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IN BLOOM: NURTURING THE LIBERATION PROCESS OF PERFORMER AND
CHARACTER AS ROSE IN AUGUST WILSON'S *FENCES*

By

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B.A., Wesleyan College, 2014

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of the
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements
for the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts in Theatre Arts

Department of Theatre Arts
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

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A Thesis Approved on

May 31, 2017

by the following Thesis Committee:

Professor Johnny Jones

Dr. Baron Kelly

Dr. Siobhan Smith

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents
Hope R. Thomas and Gregory Lockhart Sr.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my committee: Johnny Jones, Dr. Baron Kelly, and Dr. Siobhan Smith. I would also like to thank Nefertiti Burton, the Chair of the Theatre Arts department. I greatly appreciate the immense time and effort each of you have put into my education.

ABSTRACT

IN BLOOM: NURTURING THE LIBERATION PROCESS OF PERFORMER AND CHARACTER AS ROSE IN AUGUST WILSON'S *FENCES*

Paula Olivia Lockhart

May 31, 2017

Rose Maxson is the 43-year-old matriarch of the Maxson household in August Wilson's Pulitzer Prize-winning play, *Fences*. She is a character with an inviolable spirit. The unwavering force she possesses rattles the pages as she relives past loves, loss, experiences heartbreak. Imagine, how I, a then 24-year old devoid of the immense life experience that Rose encompasses found my way into her. The answer is through nurture. To nurture is a process of feeding, protecting, or rearing someone or something. It is a journey with or without a destination. Rose is in a constant state of nurturing her family, but how exactly does she nurture herself? My thesis will examine the approach I took to becoming Rose Maxson through a process that includes the nurturing my creative spirit and fostering of an academic mindset. I will explore these ideas through the lens of fat studies and womanism, an interdisciplinary field of study and sect of feminism developed by Alice Walker.

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SECTION ONE:

NURTURING THE CREATIVE SPIRIT

I consider myself one of the lucky few people who remember the exact moment they decided to act and why it changed their lives. I was ten years old and after a full day of teasing from the annoying little boys in my grade, my mother decided to take me to our local community theatre. I had never seen theatre before and equated it to television. But I would never pass up a moment to spend a night alone with my busy single mom, so we went. And although I did not realize it, my mother knew that a night at the theatre was exactly what I needed.

My mother represents the epitome of the word “nurture” to me. Although the word has several definitions, I am choosing to look at it as a verb through the lens of a process. To nurture someone or something is “care for and protect (someone or something) while they are growing; foster”; another definition is to “help or encourage the development of.” (English.OxfordDictionaries.com 1). My mother was the first person to teach me this meaning through action. She worked multiple jobs, but always seemed to have time to understand my adolescent problems enough to offer amazing advice. She is a constant force that continues to be key in my cultivation as an educated black woman.

After seeing our now defunct community theatre's production of *You're a Good Man Charlie Brown*, my life was changed. That musical brought the *Peanuts* gang to life, telling stories in a way that television could not. The ephemeral nature of theatre captivated me and I became compelled to figure out how I could tell stories onstage and in the present moment just like the actors I saw. After telling my mother that I wanted to be an actor, she continued to take me to theatre productions and enrolled me in drama club once I was in middle school. This was an after-school, extracurricular activity since we had no theatre classes in our curriculum. It would not be until high school that I was able to take real acting classes.

Before entering my sophomore year of high school, I auditioned and made it into the exclusive Advanced Drama (AD) course at Camden County High School. This was a conservatory-style training course for students serious about theatre after high school. We worked on two to three plays a semester during the school day, and after school on the big musical or play of the semester. In Advanced Drama, we attended state competitions every year and toured a children's piece to elementary schools within our district. This was my first time performing for children and coincidentally the first time I became aware of the repercussions that could occur when performing while fat.

A large part of my identity revolves around being overweight, or what I will call throughout my thesis, a "fat" woman. I have been heavy ever since I was old enough to realize the difference between fat and thin, not just the physical, but how someone treats

you because of it. When one is fat, you are forced to look at the world around you through a different lens. You must constantly ask yourself is this encounter happening because I am fat? Furthermore, how do I deal with it? One day during the post-show discussion of *Charlotte's Web*, I vividly remember a child asking me why the "Old Sheep" was fat because none of the other animals were. Immediately, everyone began to look at me with unease. Some of the older children glared and giggled at me. My cast mates sat in disbelief. Our teacher quickly rerouted that question, but I could not help but focus on that moment. It was during this moment that I became inherently aware of my fatness as an actor and the importance that it would play for the rest of my career leading up to the present.

Fat has always been seen as a negative word. For example, as a fat person I have been told to refer to myself as plus sized and not fat. Why would anyone want to be fat? This is an issue. No one should have a problem being fat, but we should all have a problem with the dialogue around the culture of fatness and the assumptions we assign to a fat body. The most effective way for me to engage with the dialogue that surrounds fatness is by studying the interdisciplinary academic area of Fat Studies. Within my thesis, I will be using fat in a positive way. From my point of view, fat is not a bad thing, it is literally just having extra weight on your body. Weight fluctuates so I may not be fat forever, but I still find it very important to study issues that surround the fat body.

