

Unfencing the Fence: The Wife as Mediator in August Wilson's *Fences*

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Abstract: This paper aims at demonstrating the fact that, although the term “fences” in August Wilson's *Fences* is generally associated with “division” and “separation” by literary critics, “fences” in this play is equally a unifying agent— an enclosure. The playwright depicts a wife who is very instrumental in uniting family members, thus gathering them behind the fence built by her husband. The fence here therefore fosters family cohesion. Formalism and Feminism will both shed light on the division suggested by the metaphor of the fence and the wife's ability to break these divisions and convert this fence into a unifying enclosure around the family unit.

Keywords: fence, wife, mediator, August Wilson.

Introduction: The metaphor of the fence in August Wilson's *fences* has been unambiguously associated with “division” or “separation” by several critics. In Thaddeus Wakefield's *The Family in Twentieth Century American Drama*, the author avers that in America's twentieth century capitalistic society “powerful economic “fences” are constructed which separate family members from one another” (42-43). This image of the fence as divisive agent is further highlighted when Wakefield adds that Troy (Wilson's hero) is fenced off from his wife and children because he views them as commodities rather than individuals (ibid). In other words, the fact that Troy reduces his relationship with his wife and children to the cost he has to incur in order to properly take care of them makes it impossible for him to properly commune with them the way a husband and father should commune with his wife and children. Money or materialism thus acts as a fence that distances Wilson's protagonist from other family members. In “Safe at Home?": August Wilson's *Fences*,” Matthew Roudané reiterates this same idea when he says of Troy that the latter has suffered profoundly from the white world that has fenced him in athletically, professionally and emotionally (*A Cambridge Companion to August Wilson* 135). Roudané is thus alluding to Troy's marginalisation by the white hegemonic world of the American society that has made it impossible for him to become a baseball celebrity by preventing him from playing in the country's major leagues. The same system initially limits other Blacks and Troy to the work of garbage carriers while the Whites drive the lorries. These discriminations embitter Troy and alienate him from the society against which he nurses animosity. While Wakefield identifies money or twentieth-century American society materialism as the fence that fragments family relationship in this play, Roudané's observation points to racism as being

the fence that makes it impossible for Troy to relate with the rest of society. This article distinguishes itself from the works of these critics because it focuses on the unifying role played by the metaphor of the fence in Wilson's play. It seeks to prove that, thanks to the mediating role of the wife in Wilson's *Fences*, the fence fosters cohesion by fencing in the members of Troy Maxson's household because Troy's wife successfully breaks the different barriers that separate family members. The paper will attempt to answer the following questions: what are the different barriers that emerge in Wilson's play as a result of the playwright's use of the metaphor of the fence? How does the wife's role as mediator break down these barriers thus transforming the fence from a divisive agent into a unifying agent that fences in her family? Formalism and the feminist critical theory will be used to analyse Wilson's play.

I. Clarification of Key Concepts and Terms: In *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, Raman Selden alludes to the fact that formalism accrued from formalists' decision to produce a theory of Literature concerned with the writer's technical process and craft skill (7). In other words, formalists perceive literature as an autonomous discipline and literary texts as being self-referential. Viktor Shklovsky, the Russian Formalist, sums up the early phase of formalism when he defines Literature as "the sum total of all stylistic devices employed in it" (quoted by Selden 8). Thus, formalism advocates the close reading of texts with a view of deciphering their meanings by exploring what is specifically literary in these texts. In *Drama: An Introduction*, Robert Diyanni re-iterates this formalist restriction to the literary text when he notes that formalists posit that the proper concern of literary criticism is with the text itself and not with its literary history, the life of the author, its social or literary contexts (628). He adds that a formalistic reading of a play should focus on how the play begins and ends; the relationship between the characters, the conflicts that oppose them as well as the recurrent motives of their actions; the dramatist's use of stage setting details; the play's structural patterns and the elements of the plot that lead toward the play's climax as well as the determining significance of its resolution or denouement (629). This critical theory will make it possible for this article to shed light on the different images used by Wilson to highlight the metaphor of the fence in his play. In conformity with formalists' thought that Literature is a special use of language, the paper will study the playwright's use of language to produce an aesthetic that emphasises man's divisive tendencies in addition to the different aspects of the play earlier cited. The depiction of the different barriers represented in the play is necessary in the first part of the article so that the wife's role of breaking these barriers through mediation will be patent in the second part of the article. Meanwhile, Simone de Beauvoir's and Kate Millett's feminist stances will be handy for the analysis of the wife's role of mediator in *Fences*. In *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir evokes the woman's subordination by noting that man "defines the human, not woman" (quoted by Selden 129). Hence, man is the "One" while the woman is the "Other." Five main foci are used to distinguish women

