief that he was directly cheated out of a special life that he deserved and earned. To Troy, it is enough of an injury that the Major Leagues were segregated during his prime. He sees baseball as the best time of his life, but also the death of his dreams and hopes. When Cory was born, Troy promised he would not allow his son to experience the same disappointment he was subjected to in baseball. So, Troy equates Cory's pursuit of a dream as strong as his

father's as mistakes worthy of warning and punishment or "strikes" that Troy believes will prevent Cory from reaching the same fate as Troy did.

Seeds and Growth

Characters in *Fences* literally and figuratively employ the motif of seeds, flowers, plants, and related actions like growing, taking root, planting, and gestation—in both their language and actions. Like August Wilson's mother whose name is Daisy, Rose has the name of a flower. Rose is a typical African American 1950's housewife and, as the caretaker of the family and home, she represents loving care and nurturing, attributes also frequently used to grow plants. Like the characteristics of the flower after which she is named, Rose is a beautiful soul who protects her family and protects herself when Troy hurts her. In Act Two, scene, five, Rose demonstrates to Raynell that seeds take time to grow. Rose says, "You just have to give it a chance. It'll grow." She exemplifies patience and generosity in her relationships with everyone in the play. For instance when she sides with Cory on his decision to play football, her compassion and concern for Gabriel when he is arrested and her acceptance of Raynell as her own child when Alberta dies. When Troy complains in Act Two, scene one that he needs to escape to Alberta's bed because he feels as if he has been in the same place for sixteen years, Rose replies, "I been standing with you! I been right here with you, Troy." Rose is sedentary, like the flower, growing upward in the same spot. She relates her decision to live life invested in her husband's life even though she knows he will never be as successful as they once hoped. In Act Two, scene one Rose's description of her life is a metaphor of planting. She says, "I took all my feelings, my wants and needs, my dreams...and I buried them inside you. I planted a seed and watched and prayed over it. I planted myself inside you and waited to bloom. And it didn't take me no eighteen years to find out the soil was hard and rocky and it wasn't never gonna bloom. But I held on to you, Troy." Rose lessens the rocky and hard nature of Troy with her love and compassion, providing shelter to her children from their father's destructive behavior and legacy. She has raised Cory lovingly and teaches Raynell about loving, a hopeful future and forgiveness.

Blues

August Wilson says he uses the language and attitude of blues songs to inspire his plays and play characters. The blues is a melancholy song created by black people in the United States that tends to repeat a twelve bar phrase of music and a 3-line stanza that repeats the first line in the second line. A blues song usually contains several blue, or minor, notes in the melody and harmony.

Fences is structured somewhat like a blues song. The play all takes place in one place like a key of music and the characters each have their own rhythm and melody that Wilson riffs off of around the common locale. Characters repeat phrases, or pass phrases around, like a blues band with a line of melody. Similar to the role of repeated lyrics and melody of a blues song, Wilson's characters display changes in their life and a changed attitude toward life by repeating scenarios in which they act. For instance, Friday, Troy's payday, is the setting of three scenes. By mirroring the situation in which events in the play take place, we can observe the change that occurs from one instance to the next. For instance in Act One, Scene one, Troy and Bono come home after payday as best friends worried about Troy's future. In Act One, Scene Four, Troy and Bono celebrate after payday because Troy won his discrimination case, but Bono is more concerned that Troy will ruin his life with his extramarital affair. Troy comes home after payday in Act Two, Scene Four, estranged from Bono and his family. He drinks and sings to comfort himself. By now, the good days of the play's first scene seem far-gone. This is a way playwrights manipulate the sense of time in a play, but for Wilson in particular, the repeated events and language of the play are in keeping what he calls a "blues aesthetic."

Wilson's plays are extensions of the history of blues in African American culture, and thus, in American culture in general. Troy sings two blues songs, one, in Act Two, scene three, "Please Mr. Engineer let a man ride the line," and in Act Two, scene four, "Hear it Ring! Hear it Ring!" Rose also sings a song in Act One, scene two, "Jesus be a fence all around me every day." Wilson invented these lyrics but based them on themes and symbols in African American traditional, spiritual, gospel, and blues songs. Rose's song is a religious song so hers might have more roots in the gospel tradition. Troy's songs are truly from the blues tradition. His song, "Hear it Ring Hear it Ring!" was passed on to him by his father and in the last scene of the play, we witness Cory and Raynell singing the song together after Troy's death. The blues in *Fences* connects generations together and keeps alive a family's roots and history beyond the grave.

Symbols

Trains

Troy brings his illegitimate baby, Raynell home for the first time at the beginning of the Act Two, Scene Three of *Fences*. Troy sits with his motherless baby on a porch where he once reigned, but now is an unwanted presence. Then, Troy sings the song, "Please Mr. Engineer, let a man ride the line," which echoes the pleas of a man begging a train engineer to let him ride, in hiding, for free. Especially during the Harlem Renaissance (the flourishing of African American artists, writers, poets, etc. in the first half of the Twentieth Century) and during slavery times, respectively, trains were common literary devices in African American literature and music. A character that rides a train or talks of trains, or even goes to a train station came to represent change. Trains represent the coming or arrival of a major change in a character's life. In *Fences*, Troy identifies with the blues song about riding the train. By singing this particular song, Troy acknowledges that his actions caused the upheaval in the lives of his loved ones. Troy sings, "Please Mr. Engineer let a man ride the line," but in other words he is crying out to his wife, Rose to let him back into her home. Like the voice in the song, Troy is homeless and has nothing to offer the one he needs something from in order to keep going. Especially with a baby in hand, Troy has no future without his wife. In order to come back into her life, Troy knows he is asking Rose to give him a free ride of forgiveness. If she does take him back, Troy knows life with her will never return to the life they once had together because he lost her trust and respect when he committed adultery. The train song also connotes the time Troy and many other men of his generation spent wandering North during the Great Migration. He sings, "I ain't got no ticket, please let me ride the blinds," which represents the poverty the released slaves and the failed sharecroppers experienced in Troy's father's generation. Troy sings the song to his newborn daughter, passing on a song that tells an important story of her past and links that past to the present. Troy's song exemplifies the tradition in African American history to make something from nothing-like the song. Troy hopes his love for his daughter and her innocence will change Rose's heart and allow Troy another chance at fatherhood and marriage.

Fences

August Wilson did not name his play, *Fences*, simply because the dramatic action depends strongly on the building of a fence in the Maxson's backyard. Rather, the characters lives change around the fence-building project which serves as both a literal and a figurative device, representing the relationships that bond and break in the arena of the backyard. The fact that Rose wants the fence built adds meaning to her character because she sees the fence as something positive and necessary. Bono observes that Rose wants the fence built to hold in her loved ones. To Rose, a fence is a symbol of her love and her desire for a fence indicates that Rose represents love and nurturing. Troy and Cory on the other hand think the fence is a drag and reluctantly work on finishing Rose's project. Bono also observes that to some people, fences keep people out and push people away. Bono indicates that Troy pushes Rose away from him by cheating on her. Troy's lack of commitment to finishing the

fence parallels his lack of commitment in his marriage. The fence appears finished only in the final scene of the play, when Troy dies and the family reunites. The wholeness of the fence comes to mean the strength of the Maxson family and ironically the strength of the man who tore them apart, who also brings them together one more time, in death.