In addition, the importance of being surrounded by strong women of color like myself was a large part of why I decided to attend my alma mater. In April 2010, I chose to obtain my bachelor's degree from Wesleyan College in Macon, Georgia. Wesleyan is the first all-female college to grant degrees to women. Founded in 1836, it became a beacon for female empowerment and strength. With 20 countries represented in the 700 students enrolled, I learned a lot about what womanhood meant to women across various cultures (WesleyanCollege.com 2017, para.1). It would be here that I would begin my process of identifying as a womanist. After taking my first Women's Studies course with Dr. Deidra Donmoyer in Spring 2011, I began to identify as a feminist. I am a person who believes in equality of the sexes. However, the roots of feminism are too Eurocentric in nature and this became troublesome for me in my learning process. I did not understand how a social-theoretical movement that sought to liberate women could fail include women of color. Then I discovered Womanism in July 2012. This discovery helped me realized that there was a sect of feminism that was geared towards women of color, a theoretical force that spoke towards our issues in a way that feminism could not. It encompasses the issues that feminism knowingly and sometimes unconsciously leaves behind. Womanism came out of the Black Feminist movement of the late 1970s. Alice Walker coined the term Womanism in her 1983 book, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*. I identify with womanism and black feminism in my daily life, but womanism is more geared towards my research for Rose Maxson in August

Wilson's *Fences*. I identify as womanist over a feminist because with womanism I know that my experiences will be a part of the perspective that has been excluded.

Further, the last three years of graduate school have been equal parts challenging and rewarding. Throughout this thesis process, I have thought about every battle that I have had to overcome just to get to this point. When I entered graduate school, I expected to find different ways to approach the text and a stage. I did not anticipate the ways in which graduate school would challenge me and reinforce my faith as a Christian and the lessons it would teach me about personal liberation. The time I spend in my Bible now is not just because of weekly church service, but because I see the lessons of the Bible being fully represented in the work that I do as an artist-scholar. Certain verses have informed the way I approach characters and coursework. The Bible has given me a faith-based structure to get through experiences that seem too daunting to complete.

Through all the aforementioned elements, I have come to a place where I want to articulate and explore my journey as an artist-scholar. Nurturing, womanism, fat studies, and the Bible each helped me to perform my thesis role as Rose Maxson in August Wilson's *Fences*. Within the next chapter I will detail the training and tools that aided in performance. I will also speak more about the theoretical lens that taught me to nurture myself and how I used the aforementioned tools helped me discover Rose Maxson.

SECTION TWO:

LITERATURE REVIEW

The decision to focus my thesis on the process of nurturing became more self-reflexive than I once imagined. It demanded me to think about the pieces of literature and theories that have been most helpful to me. Consequently, I began to appreciate the fact that the development of self and character has been such a long time in the making. It takes time to grow and understand the pivotal moments of your life, especially when it comes to education. After a thorough examination I realized what tools and theories have been most helpful in nurturing myself during the rehearsal process. During my undergraduate years at Wesleyan College, I learned the importance of making a strong objective. If an objective lacks urgency or high stakes the importance is lost. At the University of Louisville and prior to *Fences*, I learned the importance of analyzing or reading a play as literature, researching the play's socioeconomic and cultural given circumstances, and working with Aristotle's idea of The Elements for physical theatre. While in rehearsal for *Fences*, I implemented Jerzy Grotowski's impulse work and Frederick F. Matthias's Alexander Technique. For the writing of this thesis, I also incorporated the theories of Fat Studies, Womanism and certain Bible verses to strengthen my arguments for the nurturing of Rose.

UNDERGRADUATE TRAINING

Wesleyan College's theatre training program is Stanislavsky based. Constantin Stanislavski was a Russian theatre practitioner who originated a different approach to acting with the rise of realism. While in Moscow, Stanislavski directed all the original productions of Anton Chekhov's plays. As Arnold explains,

The new realistic dramas of the nineteenth century prompted actors to rethink the nature of their craft. The most influential figure in the development of a new approach to acting was Constantin Sergeyvich Stanislavski (1863-1938), an actor who became a prominent stage director and teacher as cofounder and artistic director of The Moscow Art Theatre (Arnold 205).

