

August Wilson: Completing the Twentieth-Century Cycle

Alan Nadel, Editor

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Ten plays. Ten decades. This is August Wilson's legacy. Wilson, winner of two Pulitzer Prizes, is considered the greatest American playwright of the last half of the twentieth century. In *August Wilson: Completing the Twentieth-Century Cycle*, editor Alan Nadel has brought together a series of essays which recognize Wilson's cycle of ten plays as a structural and thematic unit. This collection also invites those familiar or soon to be familiar with Wilson's work to visit and revisit the plays in the century cycle.

The fourteen essays in this volume focus on pivotal plays to reveal how themes, references, issues, and characters are woven throughout the cycle. Nadel introduces this idea of unity in the opening essay, "Beginning Again, Again: Business in the Street in *Jitney* and *Gem of the Ocean*." The remaining essays are arranged so that the discussion developed in one work with the ideas in others. This happens quite effectively in the essays by Stephen C. Tracy, Donald E. Pease, and Soyica Diggs Colbert which focus on *Seven Guitars* and *King Hedley II* since these plays were conceived as a unit by Wilson. However, this arrangement also works when essays connect thematically. The essays by Sandra B. Shannon, Vivian Gist Spencer and Yvonne Chambers, and Barbara Lewis deal with two non-sequential plays. By focusing on Aunt Ester, these essays deepen our understanding of her central importance in all of the plays.

While students of theater, those interested in works by African American authors, and other fans of Wilson will be rewarded by reading any of these essays, they will gain the greatest pleasure from reading all the essays in sequence. For example, the full impact of the closing essays depends on the reader's experience with the whole collection, and the final three essays in the collection are enriched by the reader's new understanding of the Lazarus complex, the central importance of Aunt Ester, and Wilson's definition of community and responsibility.

Alan Nadel is a professor of literature and film at the University of Kentucky and has written about Ralph Ellison, film, and television. He also edited *May All Your Fences Have Gates* which has been described as "the first comprehensive examination of the work of...August Wilson." Nadel's work as a scholar and editor is a significant contribution to scholarship on August Wilson.

GERALDINE A. RICHARDS (July / August 2010)

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