The Devil

Troy casts the Devil as the main character of his exaggerated stories that entertain, bewilder and frustrate his family and friends. Eventually, Troy's association of the Devil as a harbinger of death comes to represent his struggle to survive the trials of his life. Many scenes in the play end with Troy speaking a soliloquy to Death and the Devil. In Act One, Scene One, Troy spins a long yarn, or tale about his fight for several days with the Devil. The story of the Devil endears Troy to audiences early on by revealing his capability to imagine and believe in the absurd. In another story, Troy turns a white salesman into a Devil. Troy calls a man the Devil who tried to sell Troy furniture in exchange for monthly payments by mail. Again, providing the pragmatic version of the story, Rose explains why Troy invents stories about the Devil. "Anything you don't understand, you call the Devil." Troy observes door-to-door salesmen and the process of layaway for the first time and in his ignorance, turns a modern occurrence into a mythical story.

Troy also describes the Devil's appearance as a man in a white hood. Wilson conjures the image of KKK members in KKK regalia with this description. Troy imagines the Devil, not just as an airy spirit from hell but also as a living human being. To Troy, the Devil sometimes symbolizes the aggression and cowardice of bigotry. Troy's stories about the Devil show that Troy sees himself as a man winning a fight against injustice and hatred. Troy's courage in overcoming racism is also suggested by Troy's complaint against the Sanitation Department that eventually hires Troy as the first black man to drive a trash truck. However, as the play progresses and Troy loses the love of his family and inadvertently betrays his brother, Gabriel, the less we believe in Troy's ability to win in his struggle to overcome the bad luck of his fate and the demons he carries within that become even greater forces than the racism that curtailed his dreams.

Act One: Scene One Summary

It is Friday, Troy and Bono's payday. Their responsibilities as garbage collectors are done for the day. Troy and Bono reach Troy's house for their weekly ritual of drinking, catching up on each other's lives and sharing stories. Their dialogue begins in the middle of a conversation as they reach the dirt front-yard of Troy's house where the entire play takes place.

Troy recounts a story about a co-worker named Brownie who lied to their boss, Mr. Rand about having a watermelon in his hands, and trying to hide the watermelon under his coat. Both Troy and Bono think that Brownie's embarrassment about the watermelon was stupid. Troy has asked Mr. Rand, their boss, why the black employees aren't allowed to drive the garbage trucks, but only to lift the garbage. Bono is eager to hear the latest news of Troy's conversations with Mr. Rand and the Commissioner of the union about his complaint. Troy says that Mr. Rand told him to take the complaint to the union the following Friday. Troy isn't afraid of getting fired.

Bono transitions from the topic of Troy's complaint at work to the subject of Alberta, a woman who hangs out at Taylor's, a bar Troy and Bono like to frequent. Bono does not ask Troy directly whether or not he is having an affair with Alberta. Troy insists that he hasn't

"eyed" women since he met his wife, Rose. Bono agrees. But Bono pushes the issue further by revealing to Troy that he has seen Troy walking around Alberta's house when Troy is supposedly at Taylor's. Troy gets mad at Bono for following him around. Bono asks Troy what he knows about Alberta. Troy tells Bono that Alberta is from Tallahassee, revealing that he knows something about her.

Rose comes out of the house. Rose and Troy tell Bono about the ways Rose has changed Troy for the better as a married man. Rose tells the men that Troy and Rose's son, Cory, has been recruited by a college football team and the college coach is coming to visit. Troy was a baseball player in the Negro Leagues but never got a chance to play in the Major Leagues because he got too old to play just as the Major Leagues began accepting black players. Troy does not want Cory to play ball, but to learn a trade. When Troy exclaims that it was unfair to prohibit anyone who was good enough to play in the Majors from playing and then takes a long drink, Rose reprimands him saying, "You gonna drink yourself to death." Her comment throws Troy into a long epic story about his struggle in July of 1943 with death. Troy turns the time when he was sick with pneumonia in Mercy Hospital into a fanciful story about his fight with a character named Death. Even as Rose provides the real story to Bono, Troy continues telling his tale.

Lyons, a son Troy had before he met Rose, shows up at the house as he has tended to do on many Fridays in the past because Lyons knows it is Troy's payday. Lyons is a jazz musician. He asks Troy if he can borrow ten dollars. Troy continues his saga about Death, changing the times and situations in which he met Death and the Devil. This includes the time a door-to-door salesman that Troy claims is the Devil sold him a layaway plan to buy furniture. Lyons thinks Troy's belief that he has seen the Devil is as ridiculous as Troy thinks it is for Lyons to pursue music. Troy puts down the way Lyons was raised and Lyons accuses Troy of knowing little about the way he was raised because Troy was in jail for most of Lyons' childhood. Lyons and Rose convince Troy to give Lyons the ten dollars. Lyons abruptly decides to leave after receiving the money. Bono decides to go home to Lucille and the pig feet she made for dinner. Troy embarrasses Rose by telling Bono how much he loves his wife and brags that on Monday morning when it is time for work, he'll still be making love to her.

Analysis

The first scene of *Fences* is also the longest scene in the play, possibly because Wilson uses this first scene to foreshadow several important elements of the plot and introduce elements he will repeat or contrast later in the play, enabling him to create a sense that the characters and time have changed. Wilson forces the audience to immediately acclimate to the world of the play by gathering information from Troy and Bono's conversation. The exposition in this first dialogue informs that Troy and Bono are close friends who work together. Bono agrees with Troy's negative opinion of their co-worker, Brownie, and shows that he sticks up for Troy at work, a sign he is a loyal as well as attentive friend.

Brownie's embarrassment over possessing a watermelon is a direct reference to racist stereotypical images of African Americans. Variety plays that portrayed stereotypical blacks played by white men in blackface, called minstrel shows, were the most popular form of American entertainment for over two hundred years. In caricature drawings and minstrel shows, African Americans were frequently depicted as lazy, child-like people who enjoyed nothing more than eating watermelons all day or stealing watermelons for pleasure. Troy and Bono think Brownie's embarrassment over having a watermelon was foolish on two levels. They think this because Brownie did a bad job of concealing the watermelon that was perfectly visible to everyone. The second reason is not conscious to Troy and Bono but to the playwright. Wilson is conscious that minstrel characters institutionalized the tradition of stereotypical black characters in American entertainment. Wilson turns this tradition on

its head by writing his own realized characters in such a way that they indirectly refer to the stereotyping of blacks very early in the play thereby sending a signal to the audience that this play's project is in part to present characters who are three-dimensional. Troy and Bono are not ashamed to be black and have confident enough self-images that they would not be embarrassed to be seen with a stereotypical object like Brownie is with his watermelon. Too early to have the political-mindedness of Wilson characters inspired by the black pride movement, Bono and Troy nevertheless foreshadow issues that will emerge in the shaping of future African American identities.