Stanislavski was a Russian theatre practitioner who developed the most prominent system for naturalistic or realistic acting. Stanislavski was born on January 17, 1863, in Moscow, Russia. Stanislavski was born into prominent Russian family, The Alekseievs. Since acting was not an honorable profession in Russia at that time, he took on Stanislavski as his stage name so that he would not damage his family's reputation. Being a theatre practitioner was not considered a noble profession in Russia at this time. By 1897 Stanislavski founded the Moscow Art Theatre with Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko. It was here that Stanislavski began to work on his signature acting method (Arnold 209). He developed this to ensure that actors have consistent, meaningful, and controlled performances. The Moscow Art Theatre went on a world tour from 1922 to 1924 (Britannica.com 1998, para. 8). It was here that Americans would be exposed to Stanislavski's system. Stanislavski and the company landed in New York in 1923. During

their performances, actors such as Lee Strasberg and Stella Adler watched and began to develop different acting techniques based off his work. The interesting thing about America's obsession with Stanislavski is that not many American actors studied one on one with him. Most of the readings and teachings about his work are done through translations. Stella Adler is one of the few pioneering American acting teachers who studied with him personally. In 1934, Adler traveled to Paris where she spent five weeks working with Stanislavski (StellaAdler.com 2017, para. 3). They worked together daily and when she returned to the United States she had a different understanding of the work. Not being able to train with the primary source can become an issue for the students and teachers. It created dissonance and different interpretations about what Stanislavski meant. Stanislavski did, however, publish several books on acting; including three of the most notable, *An Actor Prepares* (1936), *Building A Character* (1949), and *My Life in Art* (1926). These books were translated and edited by Elizabeth Hapgood. Hapgood was the first female instructor at Dartmouth College and the first instructor to teach Russian. She met Stanislavski in 1924 when her husband arranged for Stanislavski and several senior members of the Moscow Art Theatre to tour the White House and meet President Coolidge. She translated for them, and Stanislavski was so impressed that he asked her to translate *My Life in Art* (The New York Public Library Archives and Manuscript.com 2003, para. 3). Stanislavski spent the latter years of his life writing and teaching. After having a heart attack five days prior, Stanislavski died on August 7, 1938 in Russia.

Using Stanislavski's System, the actor must go through a rigorous amount of reflection and artistic self-analysis. I used three of Stanislavski's tools for my thesis role. I explored the creative subconscious, experimented within the Magic If, and worked in method of physical actions. Arnold notes: "Stanislavski believed that the actor should look for ways to identify as closely as possible with his or her character and undergo a transformation in which the actor would disappear and the character would emerge in his or her place" (Arnold 206). This means that for the actor to have an effective performance night after night they must be willing to interrogate the roadblocks that stand in their way. Stanislavski believed that the actor must be willing to experience the role instead of presenting expectations of what people think the actor should be doing in the role. When the actor focuses on the art of experience it activates the brain in a more conscious way that then unlocks the unconscious part of the brain that will allow impulse to take over in a more creative way or in the creative subconscious.

The creative subconscious is a process wherein an actor has less controlled decisions, but more impulses that may affect their emotions or physical movement. This term was introduced to me during my Shakespearian Acting class with Dr. Baron Kelly. This psychological process can only be obtained once an actor has done the textual analysis needed for the script. The textual analysis mobilizes the actor's imagination so that when they are in a blocking rehearsal or onstage, the creative subconscious can be unlocked.

Stanislavski believed that even if actors could not believe in the truth or reality of the life onstage, then they could still imagine the possibilities of it. This is defined as the “Magic If”, which describes the ability of an actor to imagine oneself in the set of imaginary circumstances. It causes them to visualize the consequences of the actions that they are facing. When an actor uses the magic if. Actors should ask themselves how they would personally react if put in the position of the character (Hischak 95). If she is no longer only thinking about her character’s motivation, but how she would react in this situation, her process becomes more dynamic. This means that she becomes a character that has growth throughout the play. She is not the same person at the end of the play, that she was at the beginning.

Stanislavski’s Method of Physical Actions is a way to develop spur-of-the-moment emotion in the environment created onstage (Arnold 137). In this process, the actor executes a physical motion or a series of physical movements to create the desired emotional response. The thought is that if the actor performs this motion they will immediately be able to connect back to the emotion immediately.

As I mentioned previously, Stella Adler was one of the few American acting teachers to work directly with Stanislavski. Adler was the youngest daughter of Jacob Adler, a Jewish actor and major pioneer of the New York’s Yiddish Theater District. The New York Yiddish Theater District contributed to the theatre world via the artists that got their start in the theatres, such as the Gershwin Brothers. George and Ira Gershwin were

two of the most prominent figures in musical theatre with a legacy that lives on today. The composer and lyricist duo is responsible for the 1935 opera, *Porgy and Bess* (Gershwin.com 2017, para. 1). Yiddish Theatre was important to New York city because it gave a new point of view to immigrant culture. It allowed Jewish immigrants to feel connected to their culture while being patriotic towards the United States. The district began in New York by adapting the works of Ibsen, Shakespeare, and Strindberg for a Jewish audience. Over time Jewish playwrights like Leon Kobrin and Jacob Gordin would reform Yiddish Theatre to include original works that spoke about Jewish culture (Shapiro 45).

Stella Adler started her theatrical career early, performing in a production of *Broken Hearts* when she was just four years old. Adler spent her young adult life performing throughout the United States, Europe and South America, appearing in more than 100 plays in vaudeville and the Yiddish theatre (StellaAdler.com 2017, para. 2). I believe this influenced Adler's views on performance because she believed the actor must, "develop resources of information and experience that connect with the rest of the world — socially, culturally, historically, and politically — thereby enriching the actor's instrument that is required to perform" (StellaAdler.com 2017, para. 8) This means that the actor must also work to understand life outside of their performances. The actor must also be willing to understand how politics or history can influence their instrument. It is not enough to just go onstage with the techniques you've developed. The actor must also show their humanity.

