



Fences

August Wilson

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Soon to be a Major Motion Picture directed by Denzel Washington, and starring Denzel Washington and Viola Davis

Winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Drama and the Tony Award for Best Play

From August Wilson, author of *The Piano Lesson* and the 1984-85 Broadway season's best play, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, is another powerful, stunning dramatic work that has won him numerous critical acclaim including the 1987 Tony Award for Best Play and the Pulitzer Prize. The protagonist of *Fences* (part of Wilson's ten-part Pittsburgh Cycle plays), Troy Maxson, is a strong man, a hard man. He has had to be to survive. Troy Maxson has gone through life in an America where to be proud and black is to face pressures that could crush a man, body and soul. But the 1950s are yielding to the new spirit of liberation in the 1960s, a spirit that is changing the world Troy Maxson has learned to deal with the only way he can, a spirit that is making him a stranger, angry and afraid, in a world he never knew and to a wife and son he understands less and less.

Fences Details

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Author : August Wilson

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From Reader Review Fences for online ebook

Lola says

What a paradoxal character Troy is.

You could analyse him for hours!

?Eryn says

1 Star

I really did not enjoy this. Literally, I could not find one thing that I enjoyed in this play. Nothing. There was not one character I could connect to or identify with. So, if I wasn't bored, I was mad at Troy for being so blatantly sexist.

Honestly, plays just aren't my thing, so I cannot wait until the day I no longer have to read them for English classes.

Debbie says

Fences is Phenomenal

What a wonderful play. I wish I had seen the original starring James Earl Jones as Troy Maxson and Mary Alice as Rose. At the beginning of the book it lists the original players and mentally they fit perfectly. I pictured them the whole time. Even though I have never seen this live there is so much life in *August Wilson's* words that just reading it you can almost see the play.

I feel the need to apologize to the memory of *August Wilson* for living in his birth city and the location of many of his plays and am just now venturing into appreciating his work. August Wilson was born right home here in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He grew up in the Hill District, where I had friends living in this area and I went to church every single week through most of my childhood. Although he was from a different time period than I, it was amazing reading this play and feeling so connected as it took place in my town. There was mention of the Pirates and before them one of our Negro League teams, the Homestead Grays. Two local hospitals that are still around Mercy and Passavant were mentioned. Troy mentions his promotion to a garbage route through Greentree vs the previous one through Hazelwood, two places I'm familiar with. Lyons, Troy's son plays gigs with bands at the Historic Crawford Grill. It felt wonderful reading a book/play that takes place in my town.

Responsibility and Family are the two main themes of this play.

The word responsibility is repeated various times throughout this play. The jacket synopsis gives a good description and I don't want to spoil this for anyone because it is a must read. If it plays in your city, it is a must see. There is resounding lessons. Regardless of life's disappointments and curve balls, nothing is more important than family and taking care of ones responsibility.

I love the dialogue. It's only 100 pages. I recommend this whole heartedly. A friend and I just discussed how

all of August's plays should be required reading in our city public schools. I will definitely be reading more plays by him and running to the nearest public theater that puts one on. Perfection. 7 Deb stars/5GR.

Addendum: I can't wait to see this movie with Denzel Washington and Viola Davis filmed right here in Pittsburgh. I actually happened to see them filming a little bit as I happened to drive past their filming site. Looking forward to comparing the book to the movie and looking for all the familiar landmarks.

Sr3yas says

3.5 Stars

1987 Pulitzer prize winner for drama

"Some people build fences to keep people out and other people build fences to keep people in"

Fences is a very interesting period drama set in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and the year is 1957. The story is all about Troy, a 53 years old African-American and his family. We get to experience Troy's relationship with various members of the play and each of them is unique.

We are exposed to many themes here: Racism, family values, relationships, and death are some of them. But the story thrives on the complicated characterization of Troy. He is one character you'll never be able to figure out. Seriously, I've never read a character as complicated as Troy. He does a lot of damage in this play, but he could've done worse and he didn't. Does that make him a better person?

Oh, Troy. You got to me real good here.

Overall, read this for the complexity of our lead character.

Can't wait to watch Denzel Washington's take on the character!

Update

And Denzel Washington did an admirable job bringing life to Troy in the movie. So did others. The movie adapts the play completely (line-by-line) and adds some more materials to the story. So If you've seen the movie, you've experienced the play!

Majenta says

I read this in college for my "The Drama" course. I'm looking forward to watching the film.

Bettie? says

Description: *"In his work, Mr. Wilson depicted the struggles of black Americans with uncommon lyrical richness, theatrical density and emotional heft, in plays that give vivid voices to people on the frayed*

margins of life." The New York Times

From August Wilson, author of The Piano Lesson and the 1984-85 Broadway season's best play, Ma Rainey's Black Bottom, is another powerful, stunning dramatic work that has won him numerous critical acclaim including the 1987 Tony Award for Best Play and the Pulitzer Prize. The protagonist of Fences (part of Wilson's ten-part Pittsburgh Cycle plays), Troy Maxson, is a strong man, a hard man. He has had to be to survive. Troy Maxson has gone through life in an America where to be proud and black is to face pressures that could crush a man, body and soul. But the 1950s are yielding to the new spirit of liberation in the 1960s, a spirit that is changing the world Troy Maxson has learned to deal with the only way he can, a spirit that is making him a stranger, angry and afraid, in a world he never knew and to a wife and son he understands less and less.