Structurally, this first scene establishes patterns in the play to come. Bono and Troy's friendship is closest in this first scene and their language borrows words from each other more frequently in these first conversations. This is a technique playwrights have used for centuries to create the feeling that the characters are harmonious. Bono and Troy frequently use the word "nigger" as an endearing term, a common use of the word by African Americans who, like homosexuals who now embrace the term, "queer" to describe themselves, reverse an originally derogatory word used by a majority to denigrate a group into a word that the oppressed group uses for themselves with a positive connotation, lessening the power of its insult.

Bono and Troy's dialogue also foreshadows several plot elements. Concerned for Troy's family life, Bono inquires about Troy's relationship with a woman named Alberta. This piece of information foreshadows the inevitability that Troy will reveal his secret because Bono has been watching him closely and Troy is not covert at his sneaking around. Another conflict is planted in Act One, scene one when Rose informs Bono and Troy about the recruiter who wants to see Troy and Rose's son, Cory play football.

Setting the scene on Friday and returning to two more Fridays in following scenes allows Wilson to portray change. Lyons' entrance and Troy's complaint about his money borrowing will later provide laughs when Lyons shows up again. It will also establish Lyons as a trust-worthy, sympathetic character when Lyons makes good on his loan because he proves much more reliable than Troy's perception of Lyons in this first scene. When Bono and Troy no longer drink and laugh together on a future payday, we notice how far away from each other they've come since we first met them in the first scene that emphasizes the extent of the damage Troy's decisions have caused.

Act One: Scene Two Summary

Rose hangs laundry in the yard on Saturday morning. She sings a song asking Jesus to protect her like a fence. Troy and Rose talk about the numbers, or lottery game, that Rose and Lyons play. Troy tells Rose that everyone at work thinks he is going to get fired, but he does not think it will happen. Gabriel, Troy's brother shows up at the house with a basket. He sings a song about selling plums but he does not have any plums in his basket to sell. Gabe explains to Troy that he moved over to Miss Pearl's because he didn't want to be in the way. Troy tells Gabe he is not mad at him for leaving their home. Gabe is brain-damaged from a war injury and sometimes thinks he is the angel Gabriel. Gabe often refers to St. Peter as if he knows him personally. Gabe tells Troy that he has seen St. Peter's book for Judgment Day and Troy's name appeared inside. Gabe saw Rose's name too, but not the way Troy's name appeared. Gabe leaves Troy after he thinks he sees hellhounds around Troy's feet. As Gabe leaves, he sings a song warning Troy to get ready for Judgment Day.

Rose and Troy argue over what to do to help Gabe now that he has moved to Miss Pearl's. Troy displays some guilt for managing the money Gabriel receives from the government. Rose believes Troy did the right thing in taking over Gabriel's money. Rose reminds Troy

about the fence she's asked him to finish building. Troy tells Rose that he is going to Taylor's to listen to a baseball game and he'll work on the fence when he gets back.

Analysis

Unlike the exaggerated stories and hopes for institutionalized change at his workplace that defined Troy in Act One, scene one, the next side of Troy that Wilson introduces us to is critical of dreams and hopes. Troy criticizes Rose's enjoyment of playing numbers, a game like the lottery that Lyons also enjoys. Troy displays his sense of responsibility in his reaction to Rose's hobby, but simultaneously provides evidence of his selfish treatment of Rose. Rose had humored Troy when Troy went on for several minutes about his battle with the Devil in Act One, scene one, but Troy cannot give Rose an inch when she talks about numbers, an activity that she enjoys as much as Troy enjoys telling his stories. This argument between them about the numbers is an example of how Troy is insensitive to Rose's needs. She will later accuse Troy of "taking and not giving," which we witness here first hand. Troy is so concerned with his own survival in his stagnant, disappointing life that he fails to perceive the ways in which his loved ones have learned to cope. Playing numbers is an escape, a simple luxury and pleasure of Rose and Lyons that serves the same purpose to them as Troy's escape in his affair with Alberta.

It is therefore ironic that Troy complains about the cost of Rose playing numbers and the loss and risk involved when his gamble with Alberta eventually proves much more expensive. Lyons and Rose playing numbers represent their individual gamble in life to put their faith in unstable hopes. Rose invests her life in Troy who has lost a significant amount of potential than when they first met. Lyons gambles with a career in music, a difficult and extremely unconventional path for the time period. Rose's positive attitude towards playing the numbers connotes that she does not have regrets about her losing gamble with Troy, but keeps her hope alive in a better, more fulfilling and richer future. On the other hand, Troy prefers to see himself as practical and miserly. He is in denial about his extramarital affair and does not see the potential cost to his stability and family he is risking, to the point where he thinks a small wager placed by Rose or Lyons is foolish.

Gabriel contributes to the world of *Fences* by representing absurdity, and specifically absurdity in an African American life in America. A common theme in African American literature has been the concept that to be African American in the United States is to live in a state of absurdity because the government that supposedly represents you (a citizen) has a history of denying you the rights it promises to insure. Gabriel exemplifies this duality. He fought in a war and lost a part of his brain while his brother was denied access to play with players of his level in the Major Leagues because of the color of his skin.

Gabe's character is a descendant of the wise fools in Shakespeare whose language sounds nonsensical at times, and at other times provide insight and wisdom. Gabe speaks in child-like phrases and song lyrics. He lives in a world that is half imaginary and half based on the reality before his eyes. He physicalizes a warning and a consciousness for Troy, which Troy does not heed. Gabe's recent move out of the Maxson house to an apartment in Miss Pearl's house affronts Troy's manhood because Gabe who cannot hold down a job or live in reality has managed to provide a home of his own for himself, a feat that Troy has failed to accomplish. Gabe's story about seeing Troy's name and Rose's name in different places in St. Peter's book signifies that Troy is a sinner and Rose is going to heaven. Gabe's song, "Better Get Ready For the Judgment," and his hallucination that hellhounds are in Troy's yard warn Troy to change his behavior unsuccessfully because Troy does not hear the message. Wilson's voice as a playwright however can be heard through Gabe's assessment of Troy's deeds.

Moreover, Gabe reminds Troy of Troy's own sacrifices and inability to control his fate in certain aspects of his life. Troy is ashamed of his use of Gabe's money to buy their house, but without it, they would still live in poverty. Troy's manhood is bruised because he knows it cost the Maxson family part of Gabriel's brain to have what little assets they own. This sacrifice contributes to Troy's often-warped sense of duty. Troy feels that if he had been born white with the same talent he had in his prime, or if the Major Leagues had integrated, his family would live carefree. And even with his work ethic and years of commitment to the sanitation department, he has not been able to get a promotion because the union prohibits blacks from driving the trash trucks.

Troy's inability to control his fate undoubtedly influences his adamant response to Cory's dream to play college football. Troy's experience has been that even when you try your best and sacrifice what you have to give, the rules do not always apply in your favor as a black American. Similarly, Troy has taken from Gabe what is rightfully his money for his own use.

Act One: Scene Three Summary

Cory comes home from football practice on Saturday afternoon. Rose tells him that Troy was upset about Cory leaving the house without doing his chores or helping him with the fence. Cory tells Rose that every Saturday Troy says he needs his help with the fence but he never ends up working on it. Instead, he says he goes to the bar, Taylor's. Cory goes inside to eat lunch and do his chores. Troy comes home, supposedly from Taylor's, but can't remember the score of the game. He unsuccessfully flirts with Rose, and then yells at Cory to come outside and help him with the fence. Troy reprimands Cory for going to football practice instead of doing his chores.