In the 1930s, Stella Adler joined the Group Theatre, a New York Theatre collective founded by Harold Clurman, Cheryl Crawford and Lee Strasberg (Arnold 205). After studying and performing with the Group Theatre and apprenticing under Stanislavski, Adler would go on to leave the company and began her own. According to its website, The Stella Adler Studio of Acting focuses on four key principles throughout all their classes: the importance of action, the power of imagination, the cultivation of a rich humanity, and script interpretation (StellaAdler.com). Some of Adler's students include Marlon Brando, Salma Hayak, Mark Ruffalo, Leslie Uggams, and most important to my work, Charles S. Waxberg.

Charles S. Waxberg is an actor, director, playwright, and author. He has been coaching privately and teaching theatre since 1981. Waxberg would go on to study with Stella Adler after joining her conservatory in New York City. He started as an expert in playwriting and his website states that he would become program coordinator. Of his time studying with Adler, Waxberg stated that he "considers those years the most valuable training in a lifetime of theatre and education" (Waxberg 1998, para. 1). In 1998, Heinemann Books published Waxberg's first and only book, *The Actor's Script--Script Analysis for Performers*. Waxberg states:

The more the actor knows about all scriptural elements, the better their choices. The actor who understands play structure will be able to build the most powerful climax and create thematic completion. The actor who understands psychological motivation will best create believable, stirring characters. The actor who understands the playwright's process will best be able to fulfill their ideas and

inherent theatricality. The more versed actors are in reading scripts, the more adroit they will be at making strong, powerful choices that illuminate the play (actorsscript.com 1998, para. 10).

Consequently, this book examines common elements that appear throughout every script to give actors the tools to understand them and how to properly use them in the rehearsal room. This was the first acting book I ever used. Affectionately called “The Waxberg”, it became the guiding tool for my performances at Wesleyan College and The University of Louisville.

To illustrate Waxberg’s techniques on paper, the character is the person an actor portrays on stage. The objective is what the character is trying to achieve in the scene. It is the actor’s main desire or motivation behind everything that she does. The obstacle is what stands in the way of the character achieving his or her objective. It is the perceived behavior or actions of the other characters in a scene. The action is created when the character strives to overcome their obstacle. In this way, Waxberg declares that the formula for performance is Objective + Obstacle = Action (Waxberg 37). Creating an objective and obstacle was key to me when I began to deconstruct my *Fences* script. Without analysis, Rose Maxson can seem like a complacent character, but this is far from the truth. There are various moments of power and strength that shine through Rose, especially with her husband, Troy Maxson. Rose’s objectives often center on expressing how she feels to someone or articulating a point. Through the Waxberg, I learned the

importance of making strong choices when it comes to objectives so that when the conflict enters the space, the action between the two creates a dynamic scene.

After figuring out the formula, Waxberg articulates the six ingredients and two spices to making an objective worthy of performance. The six ingredients are as follows:

1. The objective must be consistent with the words, actions, and circumstances of the script
 - a. This means that the objective must adhere to the world of the play.
2. The objective must be active.
 - a. The objective has to involve the actor being engaged in the scene.
3. The objective must be phrased in the positive.
 - a. If the objective statement is phrased in negative it leaves no room for the scene partner to solve the problem.
4. The objective must involve your partner.
 - a. Your scene partner is the person you must engage with to create a dynamic scene. With that being said your objective must do the same. If your objective does not include your scene partner you have secluded them from your character's life in the scene and the relationship will be non-existent onstage.
5. The objective must include conflict, ideally, the conflict is how you perceive your partner's objective.

- a. The actor must know enough about the script and the world of the play to assume what their scene partner will do.
6. The objective must arouse you artistically.
 - a. Each actor creates their own set of objectives and obstacles. Since this is done individually it is imperative that this something you want to do. If it is not something that speaks to your artistry then you will have a hard time playing this out within the scene.

The two spices are Stakes and Urgency. Three of these pointers helped me construct Rose's objectives in ways that kept me effective even when I was not speaking in the scene. The three ingredients I used were: 1.) The objective must be consistent with the words, actions, and circumstances, of the script. 2.) The objective must be active. 3.) The objective must involve your partner. In chapter three, I will break down Waxberg's recommendations through an analysis of Rose's objective in Act Two, Scene One,¹.

The tools I learned through Waxberg would serve me throughout my undergraduate training and towards the end of my junior year when I decided that I wanted to attend graduate school. This decision came after I realized that my undergraduate training would only take me so far and more education was required to become a successful actor. I did not come to graduate school wanting to teach or to be a

¹ In Act Two, Scene One Troy admits to Rose that he has been having an affair with Alberta, a woman he met at the neighborhood bar, Taylors. She is now pregnant and Troy has said he will not stop seeing her.

scholar. I wanted to get more training so that I could become a better actor. What I have learned is that to be a good actor you must study more than technique and never stop learning. The University of Louisville became the place where I knew I would thrive.

