

Troy's Unfaithfulness with Rose

Posted on October 2, 2019

Marital Betrayal and the Central Conflict in *Fences*

In August Wilson's *Fences*, Troy Maxson's unfaithfulness to Rose is one of the most painful and important conflicts in the play. Troy and Rose have been married for many years, and Rose has dedicated her life to maintaining their home, supporting Troy, and keeping the family together. However, Troy betrays this commitment by having an affair with another woman named Alberta. His affair becomes even more serious when Alberta becomes pregnant and later gives birth to Troy's child. This act of betrayal deeply damages Troy's relationship with Rose and exposes many of the weaknesses in his character. Troy attempts to justify his actions by explaining the pressures and responsibilities of his life, but his explanation does not excuse his unfaithfulness. Instead, it reveals his selfishness, his desire to escape responsibility, and his belief that his needs are more important than Rose's pain. (Wilson, 2015)

Troy cheats on Rose even after years of marriage. This makes his betrayal especially painful because Rose has invested a large part of her life in their relationship. She has stood by him through hardship, domestic struggles, financial problems, and family responsibilities. Rose is not shown as a careless or unloving wife. Instead, she is presented as a loyal woman who has given her time, love, patience, and emotional strength to Troy and the Maxson family. Because of this, Troy's affair with Alberta is not simply a private mistake. It is a violation of the trust and loyalty that Rose has built their marriage upon. (Wilson, 2015)

Troy's Rationalization of Infidelity

Troy makes an effort to justify himself when he tells Rose about the affair. He tries to explain why he was unfaithful and why he became involved with Alberta. According to Troy, the pressures and responsibilities in his life became too heavy. He sees himself as the breadwinner of the family, a man who must work hard, pay bills, maintain the house, and carry the burdens of marriage and fatherhood. He argues that these responsibilities made him feel trapped and that Alberta gave him a way to escape from those pressures. However, this explanation is not a strong reason for cheating. Many people face financial, emotional, and family responsibilities, but those struggles do not justify betrayal. (Wilson, 2015)

Troy explains to Rose that Alberta gives him a different understanding of himself. He says that his relationship with Alberta makes him feel like a different man. Through Alberta, he believes he can temporarily stop thinking about the problems of his household. He does not have to worry about paying bills, fixing the roof, or handling family duties when he is with her. In his mind, the affair

becomes an escape from the life he has built with Rose. This shows that Troy is not simply seeking love; he is seeking freedom from responsibility. Alberta represents a fantasy life where he does not have to answer to anyone or carry the burdens of the home. (Wilson, 2015)

However, Troy's reasoning is selfish because he only considers his own emotional relief and does not consider Rose's suffering. He focuses on how the affair makes him feel, but he ignores what it does to his wife. Rose has also carried burdens in the marriage. She has supported Troy, managed the household, and sacrificed her own desires for the sake of the family. If Troy feels trapped by responsibility, Rose has also lived within those same responsibilities. The difference is that Rose remains committed, while Troy chooses betrayal. This contrast makes Rose appear morally stronger than Troy. (Wilson, 2015)

Masculinity, Narcissism, and Personal Responsibility

Troy's affair also reflects his desire to prove his masculinity. Throughout *Fences*, Troy often presents himself as the man of the house. He believes that his position as provider gives him authority over the family. He works hard and brings money home, but he also uses this role to justify control over others. His masculinity is connected to pride, dominance, and the belief that he has the right to make decisions for the family. By having an affair with Alberta, Troy behaves as if his desires should not be limited by his marriage. He acts as though being a man gives him permission to do what he wants, even when his actions hurt Rose. (Wilson, 2015)

Troy's unfaithfulness can also be interpreted as a sign of narcissistic behavior. A narcissistic person often claims to love others but still acts in ways that harm them. Troy says he is dedicated to his family, but his actions show that he places his own desires above Rose's emotional well-being. He wants the benefits of marriage, including Rose's loyalty, care, and support, but he also wants the freedom to escape from that marriage when it becomes difficult. This contradiction shows his selfishness. He wants Rose to remain faithful and responsible, but he does not hold himself to the same standard. (Wilson, 2015)