Cory and Troy work on the fence. Cory asks Troy if they can buy a television. Troy would rather buy a new roof because it would insure their future security. Cory thinks it would be fun to watch the World Series on TV. It would cost two hundred dollars. Troy makes a deal with Cory that if Cory comes up with one hundred dollars, Troy will match him with the other half and they will buy the television together. Troy and Cory have a friendly argument about the status of black players in the Major Leagues. Troy will not admit that Hank Aaron is changing the game and that Roberto Clemente's coaches give him plenty of chances to bat. Troy finds weakly argued excuses to deny that baseball is treating black players fairly and changing for the better. Troy disappoints Cory by not agreeing to sign the permission papers for Cory to play college football. A coach is coming from North Carolina to recruit Cory, but even with the knowledge of how far the coach is traveling to see his son, Troy will not change his mind. Troy wants Cory to work at the A&P supermarket instead of going to football practice. Cory breaks the news to Troy that he has already given away his job at the A&P during the football season. Mr. Stawicki, Cory's boss, is keeping Cory's job for when the season ends. Cory begs Troy to change his mind, but Troy refuses and demands Cory get his job back.

Cory asks Troy why he never liked Cory. Troy responds by explaining his belief that his role as a father is to provide shelter and food and the gift of life to a son and nothing more. Troy demands that Cory speak to him respectfully with the word "sir," and gives Cory the third degree, making Cory treat him with a military-like respect. Rose asks Troy why he will not let Cory play football when Cory is trying to follow in his father's footsteps. Troy explains that when Cory was born, he decided he would not allow Cory to pursue sports in order to spare Cory from a fate like his own. Rose tries to get Troy to admit that he was too old to play for the Major Leagues and that times have changed since the years Troy was prohibited from the Major Leagues because of the color of his skin. Troy will not agree with Rose. He tells Rose that he is trying to give everything he has to his family and he can't change or give

anything else but his hard work and responsibility. Troy feels that his financial support is more than enough.

Analysis

Troy and Cory's father-son relationship succumbs to its first major blow while working together on Rose's fence. The blow to their relationship is not yet a physical affront, but an irreconcilable difference. Cory has taken care of insuring his job at the A&P for after football season and gets good grades in school, but Troy does not acknowledge these responsible acts. Instead, Troy only sees the ways Cory does not live up to Troy's vision of how Cory should live his life. Troy's hypocrisy becomes evident to Cory over the course of his conversation with Troy as they build the fence.

The beginning of their talk displays a friendly competition aspect of their relationship. Troy and Cory argue about the purchasing of a television versus a new roof in good spirits. Troy is typically stubborn and takes the pragmatic view on the television issue, again emphasizing his inability to empathize with anyone else's lofty dreams but his own. However, in a moment of compassion, Troy relents and offers Cory a fair deal. In this moment, Troy is his most laudable. Cory's persistent, logical and persuasive argument for a television affects Troy. It is notable that Troy does not go head over heels and offer to buy Cory the television, but his proposal is fair and balanced. By offering to pay half if Cory can come up with half of the money, Troy emphasizes the kind of responsibility-instilling parenting he believes in that encourages Cory's work ethic, while supporting his son in realizing a dream. On the flip side, when their argument hits closer to home with the topic of sports, Troy transforms his fair and supportive outlook into an irrational, hurtful one.

Troy and Cory's conversation solidifies their positions as two men separated by a generation but sharing a common passion. Cory showed his persistence in proving to Troy that buying a television would be a good investment and goes on further to attempt to convince Troy that baseball, and thus, the world has changed since Troy was a ball player. With the television argument, Troy had substantial, though sometime weak arguments for Cory. He had a good point that their roof needs fixing, though he did not seem to think of the roof as a financial priority until Cory brought up the idea of buying a TV. In Troy's rebuttals against Cory about the change in Major League sports, however, his answers to Cory's points are irrational and lack substance, or even warp the truth for his own benefit. Troy claims Roberto Clemente sits on the bench too much but Cory challenges this by saying he has plenty of opportunities. Troy thinks Clemente and Aaron and other colored ballplayers are on the team as tokens, but are not actually played. Cory refutes this idea as well. When Cory brings up the amount of home runs Aaron hit this year, Troy deflates Aaron's success by insisting that hitting homeruns is merely Aaron's responsibility. Troy boasts about his ability to play baseball as well as the players Cory adores. Then, when Cory mentions Sandy Koufax's pitching, Troy's denial of Cory's proof that times have changed reaches a pinnacle of poor reasoning. Troy simply negates Koufax's existence in his mind by saying, "I ain't thinking of no Sandy Koufax."

Cory sees the present for what it is, a changing, gradually more accepting place for talented blacks like himself, but Troy can only see the present as he experienced his hardest disappointments in the past. Troy's unwillingness to change his perceptions with the time, results in his stubborn and selfish decision to refuse to see the college recruiter coming to ask for Troy's permission to recruit Cory for college football. Troy and Cory's incompatible perspectives and conflicting interpretation of a changing history comprise their major differences. Cory gets a startlingly sour taste of Troy's irrational hypocrisy. Troy's hypocrisy favors his own warped vision of the world as one he can shape for his own protection at the

expense of holding back a promising future for his son, who he believes he is also protecting, but instead, actually holds back.

Act One: Scene Four Summary

Mirroring the first scene in the play, Troy and Bono arrive at Troy's house to drink and talk after work on Friday, their payday, two weeks after Act One, scene one. Troy has won his case against the commissioner's office. He has been given a promotion that will make him the first black garbage truck driver in the city. Lyons shows up and asks if Troy wants to hear him play jazz that night. Troy calls jazz, "Chinese music" because it is foreign and unfamiliar to his ears and he does not understand it. Lyons and Bono tease Troy because he does not know how to drive and he cannot read. Lyons surprises Troy by paying him back the ten dollars he borrowed from Troy two Fridays ago.

Gabriel shows up at the house too and continues to talk about how he will be responsible for opening the gates to heaven on Judgment Day. Bono and Troy remember their dead fathers and their childhood experiences of becoming men when they left home in the south and moved north. Lyons benefits from the stories, learning details about his father's life that he has not heard before.

Cory comes home enraged after finding out that Troy went to the high school football coach, Coach Zellman and told him that Cory may not play on the team anymore. Cory displays his first aggressive verbal attack on Troy by saying that Troy is holding him back from his dreams because Troy is afraid that Cory will be better than Troy. Troy warns Cory that his insubordination is a strike against him and he better not "strike out."