GRADUATE TRAINING

When I started my graduate coursework at the University of Louisville, I immediately became obsessed with changing my whole artistic process so that I could succeed in the program. Instead of adding these new concepts to my actor's tool belt and building a better one, I wanted to start from scratch. This unnecessary overhaul made for a rough transition, but once I incorporated my new skills with my older ones I discovered more, especially when it came to my thesis role.

Script analysis skills from the course Playscript Interpretation gave me a better idea of how to read a play *as* literature. Movement One class gave me the ability to discern a physical disadvantage from an irrational fear. Acting One taught me a new way to look at the idea of given circumstances, which helped me create a well-rounded character. Within the next few paragraphs I will detail how these approaches from my first year of studies heavily influenced my path to perform Rose Maxson.

I had some script analysis experience when I started graduate school, but Professor Johnny Jones's class challenged me to read a play and think about it from various points of view. Understanding the play as literature made me think about the

reality of the play. “A literary work is “a linguistic event” which constructs a reality through words and speech and form with characters, actors, and audience (31)” (Jones 8). What reality is August Wilson constructing for Rose and furthermore how is it different from Paula’s reality? Rose’s reality revolved around others. Her life as a homemaker meant that she did more for others than herself and she was happy with this. Rose says this plainly in Act Two, Scene Five². This selfless reality set up a dynamic opposition between Rose and myself. Because of this fact and others that I learned through research of the time period, I realized that I had to set aside my habitual acting style and ideas about my personal demeanor.

I am a character actor with ample stage weight. This means that I do not usually play ingénues or leading ladies, but more supporting characters. A lot of the characters I portray have a vast amount of gravitas and power; this gravitas and power is linked to my weight and physique. Fat women are generally not leading ladies, but called upon to be loud and brash. Two examples are previous characters that I played during my graduate career, Persephone/Semele in Naomi Izuka’s *Polaroid Stories* and Abuela in John Chenault’s *Bloodline Rumba*. These are two things Rose is not. Rose has a lot of power,

² In the scene, Rose specifically states her contentment with being a homemaker or housewife: I married your daddy and settled down to cooking his supper and keeping clean sheets on the bed...But at that time I wanted that. I wanted a house that I could sing in. And that’s what your daddy gave me (Wilson 91).

but it is concealed. Her power lies in the graceful way she achieves her goals without yelling, but instead through masterful persuasion. I am used to playing characters that use their power in more overt ways. For example, Persephone from *Polaroid Stories* uses sexuality and emotional manipulation to control her lover, G.

Since I connect my body to the types of characters I played, I have the tendency to become somewhat stuck in a physical routine when performing. Movement One with Erin Crites broke me out of this habit through the use of element work. Aristotle named the four classical elements as earth, fire, water, and wind (Ball 20). Through Crites's MFA in Physical Theatre from Accademia dell'Arte, she taught the class to explore how these elements worked with our physical movement. For instance, fire is sharp, subtle, and mobile, whereas earth is immobile, blunt, or dense. I had to recognize what type of element I utilized in my daily life. For example, does Paula move swiftly and sharp like fire or do I move fluidly like water? Once I discovered the element I used, I then began the process to differentiate this from Rose, using the script and her given circumstances.

“The performer must also conceive of the situation in which a character exists—what Stanislavsky referred to as *given circumstances*—in terms of specifics” (Arnold 116). The given circumstances are situational and environmental provisions that may influence how a character acts and responds in the world of the play.

Although the Waxberg book familiarized me with given circumstances, my Acting One class with Professor Daniel Hill taught me to think about them in a new way.

The given circumstances should not confine a performance, but define it. It should give you more ways to approach a character. The exercise that stuck with me the most was defining the socioeconomic and sociocultural given circumstances of the year in which the play takes place. This differs from Waxberg's approach because it is not just based in script analysis on the page, but it causes the actor to do research beyond the play about the history of the time period. This can give the actor a better idea of the social customs and ideals of the time that the play takes place in. When an actor has a greater idea of where the play sits from a historical point of view, it can foster new things to further discover and show the audience. I find similarities between this exercise and how Stella Adler trained actors. This exercise causes me to step outside of the training you've learned and learn more about the outside world that influences the play. In this way, an actor needs to be more developed as human being and not just a performer. This means the actor needs to be knowledgeable in areas other than theatre. Performances become fuller when the actor allows their knowledge of multiple fields of study to influence their performances.

THESIS ROLE TRAINING AND THEORIES LEARNED DURING REHEARSAL

Since *Fences* was the first show of the semester, we did not receive the full movement and voice work that other graduate students might have received during our mainstage production season. This frustrated me at first, because I thought that without this guidance my performance would lack. Instead, it gave me more time to make

discoveries. In coaching sessions with Dr. Calvano and Professor Hilmer, I worked on monologues and then took what I discovered in these monologues to the dialogue and other parts of the play.