Troy's narcissistic traits are visible in the way he explains his betrayal. Instead of fully accepting responsibility, he shifts attention to his struggles and pressures. He presents himself almost as a victim of responsibility, as if marriage and family duties forced him into an affair. This is unfair to Rose because it makes his betrayal seem like a response to his suffering rather than a deliberate choice. Rose does not accept this excuse because she understands that Troy's decision has deeply hurt her. She reminds him that she also had hopes, needs, and dreams, but she gave them to him and the family. Her response shows that Troy has failed to recognize the sacrifices she made. (Wilson, 2015)

Rose's Suffering and Moral Strength

Rose's pain is one of the most powerful parts of the play. Her suffering is not only caused by the affair itself but also by the realization that Troy has taken her love for granted. She has spent years building a life with him, only to discover that he has turned to another woman for comfort and escape. Troy's betrayal forces Rose to see that her loyalty has not been fully valued. This moment changes their marriage permanently. Even though Rose continues to live in the household and later agrees to help raise Alberta's child, her emotional relationship with Troy is broken. (Wilson, 2015)

The birth of Alberta's child makes Troy's unfaithfulness even more serious. The affair is no longer something hidden in the past; it produces a living consequence that enters the Maxson home. When Alberta dies during childbirth, Troy brings the baby, Raynell, to Rose. This creates another moral conflict. Rose has every reason to reject the child because Raynell is a reminder of Troy's betrayal. However, Rose chooses to raise the baby because she understands that the child is innocent. This decision shows Rose's compassion and moral strength. She separates the child from Troy's wrongdoing and refuses to punish Raynell for her father's actions. (Wilson, 2015)

Rose's decision to care for Raynell does not mean she forgives Troy completely or accepts his betrayal. Instead, it shows that Rose is capable of a love and responsibility that Troy lacks. She tells Troy that the child has a mother, but he is now a womanless man. This statement is important because it shows that Rose withdraws herself emotionally from Troy. She may remain in the household, but the marriage has changed. Troy loses the emotional partnership he once had with her. His attempt to escape responsibility through Alberta results in the loss of Rose's trust and love. (Wilson, 2015)

The Symbolic and Familial Consequences of Troy's Betrayal

Troy's affair also connects to the larger theme of fences in the play. A fence can represent protection, separation, boundaries, or emotional distance. Rose wants a fence built around the house because she wants to protect and hold her family together. Troy, however, creates emotional fences between himself and others. His affair with Alberta breaks the boundary of marriage and creates a wall between him and Rose. Instead of protecting the family, Troy damages it. His actions show that he does not understand the emotional meaning of the fence Rose wants to build. (Wilson, 2015)

Troy tries to evade his duties as the provider and husband by entering into a relationship with Alberta. He claims that the obligations of marriage and family life made him look for relief, but this explanation only reveals his weakness. Being a husband and father requires responsibility, patience, honesty, and sacrifice. Troy wants the respect that comes with being the head of the family, but he does not fully accept the moral responsibilities that come with that role. His affair shows that he

wants authority without accountability. (Wilson, 2015)

In conclusion, Troy's unfaithfulness with Alberta is one of the central conflicts in *Fences*. His betrayal of Rose exposes his selfishness, his desire to escape responsibility, and his flawed understanding of masculinity. Although Troy tries to justify the affair by blaming the pressures of family life, his reasoning does not excuse his actions. Rose has also carried burdens, but she remains loyal and morally strong. Troy's affair harms Rose, damages their marriage, and creates lasting consequences for the family. Through this conflict, [August Wilson](#) shows how betrayal can destroy trust and how selfishness can weaken the bonds of family. Rose's response to Troy's betrayal proves her strength, while Troy's actions reveal his moral failure. (Wilson, 2015)

Works Cited

Mays, Kelly J., editor. *The Norton Introduction to Literature*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2015.

Wilson, August. *Fences*. In *The Norton Introduction to Literature*, edited by Kelly J. Mays, W. W. Norton & Company, 2015.