Oscar:

2* La La Land

6* Hidden Figures

4* Fences

4* Florence Foster Jenkins

Bill Kerwin says

Whenever I think of Troy, I think of James Earl Jones, the man who created the part. Sure, I saw Denzel Washington in the movie, and Denzel is pretty good in it too, but Troy should be played by a man tall enough and broad enough for tragedy: a massive man, with a massive voice, like ol' Daddy Darth Vader his own self.

August Wilson's *Fences*--the greatest play written by an African-American and one of the finest plays written by anybody anywhere--is the story of middle-aged Troy Maxson, once a legendary hitter of the Negro League but now a trash collector in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He is an admirable man, in his own way, dedicated to fulfilling his responsibilities as a breadwinner to his wife and their son. But a life of economic and emotional impoverishment--first as the son of a vicious sharecropper, later as prisoner, and then as a black ball player with no opportunity to compete in the major leagues--has left him bitter, shriveled up inside, unavailable to the people who love him.

As we watch this damaged man make choices, most of which prove to be wrong, we feel both pity and terror for him, at his growing fear of death, at the great waste that has become his life. Yet we never quite feel we are witnessing a tragedy, for Troy, magnificent as he is, as noble as destiny has formed him, has been fenced in by poverty and racism so thoroughly that even a small tragedy--like Willy Loman's, for example--will be forever denied him.

A tragic hero deprived of tragedy: that is Troy Maxson's fate. Yet the play nevertheless ends with something like an *apotheosis*: in his wife's Rose summing up ("I don't know if he was right or wrong ... but I do know he meant to do more good than he meant to do harm"); in his two children who sing again an old song Troy once sang; and in his brain-damaged brother Gabriel, who raises a trumpet to his lips to blow his brother past St. Peter's Gate, right into his fenced-in heavenly home.

I'll conclude with Troy's last soliloquy, spoken to Death after Death has come for the mother of his newborn daughter:

Alright...Mr. Death. See now...I'm gonna tell you what I'm gonna do. I'm gonna take and build me a fence around this yard. See? I'm gonna build me a fence around what belongs to me. And then I want you to stay on the other side. See? You stay over there until you're ready for me. Then you come on. Bring your army. Bring your sickle. Bring your wrestling clothes. I ain't gonna fall down on my vigilance this time. You ain't gonna sneak up on me no more. When you ready for me...when the top of your list say Troy Maxson...that's when you come around here. You come up and knock on the front door. Ain't nobody else got nothing to do with this. This is between you and me. Man to man. You stay on the other side of that fence until you ready for me. Then you come up and knock on the front door. Anytime you want. I'll be ready for you.

Brina says

Fences, a new movie starring Denzel Washington and Viola Davis, is a Pulitzer Prize winning drama by August Wilson. Part of Wilson's Century cycle of plays each depicting one decade of African American life during the 20th century, Fences takes us back to the 1950s when African Americans were first beginning to make inroads into white society.

Troy Maxson has been married to Rose for eighteen years. A family man, he has worked as a garbage collector alongside his closest friend Bono during this time. Although steady pay, the two men wonder why only white men can drive trucks while Negroes collect trash. This leads Troy to question his union boss and take his grievances to a commission. In the years between Jackie Robinson integrating baseball and the passage of the Civil Rights Act, it was not likely for Maxson to achieve his promotion.

Meanwhile, Rose has been steady by his side as a typical 1950s housewife. She desires the best for their son Cory, who has been offered a football scholarship at a North Carolina university. Troy rather than looking toward the future, is rooted in the past, partially bitter and reminiscing that he never had a shot at the major leagues. A recurring theme in Wilson's Century plays, the playwright has multiple characters with an eye toward achieving the American dream with one protagonist living in his traditions of the past. In Fences, Troy Maxson is this such character as he would rather that Cory follow in his footsteps than be his own person.

Additionally, Troy has to look out for his brother Gabe, who had been disabled during World War II, and Lyons, a son from a first marriage. Each character in this drama would like a slice of the pie during a decade that is the crossroads of the 20th century. As Jackie Robinson has achieved the ultimate American dream, African Americans believe that anything is possible. This is embodied in Cory who desires to play football and earn a college education. This puts Rose in a precarious situation because during the 1950s, her position was to value her husband's position rather than her own opinion. These powerful characters create a poignant prose and memorable second act.

Fences first starred James Earl Jones as Troy Maxson. One of the premier actors of the last fifty years, I would have loved to see him in this role. August Wilson has created a legacy in his Century cycle plays, four of which earned the Pulitzer and other multiple awards. Having read the Piano Lesson and Fences, I am looking forward to reading the Cycle to its completion at the end of the century. A powerful drama, Fences is deserving of its Pulitzer and five star rating.

