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August Wilson: Completing the Twentieth-Century Cycle

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Just prior to his death in 2005, August Wilson, arguably the most important American playwright of the last quarter-century, completed an ambitious cycle of ten plays, each set in a different decade of the twentieth century. Known as the Twentieth-Century Cycle or the Pittsburgh Cycle, the plays, which portrayed the struggles of African-Americans, won two Pulitzer Prizes for Drama, a Tony Award for Best Play, and seven New York Drama Critics Circle Awards. *August Wilson: Completing the Twentieth-Century Cycle* is the first volume devoted to the last five plays of the cycle individually—*Jitney*, *Seven Guitars*, *King Hedley II*, *Gem of the Ocean*, and *Radio Golf*—and in the context of Wilson's entire body of work.

Editor Alan Nadel's *May All Your Fences Have Gates: Essays on the Drama of August Wilson*, a work Henry Louis Gates called definitive, focused on the first five plays of Wilson's cycle. This new collection examines from myriad perspectives the way Wilson's final works give shape and focus to his complete dramatic opus. It contains an outstanding and diverse array of discussions from leading Wilson scholars and literary critics. Together, the essays in Nadel's two volumes give Wilson's work the breadth of analysis and understanding that this major figure of American drama merits.

Contributors

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Bibliography**

- Sales Rank: #2154448 in Books
- Published on: 2010-05-16
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.00" h x .60" w x 6.00" l, .75 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 248 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

“In this companion to *May All Your Fences Have Gates*, we have a timely addition to the growing scholarship on August Wilson’s works. The focus on the second half of the cycle presents certain problems, not least of which stem from the fact that Wilson’s plays were written ‘out of order,’ simultaneously pointing forward and looking back. In less capable hands, this aspect might be ignored and the plays studied decade by decade, in a linear fashion. This volume does not fall into that trap. Instead, Nadel and his colleagues address the location of each play within the larger context of the cycle, for the second half of the cycle and the entire collection alike. As a result, we see that almost any theme or motif within a single text finds echoes and reverberations in other plays, thus affording us a view of Wilson’s overall scheme and challenging future scholarship of any single play to embrace this holistic view of the cycle. No longer is it enough to say that Wilson wrote a play or plays: whenever we consider any of his plays we have to acknowledge the cycle. This book ensures that perspective, one that is unique in the history of dramatic literature.”—Kim Pereira, author, *August Wilson and the African-American Odyssey*

"In this carefully crafted volume, Alan Nadel pairs a variety of essays on the plays of August Wilson's century cycle. Among the many strengths of this collection is that the selections are well connected thematically without being repetitive and that the diverse interpretations are presented in a language and style that are easily accessible, even for general readers. At the same time, the multiplicity of meanings that can be derived from careful readings of the social, cultural, and historical contexts of the cycle will satisfy the most critical scholars."—Sandra Adell, author, *Double-Consciousness/Double Bind: Theoretical Issues in Twentieth-Century Black Literature*

About the Author

Alan Nadel is the Bryan Chair of American Literature and Culture at the University of Kentucky, where he teaches literature and film. He is the editor of *May All Your Fences Have Gates* (Iowa, 1993) and the author of *Invisible Criticism: Ralph Ellison and the American Canon* (Iowa, 1991), *Containment Culture: American Narratives, Postmodernism, and the Atomic Age*, *Flatlining on the Field of Dreams: Cultural Narratives in the Films of President Reagan's America*, and *Television in Black and White America: Race and National Identity*.

Users Review

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