from men. First, there is the biological focus that hinges on the premise that "woman is nothing but a womb" (quoted by Selden 130). Kate Millett reiterates this idea when she notes in *Sexual Politics* that patriarchy (the rule of the father) is the cause of women's oppression. She posits that patriarchy treats "the female as an inferior male" and the woman is kept under subjection both in civil and domestic life (quoted by Selden 132). Millett contends that women are thus subjected to sex-role stereotyping from the earliest age. Consequently, she opines that gender refers to a culturally acquired sexual identity that is psychological and not natural. Stated otherwise, sex roles attributed to the woman do not naturally accrue from her biological make-up. Rather, society gets her to accept and fit into the pattern drawn by this same society.

Another focus used by men to subjugate women is that of experience. Given that women have a different perceptual and emotional life from men, they have different ideas about what is important or not. And throughout the ages, in different societies, it is what men have considered to be important or relevant that has been considered to be so. Meanwhile, from the point of view of discourse it has been argued that women have been fundamentally oppressed by a male-dominated language. From the point of view of "the unconscious" as a point of divergence between men and women, the female has been associated with "process" that tends to undermine "male" discourse which is considered as being homogenous and closed. Hence, everything that initiates or advocates a free play of meanings and prevents "closure" is considered as being "female." Female sexuality is therefore considered to be revolutionary, subversive, heterogeneous and "open." Finally, from the point of view of the woman's social and economic condition, Marxist feminists have established a link between changing social and economic conditions and the changing balance of power between the sexes. And since the woman's social and economic conditions are generally subordinate to the man's, men wield more power than women. The feminist critical theory will make it possible for this article to shed light on how the wife uses the role given to her to break barriers in her family.

The terms "fence", "wife," and "mediator" will also be clarified. The *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary: A Merriam-Webster* defines "fence" as "a means of protection, a barrier intended to prevent escape or intrusion or to mark a boundary." In "Safe at Home?": August Wilson's *Fences*," Matthew Roudané stresses the divisive dimension of the play when he observes that "fences, in this play, do not make good neighbours; they divide. Fences symbolize separateness, otherness, an inability to communicate with self and the other." (*The Cambridge Companion to August Wilson* 140). He further stresses the role of the fence as an agent of separation when he compares Wilson's fences to Robert Frost's. He states that like Frost's, Wilson's fences "represent something that distances Troy from the other and from the self" (ibid). Meanwhile, the *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary: A Merriam-Webster* defines the wife as "a woman acting in a specified capacity; a married woman." In *Reconstructing Womanhood*, Hazel V. Carby notes that within the cult of

true womanhood, wifehood and motherhood were glorified as the “purpose of a woman's being” (26). She sheds light on both the engulfing and restrictive nature of the woman's responsibility as a wife and mother when she adds that the home was the sphere of all the woman's action and her prime objective in life was to get married; please her husband; bear and rear many sons as well as care for the household. Ann Dally's remark in her book *Inventing Motherhood* is equally illuminating as she avers that in twentieth century American society, motherhood was depicted as “the ultimate figure of religious purity and nurturance, according to strict Victorian standards” (17). Thus stated simply, the mother was considered to be an incarnation of piety as well as affectionate care and attention. Such qualities can only dispose the wife and mother for the role of mediator that she plays in *Fences*. Finally, the word “mediator” is defined as one that mediates; especially one that mediates between parties at variance in the *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary: A Merriam-Webster*. The same dictionary defines “mediate” as the act of interposing between parties in order to reconcile them. This paper will therefore examine how, in view of the many fences that distance family members from each other, the wife acts as intermediary in order to get the dissenting parties to agree hence breaking the fence that distances them. The fence changes therefore from being a divisive agent to being a unifying agent.

