A PLAY BY

AUGUST WILSON

Author of

Ma Rainey's Black Bottom

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

LLOYD RICHARDS

WINNER OF THE 1987 PULITZER PRIZE FOR DRAMA

FENCES

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A PLUME BOOK

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"What makes FENCES so engrossing, so embracing, so simply powerful, is Wilson's startling ability to tell a story, reveal feeling, paint emotion."
—Clive Barnes, *New York Post*

"FENCES is an eloquent play . . . a comedy-drama that is well-nigh flawless . . . Life, in all its bittersweetness, fills the stage . . . pain and anger are balanced by humor and common sense, and both passion and compassion are played on a muted trumpet that insinuates rather than insists. FENCES marks a long step forward for Wilson's dramaturgy."
—John Simon, *New York Magazine*

"A moving story line and a hero almost Shakespearian in contour."
—Sylviane Gold, *The Wall Street Journal*

"A work of tremendous impact that summons up gratitude for the beauty of its language, the truth of its character, the power of its portrayals."
—*Chicago Tribune*

AUGUST WILSON was catapulted to the forefront of American playwrights with the success of MA RAINEY'S BLACK BOTTOM (also available in a Plume edition), voted Best Play of the Year 1984–85 by the New York Drama Critics' Circle. August Wilson is also a published poet and makes his home in St. Paul, Minnesota. His third play, JOE TURNER'S COME AND GONE, received its first production at the Yale Repertory Theatre in 1986.

LLOYD RICHARDS is Dean of Yale School of Drama and Artistic Director of Yale Repertory Theatre.

for Lloyd Richards,
who adds to whatever he touches

Introduction

by Lloyd Richards

Fences is the second major play of a poet turned playwright, August Wilson. One of the most compelling storytellers to begin writing for the theater in many years, he has taken the responsibility of telling the tale of the encounter of the released black slaves with a vigorous and ruthless growing America decade by decade. *Fences* encompasses the 1950s and a black family trying to put down roots in the slag slippery hills of a middle American urban industrial city that one might correctly mistake for Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

To call August Wilson a storyteller is to align him at one and the same time with the ancient aristocrats of dramatic writing who stood before the tribes and made compelling oral history into legend, as well as with the modern playwrights who bring an audience to their feet at the end of an evening of their work because that audience knows that they have encountered themselves, their concerns, and their passions, and have been moved and enriched by the experience. In *Fences,* August Wilson tells the story of four generations of black Americans and of how they have passed on a legacy of morals, mores, attitudes, and patterns through stories with and without music.

He tells the story of Troy Maxson,born to a sharecropper father who was frustrated by the fact that every crop took him further into debt. The father knew himself as a failure and took it out on everyone at hand, including his young son, Troy, and his wives, all of whom "leave him." Troy learns violence from him, but he also learns the value of work and the fact that a man takes responsibility for his

family no matter how difficult circumstances may be. He learns respect for a home, the importance of owning land, and the value of an education because he doesn't have one.

An excellent baseball player, Troy learns that in the land of equal opportunity, chances for a black man are not always equal, and that the same country that deprived him asked sacrifice of his brother in World War II and got it. Half his brother's head was blown away, and he is now a disoriented and confused beautiful man. He learns that he must fight and win the little victories that—given his life—must assume the proportion of major triumphs. He learns that day to day and moment to moment he lives close to death and must wrestle with death to survive. He learns that to take a chance and grab a moment of beauty can crumble the delicate fabric of an intricate value system and leave one desolate and alone. Strength of body and strength of purpose are not enough. Chance and the color of one's skin, chance again, can tip the balance. "You've got to take the crooked with the straight."

Troy Maxson spins yarns, raps, tells stories to his family and friends in that wonderful environment of the pretelevision, pre-airconditioned era when the back porch and the backyard were the platform for some of the most exciting tales of that time. From this platform and through his behavior he passes on to his extended family principles for living, which members of his family accept or refute through the manner in which they choose to live their own lives.

How is this reformed criminal perceived? What should be learned from him? What accepted? What passed on? Is his life to be discarded or honored? That is the story of *Fences,* which we build to keep things and people out or in.

New Haven, Connecticut
March 6, 1986

FENCES

When the sins of our fathers visit us
We do not have to play host.
We can banish them with forgiveness
As God, in His Largeness and Laws.
—August Wilson

Fences opened on April 30, 1985, at the Yale Repertory Theatre in New Haven, Connecticut, with the following cast:

TROY MAXSON	*James Earl Jones*
JIM BONO	*Ray Aranha*
ROSE	*Mary Alice*
LYONS	*Charles Brown*
GABRIEL	*Russell Costen*
CORY	*Courtney B. Vance*
RAYNELL	*Cristal Coleman* and *LaJara Henderson* at alternate performances

Director: Lloyd Richards
Set Design: James D. Sandefur
Costume Design: Candice Donnelly
Light Design: Danianne Mizzy
Music Director: Dwight Andrews
Production Stage Manager: Joel Grynheim
Stage Manager: Terrence J. Witter
Casting: Meg Simon/Fran Kumin

Fences was initially presented as a staged reading at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center's 1983 National Playwrights Conference.

