

Although there are several books already on the subject of the Dutch in America, this one deals interestingly with an admittedly limited aspect of their assimilation or lack of it. Besides its clear presentation of the language of Pella, it also sheds suggestive light on the experience of other groups of immigrants, and for this reason should be very useful for a large number of students of ethnicity. A generalist might well start the book with Appendix B, material that Webber prepared for the American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress in 1982, and which contains a good summary of all ethnic aspects of life in Pella.

Coupled with the recent interest in ethnicity and language, this work may encourage more investigation of the way in which native languages have continued to function in this country.

—Phillips G. Davies  
Iowa State University

**August Wilson. *Fences*. (New York: Plume, 1986) 101 pp., \$6.95 paper.**

At the turn of the century, playwrights wrestled with realism and wrought a new theater capable of great poetic and symbolic force. It was an exciting time because artists turned their talents to subjects which had never been deemed fit for the stage. The classic requirements of rank and verse were swept aside as audiences learned that even illiterates could make music with their tongues, and that eloquent, serious exploration of the human condition extended well beyond the provinces of kings and queens.

August Wilson's *Fences* prompts these observations. Wilson is a playwright of vision who has set himself an ambitious goal. *Fences* is the second in a proposed series of plays which will dramatize the African-American experience throughout this century, decade by decade. Wilson sets his play in the quiescent period of the fifties and tells the tale of an extended family headed by 53-year-old Troy Maxim. A sexually active and rebellious youth, Troy spent fifteen years in jail for manslaughter. There, he took up baseball, reformed himself, and became one of the most outstanding players in the old Negro league.

A racist society may have denied him entry in the Major Leagues, but this illiterate man successfully manipulates the system to become the first black to drive a garbage truck in his city. It is not enough. A man of tremendous appetites, Troy betrays his loyal wife, and when his mistress dies in childbirth, he brings his infant daughter home for his wife to raise. She accepts the responsibility, but denies him her bed. His son, Cory, is

starved for affection, yet Troy disdains his pleas for love and refuses him permission to play football at a white college, claiming that Cory's talents will be exploited as were his. As did his father, Troy drives his son away. It's a willful act.

Isolated at home and at work, Troy finishes the fence that encloses the yard of his home which suggests the ways in which this man has closed off his life. But *Fences* does not end here; the last scene takes place eight years later in 1965. Troy has just died and members of his family gather and are reconciled in a powerful musical reprise of Troy's favorite song. We never get to see the way Troy deals with his isolation, but the implication is clear that this giant of a man endured rather than triumphed.

*Fences* is a traditional tragicomedy. Though I find its structure too episodic, on the whole it's a forceful and honest portrait, redeemed by rich, powerful and detailed characterizations. There are elements within it that suggest that Wilson is beginning to break through to explore new forms. What a joy it is to hear Troy defy Death in monologues which may seem tangential to the plot, but may in fact be clues to deeper levels of meaning.

—Robert L. Gilbert  
California State Polytechnic University, Pomona