II. The Metaphor of the Fence as a Divisive Agent: The partially built fence that surrounds Troy Maxson's house and which the hero finishes building by the end of the play is metaphorically represented in the play through strained family relationships in many ways. The first metaphor of the fence features in the initial stage direction of the play. Talking of the Black's disadvantaged position as he seeks to make fortune in the city, Wilson notes that while the city offered limitless opportunity to European immigrants, the “descendants of African slaves were offered no such welcome or participation” (*Drama: An Introduction* 345). Hence, race features here as a barrier to the Black's achievement of success in this town. Troy's lack of skill in any trade when he gets to the North only makes things worse. He steals to survive and eventually kills a man to stay alive. This only further shackles him as he is thrown into prison – another fence (*Drama: An Introduction* 1.4.569).

Troy's being in prison further fragments his relationship with Lyons's mother who finds fifteen years too long to wait for the incarcerated Troy. This fragmentation endures in Troy's relationship with his first son, Lyons. In effect, Troy finds it impossible to relate with Lyon the way a father should relate with his son. When he disapproves of his thirty-four-year old son's upbringing and lifestyle, the latter evokes Troy's absence from his life as being the reason for their inability to understand each other. Lyons sheds light on the enduring nature of their difference in these words.

Lyons: You can't change me, Pop. I'm thirty-four years old. If you wanted to change me, you should have been there when I was growing up. I come by to see you ... ask for ten dollars and you

want to talk about how I was raised. You don't know nothing about how I was raised. (*Drama: An Introduction* 1.2.551-552).

If the nurturing Lyons receives poses as a cause of discord between Troy and the former, it is as a result of the fact that Troy's imprisonment wrested him from Lyons's mother and the boy. He therefore was not there to raise the boy whose upbringing he disapproves of. Thus, the prison walls emerge as the fence that breaks the relationship between Troy, his son's mother and his son. And although father and son attempt to uphold the filial relationship that binds them later, it is obvious that they find it difficult to bond.

In *The Family in Twentieth Century American Drama*, Wakefield ascribes Troy's inability to bond with Lyons and the rest of his family to the commodification of family relationships ambient in the families of the highly capitalistic, modern American society. Wakefield observes that when Troy specifically asks what Lyons comes 'popping [him] for?' "he is acknowledging that his own paternity is verbalized by his own son through the exchange of money" (38). The author adds that outside money, Troy has no relationship with his son. This is true given that Lyons stops by in the play only every Friday night, Friday being payday. He generally does so in order to borrow some money from his father and, on one occasion, to refund money which he had borrowed. Troy equally shows little attachment to his son who entreats him in vain to come and watch him play music with his band. In fact, it is this very life of a musician that Troy disapproves of. Materialism is therefore an additional barrier to the father-son bonding in this play. This same materialism acts as a rift between Troy and his wife, Rose. When Troy betrays his wife by committing adultery with Alberta after eighteen years of marriage, he argues that he sought relaxation in Alberta's arms because it offered him a haven from his responsibility as a father and family head. Talking of Alberta, he states that

Troy: it's just...she gives me a different.....a different understanding about myself. I can step out of this house and get away from the pressures and problems...be a different man, I ain't got to wonder how I'm gonna pay the bills or get the roof fixed. I can just be a part of myself that I ain't never been. (*Drama: An Introduction* 2.1.575).

If heedlessness acts as the unifying agent of Troy and Alberta as the former suggests above, that implies that the mindfulness born of family responsibility acts as a barrier against bonding between family members; and between husband and wife in the case of Troy and Rose. But complementary to family responsibilities is the appeal of Alberta's physical outlook. Both Troy and Bono admit the fact she is attractive with her big legs and broad hips. This is what attracts the men and Alberta chooses Troy amongst her admirers. He becomes her lover at the expense of his relationship with his wife. Alberta and the haven that her arms offer become so much of an obstacle to Troy's relationship with his wife that the latter is not ready to give up the relationship even when Rose asks him to do so. He apparently cherishes the carefree laughter he enjoys in

Alberta's company so much so that he is ready to jeopardise his relationship with Rose for it. Because of his relationship with Alberta, Troy finds his wife's attention so stifling that he asks her to give him "a little time to [himself] and "some space" for himself (*Drama: An Introduction* 2.2.578). They do not talk to each other for six months after Troy talks to Rose about Alberta and informs her of the fact that he is going to have a baby with the latter. And although he reminds Rose of the fact that he has always come home when the latter asks him if he will come back home, Rose emphasises the lack of communication and disharmony in which they have lived. But when she insists that Troy should come back home immediately after work this time around, the latter— in his attempt to prove that he has always lived up to his responsibility as the man and the husband— instead mentions a number of factors that have separated them. This is what transpires between the two spouses:

Rose: I want you to come home tomorrow after work.