Analysis

Wilson's choice to set the action on another Friday reestablishes the pattern of Troy and Bono's habitual behavior and offers a useful backdrop to compare how far the plot has progressed since the play started. The return of the setting to Troy and Bono's payday creates the feeling that their life has a continuous pattern, a homecoming, and a cycle. Bono and Troy's excitement exceeds the enthusiasm they shared in the first scene. Troy's promotion rouses a renewed energy from both of the men. The repetition of the setting emphasizes the uniqueness of the exciting news of Troy's promotion and his success in challenging the racist practices of his employers because it helps to illustrate the infrequency with which great, life-changing events occur in their lives. The thrill of Troy and Bono's news temporarily suspends the plot elements planted in the previous scenes. For an afternoon, things seem to be looking up for the Maxson family and for Troy. But because Wilson has already exposed elements that are bound to produce conflict such as Troy's affair with Alberta, Cory's wish to go to college and play football, and Gabe's warnings, we know the good times will not last for long.

The reveries Troy and Bono spin about their childhood experiences of their fathers also contribute to this suspension of the forward momentum of the tragic action. They increase the nuances of character by providing a revealing back story that informs our understanding of Troy and Bono's life compared to the lives of men a generation younger like Cory and Lyons. Lyons' appearance in the scene and his love of jazz reminds Troy of how different things were for Troy. Troy refers to Lyons' passion—jazz music—as "Chinese music" because jazz music is a modern phenomenon beyond his comprehension. His use of the word, "Chinese" to describe jazz music is a derogatory remark that backfires on Troy because it says more about his own failure to appreciate an ingenious invention by people of his own culture (and his lack of appreciation for Chinese culture) than it insults Lyons. Similarly, Lyons and Bono expose other weaknesses of Troy when they tease him for being illiterate and unable to drive. Wilson makes an argument here that Troy's lack of education

and lack of worldliness or cultural literacy contribute to his black and white decisions about others' lifestyles and therefore, act as additional components to the roots of Troy's conflict with other characters in the play.

Troy and Bono's memories provide Lyons with an unwritten history of his culture. Slavery displaced many African American families. Slave owners often forced African Americans to live far apart from parents, spouses, siblings, and young children by selling some family members to distant plantations. Troy and Bono's fathers were likely born into slavery or slave-like conditions. Their fathers' parents were almost definitely born into slavery and may not have had a nuclear family to model as an adult. The family units in Bono and Troy's lives were fractured by wandering parents who sought solace in escape from parental responsibilities, a lack of commitment, a zealous work ethic and/or violence.

Troy and Bono's fathers are representative of the phenomena in African American culture that took place after slavery was abolished and after promises made by the Reconstruction era failed to provide the necessary infrastructure to help the homeless, impoverished, dislocated blacks assimilate to the free-market culture and economy. Bono describes his father as having the "walking blues," a condition that Bono blames for his own fear of having children. Bono uses this term to describe his father's behavior during the Great Migration, when thousands of blacks chose to walk to a new life in a free city north of where they lived in slavery or slave-like conditions of sharecropping. Many blacks walked on foot from the south to a city in the north, some even going as far as Canada. Even if Bono's father wasn't part of this movement north, he represents the effects of this history.

Bono and Troy and Lyons and Cory share the commonality of a similar struggle. All of these men grapple with their identities in relation to their father's life choices. Bono, afraid of wandering like his father, and disappointing a child because of a lack of commitment to the child's mother and family, does not repeat his father's shortcomings. Bono is a devoted husband who perhaps regrets his lack of children because not having them was a decision he made based on his fears of inheriting negative traits of his father. Troy inherited useful yet unfortunate traits from his dad. He gained a terrific sense of responsibility to his family from his father, whom he respects more than his mother (who left their home), but he learned little about love from his father. Troy's father expressed love only as duty and Troy repeats this philosophy with Cory. Lyons grew up largely without Troy who was in jail when Lyons was a child. Lyons feels confident that his choice to be a musician while not practical, is a freedom that he should enjoy when so many generations before him were forced into life decisions. Lyons and Troy differ on this point because Lyons was a product of his mother and his generation, and Troy had little chance to influence his identity. The lack of a paternal presence in Bono, Troy and Lyons' lives shaped their view of themselves and their life choices.

Act Two: Scene One Summary

Cory hits the baseball tied to the tree in the yard. When he sees Rose, he tells her that he isn't quitting the football team. Rose agrees to talk to Troy on Cory's behalf when Troy comes home from bailing Gabriel out of jail. Gabe was arrested for disturbing the piece. It cost Troy fifty dollars to bail out Gabriel. Troy and Bono believe that the police arrest Gabriel often because it is easy for them to take him and it makes them a quick fifty dollars. Bono and Troy work on the fence together. Bono complains that the wood is too hard and difficult to saw through. Bono asks Troy about his relationship with Alberta again. Bono says that he they have "done got tight," or closer to one another. Troy denies Bono's accusation. Cory joins them and cuts through the wood easily.

Cory and Troy do not understand why Rose wants a fence built. Bono does know why, and explains to Troy and Cory that Rose loves her family and wants to keep them safe and close to her love. Bono tells Troy and Cory that people build fences for two reasons: "Some people build fences to keep people out...and other people build fences to keep people in." Bono does not mention Troy's mistake of having an extramarital affair in front of Cory but shares his opinion on what Troy should do through his explanation of the fence. Bono implies that Troy should respect Rose's love and be loyal to her love instead of pushing her and Cory away from him.

When Cory goes into the house to look for a saw, Bono confronts Troy more explicitly about his affair. Troy finally admits to Bono that he is indeed having an affair with Alberta. Bono wants Troy to stop the affair before it's too late and Rose finds out. Bono bets Troy that if he finishes building the fence for Rose, Bono will buy his wife, Lucille the refrigerator he has promised her for a long time. Bono decides to go home and not help Troy with the fence anymore.

Rose asks Troy about what happened with Gabe at the station. Troy tells Rose about the fifty dollars and a hearing in three weeks to determine whether or not Gabe should be recommitted to an asylum. Troy explains to Rose that Gabe was arrested "for howling and carrying on" after he chased some kids away who were teasing him. Troy and Rose argue over whether or not Gabe needs more supervision.

Troy suddenly tells Rose that he is going to be a father to a child of another woman. Gabriel shows up at the house and interrupts their important conversation. Rose becomes upset and outraged. She cannot believe that she has been loyal to Troy for eighteen years and he has done this to her. Gabriel senses that Troy has done something wrong to Rose. Gabe compliments Troy on helping him earlier that day at the police station. Troy expresses to Rose that he spent time with Alberta to escape. Rose believes she has been a good wife and mother and so Troy should have stayed with her. Troy selfishly conveys to Rose that he used Alberta to get away from the pain of his stagnant career and life goals. Rose rebuts his excuse by asserting that she invested her whole life in Troy, even when she knew he wasn't going anywhere. Rose feels just as stuck as Troy but she hasn't hurt Troy the way is hurting her. Rose accuses Troy of being selfish and of taking and not giving. This makes Troy very upset and he grabs Rose's arm. Rose yells at Troy because he is hurting her arm. Cory hears the noise from inside the house. He comes outside and surprises Troy by grabbing him from behind. Cory punches Troy in the chest, knocking Troy to the ground. Both Troy and Cory are surprised at Cory's actions. Troy lunges at Cory but Rose holds him back. Troy collects himself and yells at Cory instead of hitting him. Troy tells Cory that he just committed strike number two, and leaves the yard.