By the time, Dr. Jenn Calvano, the new movement professor, came into the rehearsal process I had a physical approach to Rose that was becoming too measured and studied. Dr. Calvano is an interdisciplinarian who works on finding the intersections between practice and theory in her theatrical training and dance. Calvano's movement training is Grotowski based. This means that her approach to teaching movement is influenced by the work of Polish director and theorist Jerzy Grotowski. Born in 1933, Grotowski was pivotal in the work of experimental theatre in Europe during the 1960s. Although his engagement with theatre productions lasted for only the first decade of his working life, he still holds a significant place in theatre theory (Milling and Ley 117). Grotowski first came to the United States with his productions of *Acropolis* and *The Constant Prince* (Gussow para. 7). The American theatre scene became captivated by the two plays' stories of death and anguish. In Grotowski's obituary for the *New York Times*, Mel Gussow remarks about Grotowski's return to the United States in 1968: "The year after his American debut, he returned to New York for a series of lectures to clear up misconceptions in the United States about the Grotowski Method. He was angry that some people categorized his theatre as completely spiritual and psychic or purely physical. To him, it was all those things, and each was inextricable from the other. He said that creation was a kind of confession, a method by which one discovered and

‘unveiled’ oneself” (Gussow para. 14). Grotowski’s work is about revealing oneself in performance. One is working towards a vulnerable state with her whole body as an instrument, as opposed to isolating parts of the self. This work was pivotal in nurturing Rose, because it caused me to use my body to work through the barriers I had developed during the rehearsal process. While I worked through my physical work, vocally, I had to accept certain things and this became a task within itself when I started Alexander training.

The Alexander Technique (AT) is an immersive process that involves full body engagement for vocal benefit. It was developed by Frederick Matthias Alexander in the 1890s. Matthias was a Shakespearean orator who wanted to discover why he kept losing his voice only during performances (Polatin 25). Alexander would be able to talk without issue up until he was performing. Alexander then realized that it was because he was not using his body properly. The misuse of his body created tension, which made it harder for him to use his voice when he was onstage. Using the Alexander Technique, we work on non-doing and thinking about the action instead of completing it. This means that instead of just doing an action, the student uses their mind to think through it. This is what creates the non-doing. Non-doing is the act of not purposefully completing an action, but relaxing and thinking about the action you want to complete. Alexander training is very different from the Linklater training I received during my first year in the graduate program. During my coaching sessions, I worked with Professor Rachel Hilmer, our certified Alexander teacher and new professor of voice as of Fall 2016. In Alexander, the

student is asked to recognize her habits or her habitual way of working so that she can find a more efficient way to use the body. I connected with this during the nurturing process of Rose because it made me realize that it was only when I accepted my vocal habits that I could change them for a different outcome. Not only did these theories help me nurture Rose, but additionally they aided in the scholarly research as well.

ADDITIONAL THEORIES: FAT STUDIES AND WOMANISM

Fat studies is an academic research area that seeks to encompass multiple perspectives about issues that plague fat culture and the fat body. Fat studies has also been associated with social movements such as the Body Positivity Movement and Health at Every Size, also known as HAES. Both movements demand their participants to rethink how they talk about bodies and health. Fat bodies are not bad; they are beautiful and positive. Fat people are not unhealthy, they can be healthy at any size no matter what society thinks is stereotypically healthy. According to Rothblum:

[F]at studies is an interdisciplinary field of scholarship marked by an aggressive, consistent, rigorous critique of negative assumptions, stereotypes, and stigma placed on fat and the fat body. The field of fat studies invites scholars to pause, interrupt the everyday thinking about fat (or failure to think), and do something daring and bold. Learners must move beyond challenging assumptions; they must question the very questions that surround fatness and fat people (Solovay and Rothblum 3).

This means that it is not enough to just understand that fat people go through a different set of struggles and must abide by a different set of societal expectations. One must also question why this happens in a continual way so that the questions begin to change. When the questions change then the dialogue moves forward. The stigma against fat surfaced in the late 1800s with the emergence of the Industrial Revolution. At this time, individuals began to spend less time working in agriculture, which diminished the amount of exercise they were getting. At the same time, food was beginning to be less perishable, which meant there was more of it at all times. With the large influx of immigrants that were “genetically shorter and rounder than the early American settlers” (Fraser 12), Americans needed a way to distinguish themselves from others. Americans began to distinguish themselves by being smaller. Fat bodies became abnormal and undesirable when food was in abundance. When everyone has the capacity to eat food and gain weight fat was no longer considered a sign of prominence.

Connecting fat studies to Rose and the idea of nurturing, I found myself recalling every moment that I have had onstage where I felt the impetus to hide my body. I love performing, being onstage, having people connect with me, but there was still a large part of me that spent a great deal of time trying to hide my body in front of an audience. For example, I would constantly grab at myself, at the waist to accentuate the fact that it exists under my fat or yearning for props so I could be active and cover up my body. I wanted the audience to do anything but look at my body being still in the space. I also found the ways in which Rose was hiding. Rose hid herself when she married Troy

because she allowed his massive personality to overtake hers. She worked in his shadows by being a homemaker. Rose let Troy's actions and life become her own. It became hard for her to establish the autonomy in their marriage. Rose and I both spent a great deal of time hiding in plain sight. Through these discoveries, I worked through this problem. Fat Studies bolstered my work, in addition to womanism.