Troy: Rose.... I don't mess up my pay. You know that now. I take my pay and I give it to you. I don't have no money but what you give me back. I just want to have a little time to myself... a little time to enjoy life.

Rose: What about me? When's my time to enjoy life?

Troy: I don't know what to tell you, Rose, I'm doing the best I can.

Rose: You ain't been home from work but time enough to change your clothes and run out ... and you wanna call that the best you can do? (*Drama: An Introduction* 2.2.578).

The first evidence that Troy evokes here to prove that he is right by Rose is the fact that he never wastes his pay but gives it all to her. Yet even as Troy thus justifies himself, he unwittingly cites one of the fences that separate him from his wife— money. He apparently so commodifies his relationship with his wife as he does that with his son that he reduces his responsibility vis-à-vis Rose and Cory to that of taking care of them materially and financially. With respect to this, Wakefield posits in *The Family in Twentieth Century American Drama* that "Troy Maxson's relationships with his children and wife are consistently and directly related to money" (37). It is obvious that Troy's mistaken conviction that honouring his financial commitment is all that is necessary to be the model husband affects his relationship with Rose. As mentioned earlier, money poses as a fence that separates husband from wife.

The second fence is Taylor's where Troy hangs out with the other men. Taylor's is symbolic of the male, patriarchal world that leaves no room for the intrusion of the wife's presence. Feminine presence that is admitted in this setting is only that which promotes male chauvinism. Appealing and unmarried ladies like Alberta are welcome to this milieu as their presence enlivens the men's time together. While these men swill down alcohol, they satisfy their ego by making passes at such ladies. Troy and Bono discuss how several men endeavour to seduce Alberta. Mention is made of the fact that Troy even offers her a drink twice (*Drama: An Introduction* 1.1.544). And as far as Troy is concerned, this world should

be totally inaccessible to Rose (as a wife). When Bono and he “transport” this patriarchal world to his house by discussing Alberta and Troy’s crush for her, Rose’s attempt to be part of the conversation when she turns up is rebuffed. Troy chauvinistically states that “This is men talk” (*Drama: An Introduction* 1.1.545). Hence Taylor’s— as a men’s world— features as a fence that separates Troy from Rose. The strict restriction of this world to men leads to the man’s separation from the woman as a result of gender role distribution. As far as Troy is concerned, Rose should be limited to the kitchen (where she is expected to cook) and the bedroom (where she is expected to satisfy his sexual urges). He tells Rose several times in front of Bono to prepare because he will need her in bed. Yet he does not hesitate to keep her at arm’s length when it suits him to do so. That is why he can afford to ask her for some time and space to himself so that he can enjoy his life.

Even more divisive is Troy’s selfishness. Wilson’s hero is so enveloped in self that he finds it impossible to properly relate with his wife. This is the third fence that emerges between Rose and he in the exchange above. Troy conceives his timetable such that it is convenient for him as an individual and not for them as a couple. Although he claims that he has always come back home every day of the year, it is stated that he does so in order to have a change of clothes and go out again. He justifies his actions by telling his wife that he behaves in this way so that he can enjoy himself. And when Rose, whose happiness ought to be his prior concern asks him about her, his answer is that he does not know. It is obvious that that is the least of his concerns. In effect, this same self-centredness gets Troy to find nothing wrong with his extra-marital affair with Alberta. Because his ego (which he calls his heart) does not reproach him for it, he says that he finds nothing wrong with it (*Drama: An Introduction* 2.3.580). It is equally the same selfishness that prompts him to refuse to stop seeing Alberta when his wife requires that he does so. Raynell, born of Troy’s relationship with Alberta, is another fence that separates Troy both from Rose and Cory. When Alberta dies while giving birth to this child and Troy brings her home, Rose finds it difficult to accept the child. But when she finally resolves to do so, she shuts Troy out of her life in these terms:

Rose: Okay, Troy... you’re right. I’ll take care of your baby for you... cause...like you say...she’s innocent...and you can’t visit the sins of the father upon the child. A motherless child has got a hard time. From right now...this child got a mother. But you a womanless man. (*Drama: An Introduction* 2.3.580-581).