Analysis

Bono clarifies the significance of the play's title as the action rises and nears the climax of the scene. In a profound moment of compassion, Bono spells out to Cory and Troy the reason Rose wants the fence built. His reason is a metaphor not a literal interpretation. Bono sees Rose's fence as a defining symbol of her qualities as a wife and mother, correctly fearing her family's relationships are falling apart. Bono observes that the fence is symbolic of both the negative and positive aspects of the Maxson family. His reference to the people who build fences to push people away from them is indirectly directed at Troy who, with his affair, will eventually hurt his wife and who is already in the midst of hurting his son Cory by preventing him from a hopeful future. We never learn the practical reason why Rose wants the fence built. Perhaps she wants Troy and Cory to bond while making a fence together. Perhaps she thinks it is a way to keep her eye on Troy. Wilson never allows us into that part of Rose's thinking, so the fence, like Bono's description, leaves the observer to interpret the meaning of the fence for themselves.

Bono's poignant observation of why Rose wants the fence built contributes to Bono's success in pushing Troy to admit the truth about his affair. Troy's confession to Bono causes a disturbance, or a major reversal, in Troy's behavior and leads to the rising action escalating in Troy's admission of his affair to Rose. Until this moment, Troy has lived in denial about his affair, allowing himself the luxury of believing in and escaping to a world of illusions with Alberta, separate from his real-life responsibilities and disappointments. By announcing out loud to Bono the truth, Troy begins to make real the betrayal he has committed to himself. Unfortunately for Troy, his timing is too late. Alberta is pregnant; creating another realized form of his betrayal that will not be erased. Troy and Rose argue about Gabe's recent arrest and decision to move out, driving the rising action forward and steeping Troy and Rose in the unsatisfying bickering of their failing relationship. Rose's involvement in Gabe's life also expresses how closely linked Troy's family is with her own life, a stark contrast to the lover, Alberta who is a stranger with no familial duties. Troy blurts out to Rose the fact of his affair with Alberta in a double dose of shocking betrayal. He does not first reveal his affair and then the pregnancy, but dishes both parts of his news at once saying to Rose, "I'm gonna be a daddy." Rose demands an explanation and Troy, still clinging to a world of illusions and selfish excuses, only provides Rose with indulgent reasons why he needed to be with Alberta, and never apologizes for his decision.

Rose and Troy's disparate outlooks on how to live their life come to a head here. When Troy explains that having the affair felt like he was achieving something instead of remaining stagnant in a dead-end career and failing relationships at home by describing the decision as stealing second, like the move in baseball, Rose snaps at Troy in an effort to ground him in the reality of his mistake. She says, "We're not talking about baseball! We're talking about you going off to lay in bed with another woman!" Troy continues to see the story only from his point of view with no comprehension of the effect his actions have on anyone but himself, even when his actions will soon bring a new life into the world and change the life of those who are closest to him forever.

Act Two: Scene Two Summary

Rose has not had a conversation with Troy for six months, though he is still living in their house. Rose speaks to Troy for the first time by asking him if he is planning on coming home after work the next day, Friday. Troy has been going to Alberta's house every Friday after work, even though he still says that he goes to Taylor's. Troy tells Rose that he plans on going to Taylor's. Rose asks that Troy come straight home. Troy explains that he wants to have some time to himself to relax and enjoy life. Fed up with Troy, Rose warns Troy that she does not have much more patience for his behavior. Troy discloses hurtful news to Rose that he is actually going over to the hospital to see Alberta who went into labor early.

Rose matches Troy's bad news. Gabriel has been taken away to the asylum because Troy signed papers granting permission for half of Gabe's money from the government to go to Troy and half to the hospital. Troy is confused and hurt. He had thought that the papers he signed were the release forms to allow Gabe out of jail. He had made a mistake in sending Gabe away because he could not read the papers that he signed. Troy denies having signed the papers, but Rose saw Troy's signature on the document. Rose is furious at Troy for not signing the papers so Cory could go to college to play football and then signing the papers for Gabe to be locked up in a mental hospital. Rose warns Troy that he will have to answer to his misdeed. The phone rings and Rose answers it. Rose learns from the hospital that Alberta had a healthy baby girl but Alberta died during childbirth. Troy confronts the imaginary character, Death, out loud again. He challenges Death to come and get him after he builds a fence. Troy dares Death to confront him "man to man," still confident that he would win.

Analysis

Troy arrives at his house like a stranger. The household that once revolved around Troy and his whims and fanciful stories and ideas no longer exists. It is a day before Troy's payday, the day Wilson previously emphasizes in order to display a change in character and time. Even though we have yet to see if Troy and Bono will come to the Maxson house to drink and talk like they always do on Fridays, it is clear from Rose's unemotional, hands-off behavior that Troy has lost so much respect and love in his family that it is unlikely that Bono and his relationship with Troy will survive. Even though Troy has brought the truth of his affair to light, he still lives in an escapist mode. Troy continues to see Alberta and escape reality with her despite the facts that his son and wife know about the relationship and he still lives with them. As Rose attempts to salvage what little spousal bond she has with Troy by insisting that he come home after work, Troy continues to tell her he wants to go to Taylor's instead and tries to leave Rose in the middle of their conversation. By this point it must be obvious to Rose and Cory where Troy goes when he says he is going to Taylor's. Incapable of shattering his illusion in his own mind, Troy proceeds by pretending life is the way it was when his affair was a secret and believes he can maintain both his family and extramarital life simultaneously without further loss.

Wilson dramatically creates a double-edged situation in which the audience may sympathize with and object to Troy's character. While Troy could control the mistake he made by having an affair, he could not help being misled about Gabe's future due to his poor education and illiteracy. During the climax of the play, Troy's illusionary world bursts when the phone call from the hospital discloses that Alberta died in childbirth, and Troy is now responsible for a healthy baby girl. Ironically, Troy's escape from responsibility produced a huge responsibility, his baby, Raynell. The peak of Troy's mistakes occur after Rose sticks up for herself and tells him the truth of her sacrifice and commitment to Troy even though she has been disappointed with their life. Troy takes out his anger on Rose because of his anger about Alberta's death and his frustration with himself for failing Gabe. He grabs her violently and will not let go when she pushes him down farther by accusing him of taking and not giving in their relationship. Cory attacks Troy to protect Rose, defying the obedience Troy has aggressively demanded of Cory which lays the groundwork for a culminating incident caused by Troy's mistakes.

Act Two: Scene Three Summary

Troy brings home his motherless baby, Raynell. He sits on the porch singing a blues song about a man begging a train engineer to let him ride the train in hiding, for free. Rose decides that the baby is innocent and shouldn't be blamed for Troy's sins, saying, "you can't visit the sins of the father upon the child this child got a mother, but you're a womanless man." She takes in Troy's baby as her own child, but refuses to honor her partnership with Troy.

Analysis

Troy finally has no choice but to bear his burden in hand. He comes home to Rose with his baby, Raynell, not knowing if she will take him in as her husband again. Troy could be homeless, without a family except the baby, with nowhere to care for the baby or keep her from the elements if Rose rejects him once and for all. Instead of knocking on the front door to find out his standing with Rose, Troy cradles his baby on the front porch and sings. The baby is the only person left in Troy's world who will listen to Troy with an open mind. The porch used to be an arena for Troy's viewpoints and Troy's vision of the world. Now all Troy may have left in the world is his baby who does not know any better but to listen to him and depend on his love.