Womanism is a social theory that was developed, in part, as an alternative to feminism. Alice Walker coined the term in her 1983 book, *In Search of our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose*. Womanism is a part of the late 1970s revival of black feminist criticism. Though black feminism has its roots that extend back to at least the nineteenth century, the current resurgence of black feminist criticism, creative writing, and scholarship stems in part from the failure of the civil rights movement of the 1960s and the feminist movement of the 1970s to address the concerns of black women (Childers and Hentzi 32). Walker defines "womanist" as:

1. From *womanish*. (Opp. of "girlish," i.e. frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, "you acting womanish," i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or *willful* behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered "good" for one. Interested in grown up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: "You trying to be grown." Responsible. In charge. *Serious*.
2. *Also*: A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people,

male *and* female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally a universalist, as in: "Mama, why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige and black?" Ans. "Well, you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented." Traditionally capable, as in: "Mama, I'm walking to Canada and I'm taking you and a bunch of other slaves with me." Reply: "It wouldn't be the first time."

3. Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. *Loves* the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. *Loves* the Folk. Loves herself. *Regardless*.

4. Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender. (Walker 1983, p. xi-xii)

Even though it is extensive, I offer the whole definition because it has been crucial to my nurturing process. Womanism seeks to encompass experiences and perspectives of women of color in ways that feminism has not. Walker suggests that feminism is under the umbrella of womanism and that womanism is a theory and movement that can help the survival of the black race. Unlike feminism, womanism seeks to end race and class-based oppression, not just gender inequality. More than 30 years have passed since its inception and womanism is still prevalent to women of color. Walker may have coined the term, but many theorists have added definitions of their own to the ever-evolving social theory. While I am looking at Rose through the lens of womanism, it is important to note that she does not consciously practice feminism. Rose and many of Wilson's women characters predate these terms. Identifying as a womanist, feminist, or making the choice not to align with any of these come from a conscious choice. I found this decision helpful for me as Paula, because it gave me a different type

of foundation. Rose does not need the same foundation I do, but I will still be looking at her through this lens for a portion of the analysis in the upcoming section.

Further, a part of womanism is spirituality, as Walker (1983) says a womanist *Loves* the spirit. Walker says that the spirit is a set of unfixed personal characteristics that are a part of a woman's consciousness (Walker 1983). The spirit that Walker talks about is not necessarily a religion, like Christianity or Catholicism. A womanist's spirituality informs her life constantly. I relate spirituality of womanism and religion through faith. The Bible states that anyone who believes in God must have faith. The spiritual practices of womanism rely on faith as well. Womanists must have faith in the work they do for themselves and the world at large.

Religion is rooted and continuous when it comes to Rose, therefore I will be using the New International Version (NIV) of the Bible to illustrate how Rose nurtured her family. She did so through fulfilling the roles of a wife and mother as established by the Bible. I believe that Troy's affair and child out of wedlock causes Rose to recommit herself to God and relearn ways to nurture. The aforementioned literature and theory, Charles Waxberg's ingredients and spices, Stanislavski's acting system, Script analysis skills, Given circumstances, Grotowski work, Alexander Technique, Fat Studies, Womanism, and the Bible, will be my guiding principles as I began to analyze Rose Maxson in the next section.

SECTION THREE:

READING ROSE ON THE PAGE

Rose Maxson is one the most revered female characters within August Wilson's Century Cycle. When I first told family and friends that I was going to be taking on Rose for my thesis role they were in awe. *Fences* is usually the play that gets read at high schools when and if you study African American theatre. This was true for my high school and for several friends and colleagues I surveyed. It is chosen, not just because of its Pulitzer Prize Award for Drama, but also because of its universal themes that reach women and men across different generations. One of these themes is unity, specifically the unification of the family unit. I see this executed through Rose's constant struggle to bring her family together. Rose spends so much time fostering the lives of her children and husband that I believe she is a true nurturer. This became apparent to me after analyzing Rose using the theories and skills I learned in my undergraduate, and graduate training as well as my theoretical coursework. This analysis seeks to use the tools referenced in my literature review for a deeper understanding of Rose.

Rose Maxson is a 43-year-old African American female homemaker living in the Hill District of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She is a disciplinarian to her three children: Cory, Lyons, and Raynell. Cory is her only biological child, as he was fathered Troy. Lyons is her stepson from Troy's previous relationship and Raynell is the child he obtains through an extramarital affair. Rose's days are filled with cooking, cleaning, and caring

for her family. With a charming disposition, Rose makes a place for herself in the male dominated rituals of the play. She does so in style, wearing tailored blouses, dresses, and skirts. Multiple aprons finish her look because she is never too far from the kitchen. I want to take a moment to acknowledge the significant affect that Rose's costuming had on me as an actress.