One of the reasons why Rose finds Alberta’s pregnancy disheartening is the fact that, as she tells Troy, she had dreamt of having one united family in which all the children would share the same father and mother. This, she hoped, would make up for her personal experience of family life because in her family, each of them had had a different father or mother. Thus, Raynell’s presence in Troy’s house could pose a threat to the cohesion Rose had hoped her family would have. She would now have to break the fence in order to mother another woman’s child as she has had

to do for Lyons. That is probably why she initially finds it difficult to accept to be the mother of Troy's child. But when she finally decides to do so because the baby is innocent and cannot be held responsible for its parents' sins, she makes up her mind to punish Troy who is responsible for bringing in this potential "fence" in the family. She decides to shut him out of her heart. In "Protecting Home: Patriarchal Authority in August Wilson's *Fences*," Eric Sterling notes that "Raynell supplants Troy as the primary object of love and affection in Rose's life" (55). In the second scene of Act One, Rose sings this song which presages the fence she will eventually build around herself to parry the pain that Troy's infidelity will cause her:

Rose [sings]: Jesus be a fence around me everyday
 Jesus I want you to protect me as I travel on my own
 Jesus, be a fence all around me every day.

(*Drama: An Introduction* 1.2.552-553).

This song augurs her emotional and psychological break from Troy. As if in anticipation of Troy's infidelity, Rose seeks protection here in Jesus. It is therefore not surprising that she later on finds refuge in the church where she spends most of her time after the rift between them. At one time of the play, she even bakes cakes for a bake sale in church and entreats her husband not to eat any of the ones she leaves behind. When he seeks to know at what time she will be back from church, she tells him it is no use "studying her" (*Drama: An Introduction* 2.4.581-582). She is no longer available for him and that is why she tells him that his dinner is on the stove and he should heat it when he is ready to eat. It is patent that Rose seeks a balm for her pain in the church which, in the course of shielding her from Troy, poses as a wall between Rose and her husband. Meanwhile Raynell does not only pose as a wall in the relationship between Rose and Troy. Her intrusion also puts an end to the semblance of father-son relationship that existed between Troy and his son, Cory. Racism—the fence between Troy and the Whites that makes it impossible for Troy to make it as a baseball player—also intrudes in the relationship between Troy and Cory. Troy's bitter experience goads him to interfere with Cory's dream of becoming a football star. He does not want his son to stake on football only to get disappointed later on. That is why he declares that the recruiter is not welcome to see him and tells coach Zellman that Cory cannot play football. Unfortunately, Cory misconstrues his action. He tells his father that the latter is scared that he (Cory) will make it where Troy had failed (*Drama: An Introduction* 1.4.570). Hence football and Troy's past experience act as a barrier here. It is this already degraded relationship that Raynell's arrival in the house totally destroys. Cory becomes so contemptuous of his father that he refuses to ask the latter to excuse him and make way for him when he meets the old man seated at the entrance of the house such that it is impossible to pass. He wants to step over Troy. Meanwhile, his father, who is still self-assertive though old, insists on being given due respect. Cory refuses to accede to his father's demand. And in so doing, he supports his father's destitution by his mother following the latter's adulterous act that results into the birth

of Raynell. He now so disdains his father that he is ready to face him in a physical fight. Christine Birdwell alludes to the savagery with which father and son face each other when she remarks in "Death as a Fastball on the Outside Corner": Fences' Troy and the American Dream" that "father and son vie for the bat which is transformed into a weapon and savage combat erupts" (91).

It is worth noting that this is not the first time that Cory faces his father in physical combat. The first time he does so is following the dissension between his parents when Troy first informs Rose of his extra-marital relationship with Alberta and the latter's pregnancy. When Rose is disappointed with Troy and accuses the latter of "taking" without "giving" anything in return, Troy gets angry and grabs her tightly such that it hurts. He does not heed Rose's entreaties that he should let her go because it hurts. Cory suddenly comes up from the rear, grabs his father and deals the latter a blow that knocks him down (*Drama: An Introduction* 2.1.577). It can thus be said that Raynell is connected to the two physical confrontations that oppose father to son. Unlike the first time, Troy outpowers Cory and orders him out of his yard. As the young man stands on the other side of the fence to say that he will come back for his things later, the fence (which is now complete) plays its role of distancing Cory— not only from his father to whom he has never been close— but also from his mother and Raynell. And since Troy is responsible for the fact that Cory can no longer live in that house, Troy features as a metaphor of the fence that fragments family relationship here. Hence, it can be concluded that the prison, racism, money/materialism, Taylor's, Alberta, Troy's selfishness and Raynell all pose as fences that variously separate Troy from his society, wife and children in Wilson's play. This justifies the perception of the fence as a divisive agent. Presently, the wife's mediating role will be examined with the view of showing how she is instrumental in breaking these fences thus converting the metaphor of the fence into a unifying factor- an enclosure.