The lyrics of Troy's train song mimic his predicament with Rose and Raynell. He is homeless unless Rose takes pity on him and takes him in which, after his deceit of her trust,

would also be an act of granting a free ride to a man who has more than spent his chances for forgiveness.

Moreover, Wilson's choice in writing Troy a song based on an experience with a train follows a literary tradition in African American literature and an oral tradition in African American spirituals of associating trains with moments of significant life changing experiences. Specifically, trains have come to represent a crossroads in a person's life in the African American tradition. Frequently, these references to trains also have a religious connotation. In African American spirituals, trains often meant a ride to heaven and a ticket away from the troubles of life on earth. Wilson acknowledges his antecedents in fiction and song with Troy's lyrical plea.

Rose also makes a religious reference with her justification for accepting Raynell as her own child. She attributes her reasoning to her understanding that Raynell is innocent even though she was born out of a sinful partnership. Rose rejects Troy as her partner because she takes seriously the Biblical commandment that decrees, "Thou Shalt Not Sin," but finds forgiveness for the child born to her sinful husband because of her belief that "when the sins of our fathers visit us/we don't have to play host/we can banish them with forgiveness/as God in his largeness and laws." To Rose, it is a godly act to bring Raynell into her home and a blessing to behold in the midst of her pain.

Act Two: Scene Four Summary

Rose prepares for a church bake sale as Lyons arrives with twenty dollars to pay Troy back for a loan. Lyons and Cory chat. Cory has graduated from high school and Lyons missed the ceremony because he had a jazz gig. Cory is trying to find a job, indicating that Troy did not allow him to go to college to play football. Lyons and Cory agree that jobs are few and far between these days. Lyons suggests to Cory that he ask Troy for help finding a job. Rose, Lyons, and Cory leave the yard as Troy heads in to the yard after a day's work. It is Troy's payday.

Rose is more independent. Troy heats up his own food for dinner and Rose feels she can come and go without reporting to Troy when she is coming back or what she is doing. Troy drinks without Bono and sings a blues song to himself about an old dog named Blue. Bono stops by the house. They are no longer close friends. Bono and Troy do not work on the same trash route anymore now that Troy has been promoted to drive a truck in Greentree, a white neighborhood. Troy and Bono catch up with each other. They talk about their hopes for an early retirement and their wives. Rose is more religious now and more dedicated to her church. Troy invites Bono to stay and drink like old times, but Bono plays dominoes every Friday with other men at a man named Skinner's house. Troy and Bono acknowledge how each man made good on his bet; Troy finished the fence for Rose and Bono bought Lucille the refrigerator. Troy and Bono half-heartedly agree to meet up someday at Bono's house. Bono goes to his domino game. Troy continues to drink and sing by himself.

Cory comes back and steps over Troy on the porch without saying excuse me. Troy picks a fight with Cory. Cory isn't afraid of Troy. Troy asserts his manhood and role as father by forcing the respect issue with Cory who disrespectfully refuses to say "excuse me" to his father. Troy insists that Cory leave the house and provide for himself since he does not respect him as the man of the house and the breadwinner who provides for Cory. Troy flaunts how long and how much he has provided for Cory, but Cory refuses to give Troy much credit for the material things Troy gave him because Troy gave so little loving care to Cory and made him fear his own father.

Cory brings up Troy's recent failings with Rose and lets Troy know he disapproves. Troy again insists that Cory leave to be out on his own and goes as far to say, "You just another

nigger on the street to me!" Outraged, Cory points out that the house and property from which Troy is throwing Cory out, should actually be owned by Gabriel whose government checks paid for most of the mortgage payments. Troy physically attacks Cory. Cory swings at Troy with a baseball bat but does not hit Troy because he would probably kill him. Troy taunts Cory and then gets the bat away from Cory in a struggle. Troy stands over Cory with the bat and kicks Cory out of the house with finality. Cory leaves, saying he'll be back for his things. Troy tells Cory that he will not let Cory inside, but that he will leave Cory's belongings on the other side of the fence. Cory leaves. Troy swings the baseball bat, taunting Death to try to face him. He has a renewed belief in his strength because he defeated Cory. Troy is ready for death but he will fight a hard fight when death comes.

Analysis

Wilson manipulates the sense of time by breaking the established expectations of Bono and Troy's relationship. The details of the change inform the audience of how long it has been since their friendship was the fun-loving companionship of the opening scene. Several things are different now. Bono, who used to adore Troy and play the follower to Troy's lead in the friendship, now has a social life independent of Troy. Bono has a new group of friends who celebrate payday without Troy. Troy and Bono no longer work on the same trash route. Troy's promotion has landed him a job driving a truck in Greentree, a white neighborhood. Souring the sweetness of the promotion, Troy's new job is lonely because he has no one to talk to during the day.

In fact, loneliness defines every aspect of Troy's life. He is alone at work, on payday afternoons and weekends, as well as with his family and in his love life. Troy's actions have come back to haunt him. His conversation with Bono attempts to catch-up and heal an irreparable friendship. After a few months, Bono and Troy seem like strangers to each other, grasping onto aspects of each other that they used to know well. The scene between them creates sympathy for Troy and for Bono. There is an unspoken understanding between them. They both know that if Troy had heeded Bono's advice to stop his affair, life would be better for Troy now.

The falling action of *Fences* reaches a pitch when Troy challenges his son Cory by demanding fatherly respect from a son who no longer respects his father. The physical blockade Troy forces on Cory is an immature maneuver, typical of a child who did not get their way. Troy's immature behavior heightens the degree of foolishness he exhibits and emphasizes Cory's entry into manhood. When Cory stands up to Troy by scolding him like a child with the disgust of his opinions on Troy's failings, Cory, like Troy before him, becomes a man by challenging his father. Cory and Troy engage in physical violence just as Troy did with his own father when he came of age. And Cory, just like Troy must now leave the home he shares with his father to lead his own, independent life.

It is ironic, yet understandable that Cory and Troy fail to see eye-to-eye. It is ironic because both of them leave home under similar circumstances: they share disgust for their respective fathers and the experience of a father who selfishly took away something from each of them that they treasured. Cory lost his college football opportunities, trust in his father and home, Troy lost his girlfriend in a traumatic beating and rape by his father, his trust in his father and his home. Yet, tragically, what they share also pulls them apart and Troy and Cory are conflicted and enraged at each other. Troy finds himself unable to cope with the truth in a life or death situation. Therefore, Cory, a vigilant speaker of the truth, must disappear from Troy's world in order for Troy to maintain the illusion he now clings to in order to salvage what little is left of his once fearless life.

Act Two: Scene Five Summary

Seven year-old Raynell plays in the dirt of her newly planted garden, poking the ground with impatience. She has recently planted seeds but they have yet to grow. Rose asks Raynell to change her shoes to prepare for Troy's funeral. Troy has died from a heart attack when he was swinging a bat at the baseball that hangs from a tree in their yard. Cory returns home from the Marines in his uniform. Lyons also comes home to go to the funeral. His girlfriend, Bonnie, broke-up with him and he has been forced to do time at the workhouse because he was caught illegally cashing other people's checks. Cory is engaged to be married to a woman he seems to care about a lot. Lyons and Cory reminisce about Troy's saying, "You gotta take the crooked with the straights."