Rick says

Fences, the sixth in the ten play cycle by August Wilson, takes place in 1957, two years after the Montgomery Bus Boycott began, ten years after Jackie Robinson broke the color line that by a so-called “gentlemen’s agreement” kept African-American players out of the major leagues (but two years *before* the Red Sox became the last team to include a black player on their team), six years before the March on Washington, seven and eight years before the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act. In other words, it takes place during the early years of a slow, long delayed and much resisted change. For Troy Maxson, a garbage man who according to his friend had only two ballplayers better than him, Babe Ruth and Josh Gibson, the change is not just over-due but too late. He’s gruff and bitter about his own denied opportunities. “There ought not never have been no time called too early.”

Troy is supported by a devoted wife, Rose, and a great friend, Bono, but he’s struggling with the times, challenging his bosses about the fact that there are no Negro drivers among the city’s garbage men, trying to raise his sons his way while they push for their own way, and wrestling with temptations related to love and identity. *Fences* is one of Wilson’s best plays and has the street poetry dialogue, the blend of folk wisdom and superstition, of the personal and societal, and the ever presents shadows of history and race that are characteristic of his work.

While times are changing, to what degree they are changing and the cost of the changing is far from clear in 1957. Selma and Birmingham and the Mississippi Summer are yet to come; Medgar Evers, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King’s assassinations are six, eight and eleven years away. As with its beginning, segregation will be supported by violent acts of terrorism through its end. So Troy’s bitterness is earned, his courage in advocating for equality of opportunity in the workplace is real and his suspicion of the permanence of any incremental change is not just reluctance to adjust. His refusal to let his son Corey talk to a college recruiter about a football scholarship is in fact a swamp of motivations: fear, jealousy, suspicion. “The white man ain’t gonna let you get nowhere with that football noway. You go on and get your book learning so you can work yourself up in that A&P or learn how to fix cars or build houses or something, get you a trade.... You go on and learn how to put your hands to some good use. Besides hauling people’s garbage.” Equally complex and all too human are the personal battles Troy fights. Wilson turns the mundane into something epic; something personal into the universal.

Fences is a play about family, responsibility, love, friendship, and respect. The relationships between Rose and Troy, between Troy and his brother Gabriel, whose brain was damaged in World War II, between Troy and Corey, and between Troy and Bono are each richly complex and compelling. It is a drama, not a tragedy. It has moments of uplift and of sorrow. Troy is a human figure, strong, mostly decent and upright, though not always, and flawed. He is a less melodramatic, less hysterical Lear but a more human and deserving one. (There are no bodies strewn around the stage but lives are.) The secondary characters are full-bodied and with the efficiency of Hemingway Wilson lets a bit of dialogue, an exchange that has the roots of pattern in it, stand not just for the moment but for the history and character of those involved. He is a master at getting us recognize much in little. *Fences* is a bittersweet drama, compassionate, moving, and thoughtful.

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Aidan has been telling me to read this since his Honors English class read it in October. I finally picked it up (to better understand the essay he wrote about it) and devoured it in an hour or two. Talk about dense storytelling! Closer to poetry in a way, capturing so much in so few words. I will never forget Troy, who reminded me of a more-alive version of Willy Loman. Highly recommended.

A great American drama. The writing is masterful, obviously, but what struck me most on this first reading is the complexity of responses that Wilson evokes from the reader/audience. I am a middle aged Caucasian AP Lit teacher, so while some might expect my reactions to center on the African American experience, what struck me first was the recognizable conflicts between father and son, husband and wife, man and woman. I felt a kinship to Troy, Cory and Rose, even while I watched the fruits (consequences?) of a life experience for which I had no frame of reference. I felt "it shouldn't be this way" while I acknowledged "isn't this the way it always is?"

8

Adira says

I highly recommend this play! I saw it performed live in the West End and was blown away. The play itself has so many raw pieces of the African-American culture woven into it that you can't help, but feel as if Wilson is talking to you as he writes the play. It sort of feels like he looked into a piece of your soul and wrote what was hidden deep inside of it. Even if you're not of African or African-American descent, you'll find something in this play to love. The play is a quick read and worth watching if you ever get a chance to see it performed live.*

***Update:** Go see the film with Denzel Washington and Viola David. It will make you cry just because of the simplicity and deepness of the production.

P.S. Denzel was robbed of that Oscar!

Sarah says

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♥ Sandi ♥ says

No surprise - great play - an August Wilson play.

An average black man in the 1950's - trying his best to make his way in an average American city. Working hard, looking for more, and knowing that his chances are slim to none. The expectations of his wife and children, his expectation of himself and running from both. Responsibilities, vulnerabilities, infidelities and expectations are all witnessed in this short play.

This will be a movie in 2017. Reenacted by Denzel Washington and Viola Davis from their original award winning play on Broadway.