III. The Mediating Role of the Wife and the Fence as Enclosure:

Having highlighted the different metaphors of the fence that distance family members from each other in Wilson's play, this section will now examine how the wife and mother destroys these barriers to family cohesion thus converting the fence into an enclosure that gathers rather than divides. Bono mentions the fence as enclosure in the excerpt below:

Cory: I don't see why mama want a fence around the house noways. Troy: Damn if I know either. What the hell she keeping out with it? She ain't got nothing nobody want. Bono: Some people build fences to keep people out...and other people build fences to keep people in. Rose wants to hold onto you all. She loves you.

(*Drama: An Introduction* 2.1. 572)

It is patent that both Cory and Troy perceive the fence as a divisive agent in the excerpt above although they do so from the point of view of Rose's desire to separate external intruders from her family. But Bono corrects this perception of the fence and alludes to its unifying dimension. He alludes to Rose's yearning to keep her family as one cohesive unit behind

the fence. That is why she asks her husband to build a fence around the yard. And in order to do so, she resorts to the role given to her as a woman by her society. The efforts she makes can be deciphered in various instances in the play. Although her dream of having a family in which all the children have the same parents is first shattered when she marries Troy who already has a child (Lyons) with another woman, Rose works hard at being a mother to the thirty-four-year old Lyons who no longer lives with them. The latter thinks of visiting them only on Fridays so that he can borrow some money from his father as earlier stated. And although it is very obvious that Lyons's visits are not disinterested as Troy repeatedly points out, Rose insists that Troy should accede to Lyons's demand each time. She takes advantage of the fact that it is her responsibility to manage the family income to run the house to act as a mediator between her husband and his son. As such, each time Lyons comes for money and Troy is disinclined to lend him any, Rose does so. It is in acknowledgement of this fact that Wakefield comments that although she is not Lyons's biological mother, Lyons considers her to be his mother "because she doles out the money" (*The Family in Twentieth Century American Drama* 39).

But Rose's motherly role goes beyond lending Lyons the money he needs. She does not only press Lyons to stay for supper several times, but equally shows interest and concern for Bonnie— Lyon's steady girl. She seeks to know in which hospital Bonnie works when the latter states that the young woman has had work in a hospital. She also insists that Lyons should bring Bonnie along the next time he is coming to visit them (*Drama: An Introduction* 1.4.569). It is apparent that Lyons bonds better with Rose than he does with his father who is neither inclined to give him money nor to go and watch him play music at the Grill. In fact, the best Troy does is to disapprove of Lyons's lifestyle. One can therefore conclude that it is because Rose accepts Lyons for who he is that the latter feels free to come for his father's burial even though he is in prison when Troy dies. Rose probably informs the prison officials of Troy's death so that they can let Lyons attend it. Rose is equally very instrumental in breaking the barrier between Troy and Cory. She severally insists that Troy should allow Cory to play football although she does not succeed in doing so. She is not around when Troy finally throws Cory out. But it is apparent in the play that she keeps in touch with the latter. When Troy finally dies, she informs Cory so that he can seek permission to attend his father's burial. And when the latter finally comes yet states that he will not attend it, Rose insists that he should. Diagnosing Cory's problem as being that of wanting to break loose from his father's shadows, she observes that not attending Troy's funeral will not make Cory a man. It is worth nothing that Rose's role of cooking and serving food gives her access to the man's world which she would not otherwise be able to access. It is in an attempt to enquire whether Bono will stay for supper that she stumbles on the men talking about Alberta. Although Troy successfully keeps her out of what he terms "men talk," Rose will take part in such conversations subsequently. That is how she gets to telling