Fences opened on March 26, 1987, at the 46th Street Theatre, with the following cast:

TROY MAXSON	*James Earl Jones*
JIM BONO	*Ray Aranha*
ROSE	*Mary Alice*
LYONS	*Charles Brown*
GABRIEL	*Frankie R. Faison*
CORY	*Courtney B. Vance*
RAYNELL	*Karima Miller*

Producer: Carole Shorenstein Hays in association with The Yale Repertory Theatre
Director: Lloyd Richards
Set Design: James D. Sandefur
Costume Design: Candice Donnelly
Light Design: Danianne Mizzy
Music Director: Dwight Andrews
Production Stage Manager: Martin Gold
General Manager: Robert Kamlot
Stage Manager: Terrence J. Witter
Casting: Meg Simon/Fran Kumin

Fences was initially presented as a staged reading at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center's 1983 National Playwrights Conference.

This new edition, first printed in May 1987, reflects the final definintive text of FENCES as performed on Broadway.

Characters

TROY MAXSON	
JIM BONO	TROY*'s friend*
ROSE	TROY*'s wife*
LYONS	TROY*'s oldest son by previous marriage*
GABRIEL	TROY*'s brother*
CORY	TROY *and* ROSE*'s son*
RAYNELL	TROY*'s daughter*

Setting

The setting is the yard which fronts the only entrance to the MAXSON household, an ancient two-story brick house set back off a small alley in a big-city neighborhood. The entrance to the house is gained by two or three steps leading to a wooden porch badly in need of paint.

A relatively recent addition to the house and running its full width, the porch lacks congruence. It is a sturdy porch with a flat roof. One or two chairs of dubious value sit at one end where the kitchen window opens onto the porch. An old-fashioned icebox stands silent guard at the opposite end.

The yard is a small dirt yard, partially fenced, except for the last scene, with a wooden sawhorse, a pile of lumber, and other fence-building equipment set off to the side. Opposite is a tree from which hangs a ball made of rags. A baseball bat leans against the tree. Two oil drums serve as garbage receptacles and sit near the house at right to complete the setting.

The Play

Near the turn of the century, the destitute of Europe sprang on the city with tenacious claws and an honest and solid dream. The city devoured them. They swelled its belly until it burst into a thousand furnaces and sewing machines, a thousand butcher shops and bakers' ovens, a thousand churches and hospitals and funeral parlors and money-lenders. The city grew. It nourished itself and offered each man a partnership limited only by his talent, his guile, and his willingness and capacity for hard work. For the immigrants of Europe, a dream dared and won true.

The descendants of African slaves were offered no such welcome or participation. They came from places called the Carolinas and the Virginias, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Tennessee. They came strong, eager, searching. The city rejected them and they fled and settled along the riverbanks and under bridges in shallow, ramshackle houses made of sticks and tar-paper. They collected rags and wood. They sold the use of their muscles and their bodies. They cleaned houses and washed clothes, they shined shoes, and in quiet desperation and vengeful pride, they stole, and lived in pursuit of their own dream. That they could breathe free, finally, and stand to meet life with the force of dignity and whatever eloquence the heart could call upon.

By 1957, the hard-won victories of the European immigrants had solidified the industrial might of America. War

had been confronted and won with new energies that used loyalty and patriotism as its fuel. Life was rich, full, and flourishing. The Milwaukee Braves won the World Series, and the hot winds of change that would make the sixties a turbulent, racing, dangerous, and provocative decade had not yet begun to blow full.

Act One

SCENE ONE

It is 1957. TROY *and* BONO *enter the yard, engaged in conversation.* TROY *is fifty-three years old, a large man with thick, heavy hands; it is this largeness that he strives to fill out and make an accommodation with. Together with his blackness, his largeness informs his sensibilities and the choices he has made in his life.*

Of the two men, BONO *is obviously the follower. His commitment to their friendship of thirty-odd years is rooted in his admiration of* TROY*'s honesty, capacity for hard work, and his strength, which* BONO *seeks to emulate.*

It is Friday night, payday, and the one night of the week the two men engage in a ritual of talk and drink. TROY *is usually the most talkative and at times he can be crude and almost vulgar, though he is capable of rising to profound heights of expression. The men carry lunch buckets and wear or carry burlap aprons and are dressed in clothes suitable to their jobs as garbage collectors.*

BONO: Troy, you ought to stop that lying!

TROY: I ain't lying! The nigger had a watermelon this big. (*He indicates with his hands.*)

Talking about . . . "What watermelon, Mr. Rand?" I liked to fell out! "What watermelon, Mr. Rand?" . . . And it sitting there big as life.

BONO: What did Mr. Rand say?

TROY: Ain't said nothing. Figure if the nigger too dumb to know he carrying a watermelon, he wasn't gonna get much sense out of him. Trying to hide that great big old watermelon under his coat. Afraid to let the white man see him carry it home.

BONO: I'm like you . . . I ain't got no time for them kind of people.

TROY: Now what he look like getting mad cause he see the man from the union talking to Mr. Rand?

BONO: He come to me talking about . . . "Maxson gonna get us fired." I told him to get away from me with that. He walked away from me calling you a troublemaker. What Mr. Rand say?

TROY: Ain't said nothing. He told me to go down the Commissioner's office next Friday. They called me down there to see them.

BONO: Well, as long as you got your complaint filed, they can't fire you. That's what one of them white fellows tell me.

TROY: I ain't worried about them firing me. They gonna fire me cause I asked a question? That's all I did. I went to Mr. Rand and asked him, "Why?" Why you got the white mens driving and the colored lifting?" Told him, "what's the matter, don't I count? You think only white fellows got sense enough to drive a truck. That ain't no paper job! Hell, anybody can drive a truck. How come you got all whites driving and the colored lifting? He told