

Analysis of characters and their encounters with death in fences by august wilson...

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The Ninth Inning

August Wilson paints an engaging story with intricate characters in his play, 'Fences'. The seven (speaking) characters are bursting with unique personalities, which directly affect each other's lives. The protagonist, Troy Maxson, and the ultimate antagonist, Death, have a few encounters, which change Mr. Maxson in the long run. Many events and situations are the direct result of the main character's actions and more importantly, his mistakes. Towards the end of the play, the man loses a fight to death, which lands him a front row seat at his funeral. Sadly, this is not his first death. This man has died long before he was buried. The burial was simply the result of his giving up.

Troy reiterates his encounter with death to his wife, Rose, and best friend, Bono, in the beginning of the play. The protagonist proudly exclaims that he "ain't worried about death. [He] seen him, [he] wrestled with him" referring to the two times he believed he encountered death (1. 1. 86). One of them being during July in 1941, when thirty-year-old Troy came down with pneumonia where he looked death, who was backed with an army, in the eyes and with a smile, death reached out and touched him, but Troy was not about to give in that easily. Maxson and the devil wrestled for, as he states, three days and three nights while his immune system fought off the pneumonia. Wilson does not explain why he chose this precise amount of time, but it is interesting because of two well-known biblical triumphs. Jonah fought for survival in the belly of a whale for three days and three nights, and Christ resurrected from the tomb after crucifixion for the same amount

of time. We can easily relate these two stories of perseverance, determination, survival, and triumph to Mr. Maxson's experience with death.

The character, Death, is perceived to be an unknown entity; he can take the form of many people, including a salesman, a morally objectionable father, and a member of a large, racist group of white southerners. Ensuing the confrontation with death, the favored fighter illustrates the next event being: "death stood up, threw on his robe... had him a white robe with a hood on it" (1. 1. 92). A white robe with a white hood can conveniently resemble a Ku Klux Klan member. One very illustrated devil was Maxson's father. He was not always viewed as such a nightmarish being, after raising a plethora of children, going through countless lovers, he was no father of the year but this taught Troy the aspect of responsibility. Although Troy hated his father, he understood his responsibility but the tables turn the day that child became a man. His father was no longer human to him. Troy grew up real fast after being face-to-face with the Devil, learning to endure hardships such as finding work, residency, food, all while still not being of legal voting age. He has gone through his fair share of struggles, which have shaped and molded him throughout his life. Looking at the tormented man, the audience can understand many of his current actions, damaging as they may be. His hatred and resentment towards his father causes him to refuse to believe he has any part of his father running through his veins, just as his son, Cory, believes he has no part of his father in his blood. Using this thought process, how many lives has this man affected to cast him as the devil in their eyes?

Troy's is only one of two marked deaths in the play. Scene two, line thirty-nine, Rose, informs him of his mistress's death after her pregnancy and upon hearing he urgently goes to the hospital to bring home the motherless infant (2. 2. 39). Rose ends up raising the mistress's child like one of her own. In addition to his wife, the main character betrays many other people in the play. Arguably, one of the worst betrayals is with his schizophrenic uncle, Gabriel. Troy does not believe he had part in Gabriel's admittance into a mental hospital, asserting that he " ain't signed nothing" and Miss Pearl made it up because she is upset due to the fact that she is no longer " getting Gabe's rent money" (2. 2. 28, 30). Troy refuses to take responsibility for his actions against his uncle. Gabe surprisingly either does not hold it against him, or does not understand the technicalities of the situation. Nonetheless, it is very evident Troy had it out for his middle child, Cory, since the beginning of the play. It is unclear exactly why but the audience is lead to believe that it is because Troy sees himself in Cory and does not want his son going down the same road he traveled. The father is convinced that he is being just in taking action to prevent his son's rejection due to his race and skill, but in Cory's eyes, his father dashes his dreams before they are even fully formed. The most affected by his behavior would be Rose, who banishes him from her heart upon hearing about the affair where Troy could not bring himself to leave either woman. Although, Rose does agree to care for and raise the other woman's baby, Raynell, she no longer wants anything to do with her cheating husband. Troy does not do anything halfway including mistakes, when he screws up; he goes all out with it.

Troy, although aging, has the spirit of an unrelenting warrior. He quoted death with declaring, “ ‘ I’ll be back.’ just like that ‘ I’ll be back.’ [Troy] told [death]... yeah but... you gonna have to find me!” which really trivializes his fight to almost a cat-and-mouse game (1. 1. 92). He shows death that he will not go down without a fight and if death truly wants him, death will have to try harder. Troy was dead to the world well into his fifties, but was buried in 1965, his early sixties (2. 5). The death of the main character, although unseen, is a very crucial part of the play. There could be many reasons why his death was not shown to the audience. The reason could possibly be along the lines of, Troy gave up and committed suicide, or he fought the tough battle but was just too old to come out on top, or maybe depression from his family’s attitude towards him got the best of him. We are uninformed therefore the audience must come to their own conclusions. Troy died in 1965 around the age of sixty-sixty one. The audience is uninformed as to why he passed, since it is unstated in the play we can assume it was not a major, epic death but more of a passing due to old age. Looking closer into the story the audience can tell, although buried in 1965, he died much sooner. He was cast out of the hearts of Rose, Cory, Bono, Lyons, and Gabriel before his time came. Although he gained the promotion at his job, what he lost could devastate the soul and spirit of any living creature. His family would never see him in the same light again. Once he is buried, they will continue to live their lives. Death threw him a ‘ fastball on the outside corner’, but Troy just swung with a miss, leading to his final strikeout.