Troy about Cory's recruitment by a college football team. She is also part of the discussion when the men talk about Troy's complaint to Mr Rand with respect to the unfair treatment of black workers. It is significant that all of the action of Wilson's play takes place in Troy's yard which is enclosed by the partially built fence at the start of the play. The nine scenes of the play that comprise the interactions of members of the Maxson household and their friend, Bono, as they endeavour to live in harmony; the confrontations between Troy and Rose as well as Troy and Cory; Troy's consequent marginalisation and isolation; are all set in the Maxson's household. Every action that takes place elsewhere, however significant to the development of the plot, is simply reported on stage. It is worth noting that these reports are also done by the characters who are once more gathered in Troy's yard. If the home is the sphere of all the woman's actions as Carby posits, then by wholly setting this play in the home, Wilson puts the man's world and actions out of the home under the woman's jurisdiction. This empowers Rose in her role of mediator as she strives to keep her family united in the enclosure of the fence.

In effect, her actions within the confines of the home have far-reaching effects that break fences even outside the Maxson household. Not only does Troy's imprisonment fragment his relationship with Lyons's mother and the boy, but it also distances him from the rest of society. He refers to his marginalisation when he remarks that after serving his prison sentence, "Everything lined up against [him]" (*Drama: An Introduction* 2.1.576). He adds that marrying Rose, having Cory and a "halfway decent job," saved him from a life of criminality that would earn him another imprisonment or from the reckless life of a drunk. From every indication, Rose is the ideal wife. It is worth noting that Troy marries Rose because the latter makes it clear that she is unwilling to indulge in any fling. It is therefore thanks to the latter's stance that Troy becomes a respectable, married man and head of family. Bono confesses that his friend's choice of Rose accounts for the fact that he has followed Troy around all these years (*Drama: An Introduction* 2.1.572). This social stability that Troy enjoys also prompts him to appreciate his wife. Grateful and content, he is faithful and devoted to her during the first eighteen years of their marriage. It is consequently not surprising that Rose desires to preserve the unity of the family they have succeeded in founding. This makes Bono's observation that Rose wants a fence because she wants to keep her family members in pertinent. Interestingly, Troy unconsciously subscribes to Rose's yearning although he overtly states that he does not know why she wants their yard to be fenced. Troy's adherence to Rose's wish for their family to remain united can be deduced from the type of wood he uses to build the fence. Opting for hard, red wood—that is more difficult to handle and apparently more expensive—when soft, pine wood could do suggests that Wilson's hero subscribes to the idea that the fence is necessary "to keep [them] in" more than he cares to admit. The effectiveness of the fence at doing so can even be judged by the fact that Troy repeatedly goes out and eventually indulges in an extra-marital affair with Alberta only when the

fence has not yet been completed. By the time it is evident that the fence has been completed in Act Two, Troy is a solitary man who keeps indoors. It is queer that even when Bono cursorily visits him and informs him of the fact that he is on his way to Skinner's where a group of men regularly meet to play dominoes, Troy does not volunteer to join him. Neither the company of his good old friend and faithful companion nor the company of the men folk is attractive enough to draw him out-of-doors. He prefers to sit on the step and drink in solitude. This suggests that the fence is indeed playing its role of keeping him in as Rose initially desires.

The climax of this play as well as the play's denouement both stress Rose's primary role of keeping the family united. At the climax of the play when Rose is shocked by the news of Troy's infidelity, she quickly recovers and seeks a way forward by asking Troy whether he is ready to give up the relationship with Alberta. It is Troy's refusal to give up that relationship that creates a rift between these two. Rose attempts again to get reconciled to her husband six months after when she asks him to come straight home after work. Once again, her efforts are rebuffed by Troy who wants a little time and space to himself in order to enjoy life. It is apparent that Troy's relationship with Alberta is responsible for this distancing because he adds that he has to go and see his lover who is likely to have the baby early and has been admitted into hospital. It can be said that Rose's decision to find refuge in church and her intransigence when Troy later seeks her help for the nursing of Raynell are triggered by Troy's refusal to cooperate. And in so doing, Troy builds a fence that "keep[s] people out" to borrow from Bono. Antithetical to Rose's notion of what a fence ought to do in family circles, Troy poses as a threat to the family's unity in various ways. Troy Maxson's huge frame, impressive character traits and vantage position as family head make him a formidable fence indeed. Both Rose and Cory attest to the fact that Troy is a very domineering person and an engrossing personality. Cory complains of the fact that while he was growing up, Troy was like a shadow that followed him everywhere; weighed on him and sank into his flesh. It is therefore in a bid to assert his manhood that Cory violently stands up to his father twice in the play. Rose equally complains that when she marries her late husband, he so fills the house, her existence and her being that pieces of their lives get mixed up to become one. That is probably why Troy's infidelity and request that Rose should give him a little time and space are such a blow to her. Yet it is this monument of strength whose convictions and decisions fragments many family relationships that Rose successfully reduces to nought. Breaking the fence of not being Raynell's mother, Rose accepts the child as hers at the expense of her relationship with Troy. Although she continues to cook, she is no longer at his beck and call. When Troy seeks to know when she will be back from church, she states that it is of no use for him to study her movements. She is so effective at reducing Troy to nought that Cory can afford to say this to his father's face.