Cory refuses to attend the funeral because he wants to rebel against Troy. Rose teaches Cory that not attending Troy's funeral does not make Cory a man. Cory attempts to explain why he has mixed feelings for Troy. Cory says to Rose, "Papa was like a shadow that followed you everywhere." Cory and Raynell compare their memories of Troy as a father. Raynell and Cory sing Troy's blues song about the old dog named Blue which Troy's father taught him originally.

Gabriel shows up, having been released or having escaped from the mental hospital. He has his trumpet in hand. Gabriel announces that it is time to tell St. Peter to open the gates of heaven for Troy. Gabe blows his trumpet but no sound comes out. He tries and tries but the trumpet will not play. Disappointed and hurt, Gabriel has a painful realization in his mind. He walks around, turning his frustration into an improvised dance, reminiscent of an African dance. Gabriel's dance climaxes as he makes a cry to the heavens, which, in response, open wide, perhaps in the form of a bright light shining on stage. Gabriel is successful. He says, "That's the way that goes." The play ends.

Analysis

Troy has died in between the action of the last two scenes of the play, so the final scene presents the lasting effects of Troy's life on his loved ones. Though Troy's relationships with Bono, Rose, and Cory were ruined and broken in life, they gather together in his honor. The most significant representation of Troy's legacy is the conversation between Cory and Raynell. Raynell experienced Troy's parenting after he and Rose stopped loving each other and after Cory left home. Cory experienced Troy at his worst as a parent and husband. Lyons had very little chance to know Troy as a father at all. Bono and Rose knew Troy in his prime as a ballplayer and witnessed his demise. Cory refuses to go to Troy's funeral even though he made the journey to visit home for the first time in almost eight years. Cory's last memories of the Maxson household were bitter and oppressive.

Now, however, Cory meets Raynell, who bears witness to a changed world at the house and represents the changing world of the United States as it evolves into the passionate and liberating decade of the sixties. Raynell hold no grudge against Troy. Her comments about their father are mundane. She, like Lyons, Bono and Troy will grow up without one parent, but she will never experience the hurtful coming of age struggle Cory and the older men experienced. Raynell changes the pattern of violence between father and son in the Maxson family. When Cory and Raynell sing Troy's father's song about the dog named Blue together, Cory forgives Troy because he witnesses the love and the lessons that Troy passed on to his children. Cory experiences the song as evidence that Troy's deeds were derived from what Troy knew in life. Troy did what he could with what he had and did his best to give what little he had to his family. Cory was hindered by Troy's mistakes, but will become a better person than his father because of what he learned as a result of Troy's struggle with himself.

Key Facts

Full title

· Fences

Author

· August Wilson

Type of work

· Play

Genre

· Comedy, Drama

Language

· English, with African American dialects

Time and place written

· Developed from 1983–1987; United States

Date of first publication

· June, 1986

Publisher

· Plume, an imprint of Dutton Signet, a division of Penguin Books USA

Narrator

· The play does not have a narrator but the stage directions do lend an omniscient voice at times

Point of view

· not applicable (drama)

Tone

· Loosely autobiographical; emphasizes links between the aftermaths of slavery as well as legalized discrimination and African American lives during the 1950's

Tense

· not applicable (drama)

Settings (times)

· 1957, later, 1965

Setting (place)

· The dirt-yard and porch of the Maxson family's house in Pittsburgh, PA

Protagonists

· Troy Maxson and Cory Maxson

Major conflict

· Troy and Cory's opposing views on how Cory should spend his future deteriorates after Troy prohibits Cory from playing football and going to college. Their relationship disintegrates further when Troy reveals he has been cheating on Cory's mother with another woman and gotten her pregnant and signed papers permitting Cory's Uncle Gabe to be committed to a mental hospital while Troy lives in a house paid for by Gabe's money.

Rising Actions

· Troy reveals his affair with Alberta to his wife, Rose; Rose reprimands Troy; Troy viciously grabs Rose's arm and will not let go; Cory surprises Troy, attacking him from behind; Cory and Troy fight; Troy wins the fight and warns Cory that he has one more strike to spend

Climax

· Rose tells Troy that Alberta died having his baby.

Falling Action

· In Act Two, scene four: Troy picks a fight with Cory; Cory displays his disgust for Troy's betraying behavior towards Rose, Gabe, and Cory; Troy and Cory fight with a baseball bat; Troy wins and kicks Cory out of their house

Themes

· Coming of age within the cycle of damaged black manhood; interpreting and inheriting history; the choice between pragmatism and illusions as survival mechanisms

Motifs

· Death and baseball; seeds and growth; blues

Symbols

· Trains; fences; the devil

Foreshadowing

· In Act One, scene one, Troy says without humility, "Death ain't nothing," but he eventually dies before the play ends. In Act One, scene two, Gabriel talks in songs and strange stories about his friendship with St. Peter. But sometimes his words appear to foreshadow Troy's demise. Gabe sings to Troy, "Better get ready for the judgment." In Act One, scene one, Bono inquires about Troy's relationship with a woman names Alberta. Troy denies his affair with Alberta, but Bono says he has seen Troy buying her drinks and walking near her house when he says he's at the bar, Taylor's. Bono's questioning foreshadows Troy's inevitable inability to hide his secret.

Study Questions and Suggested Essay Topics

Study Questions

How does Troy's character change over the course of the play?

Are Troy's problems self-created or out of his control?

Discuss the significance of the title, *Fences*, as it relates to characters and themes of the play.

What elements does Wilson employ to give the audience a sense that time has passed and characters have changed during the course of the play?

How does *Fences* fulfill Wilson's description of the style as a "blues aesthetic?"

Is Troy a tragic figure, a hero, a villain or a combination of these types? Is he a sympathetic character?

How does Wilson create the time period of the play with his language? Could the play take place in a different decade? Why or why not?

In many American plays, blacks play only minor roles or are only mentioned in passing by the main characters. Wilson reverses this by only referring to white characters but never having them appear on stage. What effect does this have on the play? How does their absence and presence inform the characters' world? Would the play be more effective or less effective if the white characters mentioned in the play were more present? Provide textual evidence to support your answer.

What is the play's attitude towards women? How might a female playwright tell the story of *Fences* differently than August Wilson? What themes or issues might be raised in a play about blacks in the 1950's that Wilson does not address? Do Rose and the women mentioned in the play typify roles of the 1950's or defy them? What attributes or actions of the female characters support your interpretation?

Some critics of August Wilson complain that "nothing happens" in his plays, meaning the plot is too subtle to be dramatic. Write a review of *Fences* arguing against this assertion and proving that it is a dramatic work. Back up your opinion with textual support.

Compare and contrast Arthur Miller's play *Death of a Salesman* with *Fences*. Compare and contrast the roles of fate vs. personal actions in the story of Willie Loman and Troy Maxson.

Suggestions for Further Reading

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