Cory: I ain't got to say excuse me to you. You don't count around here no more. (*Drama: An Introduction* 2.3.583)

Cory earlier states that Troy is nothing other than a tipsy, old man who

sits on the stairs singing to himself. That is why he attempts to pass over him to enter the house. And when Troy reminds him of the fact that the house is his, Cory retorts that he has had to seize Uncle Gabe's money to buy the house and has thrown the latter out. He declares that his father is nothing other than a crazy old man. That is why he thinks that his father does not count in that house any more.

Slighted by Rose and defied by Cory whom he finally throws out, Troy spends the rest of his days in loneliness. Even Bono can no longer hang around with him because Troy's trips as a lorry driver keep the two men apart. It is therefore under the weight of isolation and age that Troy spends the rest of his days. It can be construed that his unappealing condition favours his sudden death. Rose relates how he stands by the tree in the yard alone and on swinging the bat, just falls over. It is evident that the exile on which Rose puts him is too much for him. Hence, from the point of view of the play's beginning and end, it can be inferred that Rose, as the mediator who strives for the cohesion of her family behind the fence, gets the better of Troy who— though the family head— stands in the way of his family's unity. It is significant that every metaphor of the fence analysed in part one of this paper revolves around the character of Troy. And when Troy throws Cory out thereby attempting to sever the link between Rose and her son, he emerges as a formidable barrier and menace to the family's unity. Every clue of Rose's greater assertion in the play therefore signifies her success at keeping her family together, sometimes at the expense of Troy— the barrier. And several of such clues that feature in the play have already been highlighted.

Finally, the play's structural pattern emphasises Rose's ascendancy over Troy as she seeks to keep her family together behind the fence. Wilson's play is written in two acts with Act One comprising four scenes while Act Two comprises five scenes. Both Troy and Rose feature in every single scene of Act One and in the first four scenes of Act Two. But not only is Rose the only character of the two who features in the fifth and final scene of Act Two (which is also the last scene of the play), but she is the pivot around whom the events of this scene turn. It is important to note that these events revolve around the funeral service of Troy Maxson, Wilson's hero and the major obstacle to Rose's endeavours to preserve the family united behind the fence. And in spite of the fact that Troy is Wilson's hero in this play, the fact that his death is not staged but is just reported can entail that he is not very much prized. He is eclipsed by Rose who is made to relate his death. Equally vital is the fact that Bono, Lyons, Cory, Raynell and even the insane Gabe— who is allowed by the hospital authorities to attend his brother's burial— all gather around her. The knell of Troy's total ejection is sounded when Gabe asks the dead Troy to get ready because he is going to ask St Peter to open the gates of heaven so that Troy can get in. And although the trumpet he blows to mark the opening of these gates does not sound, his weird dance and howl do so because it is stated in the stage direction that at the end of his performance "*the gate of heaven stand open as wide as God's closet.*" The last

words of the play are Gabriel's as he ushers his brother out of this world into the next. Troy—the fence—is ushered out of the family fence into the gates of eternity. The family can now remain united around Rose in the enclosure of the fence that surrounds their yard. Hence the fence no longer divides but unites. This paper has proven that, in August Wilson's *Fences*, the metaphor of the fence does not only divide but also unites. The fence that Troy builds around the yard at his wife's request is intended to enclose family members hence keeping them in unity. As Rose, Lyons, Cory, Raynell, Gabe and even Bono gather in the last scene of the play to bury their husband, father, brother and friend, they are not only united by the grief of his loss. Clustered around Rose, they are ready to live on as a united family.

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