Women wore pants and trousers in the 1950s, but the costume designer's decision to only outfit Rose in more structured pieces like tailored blouses, dresses, and skirts really disconnected me from my millennial graduate student lifestyle and helped me develop this character. This was an important part of my journey, as outlined in my journal entry from September 1, 2016:

"I've noticed that posture onstage is not fitting of this character and I am not sure how to fix it. Today, I had a costume fitting and the answer became clear to me. The clothing that Rose wears is much more structured than my own. This can help with my posture and demeanor as Rose. I wear athletic clothing so much that I forgot how different I looked in a tailored shirt. I immediately widened my chest during the fitting and stood up straight. This is in direct opposition to how I was in rehearsal last night. I should try to rehearse in a tailored shirt in addition to my rehearsal skirt and shoes".

Now that I have briefly detailed Rose from a visual point of view, I want to unpack how I used the script analysis tools acquired in my first year of graduate school. Rose's reality revolved around others. Her life as a homemaker means that she does more for others than herself and she was happy with this. Rose says this plainly in Act Two, Scene Five: "I married your daddy and settled down to cooking his supper and keeping clean sheets on the bed... I wanted a house that I could sing in. And that's what your

daddy gave me” (Wilson 91). This piece of the text gave me a greater understanding of Rose’s point of view.

The assumption that I had about Rose’s selflessness turned out to be more than just a hunch. Through textual analysis of Rose and assessing myself, I realized the worlds that Rose and I live in are dynamically opposite. I am not the type of person who is satisfied doing more for others over myself, although Rose is. Once I was able to understand this through a perusal of the text it made it easier to find the moments that were compelling to me. Additionally, once I established these moments, I was then able to focus on them during the rehearsals. In Playscript Interpretation, I learned that language is a large part of what makes literature provocative, therefore understanding the language of August Wilson as a playwright was crucial to me. The beat and rhythm within the text became stimulating to me the more I read it. I knew it would engage the audience if I used the language correctly. I quickly learned that Wilson has a rhythm that is evident when reading and when reciting the text. If you miss a word, the pattern is thrown off and ultimately the audience does not get the intended effect. I felt this particularly during the dialogue in Act Two, Scene One between Rose and Troy. They reference their eighteen years of marriage eight times in five pages. I found that whenever I put the eighteen years in a wrong place the fluidity of the lines was lost. Through reading the script as literature, and not thinking about it as just a script for acting, I found nuanced moments to play with in rehearsal. Although I had these

moments, I still found myself going back to the given circumstances I found when reading the text.

In the case of *Fences*, it would be the given circumstances of 1957. In this exercise, I listed all societal, socioeconomic, cultural, historical, and political factors that were true in 1957. This gave me a greater idea of where to start when I began to research for Rose and it helped me understand her. Upon discovering the circumstances, I found ways that I connected to Rose, namely through religion, femininity, and the importance of family structure and how these played into societal expectations of black women. Through discovering the shared commonalities, I found an authentic connection to Rose that made it more fulfilling artistically. This would not be the last time I called upon coursework during the rehearsal process.

After devising the formula for action, Charles S. Waxberg focuses on how to make a good objective for performance in *Actor's Script--Script Analysis for Performers*. He describes six ingredients and two spices to making an objective worthy of performance. Three of these pointers helped me construct Rose's objectives in ways that kept me effective even when I was not speaking in the scene. I am going to break down these recommendations via Rose's objective in Act Two, Scene One, which is the climax of the play.

- 1) The objective must be consistent with the words, actions, and circumstances of the script. "This is the most obvious choice, but the most

often overlooked. The script is a list of lines and actions from which you determine an objective. Yet too often an interpretation comes from the *actor's* desire to do or be something on stage rather than from the characters" (Waxberg 41). This is a fancy way of saying that the objective an actor creates must be truthful to the original script. If I am a homemaker in the 1950s my objective must encompass choices that are within the world of the play.

- a. Rose is a housewife in the 1950s. She has only one child and does not work a day job. These are a few of her given circumstances or set of conditional or environmental provisions that influence the character's action in the play. Because of Rose's circumstances, I only made objectives that fit her and not objectives to fit Paula. For example, it is socially accepted that couples will argue, but the radical part for Rose is her immense need for Troy to understand her point of view. Some arguments are just about expressing one's feelings, but this is not the case for Rose. She needs Troy to comprehend the amount of pain his affair and illegitimate child have caused. So, when Troy says, "I'm talking, woman, let me talk. I'm trying to find a way as to tell you...I'm gonna be a daddy. I'm gonna be somebody's daddy" (Wilson 63). With this introduction of new information, Rose's objective cannot be *to cry*

out or *shriek* at her husband to express her feelings. Rose must convince her husband to understand her feelings through persuasion.

2) The objective must be active. “You cannot play a *state of being*...Stanislavsky said that the actor’s job is to translate all feelings and desires into *playable* actions” (Waxberg 42). This means that even if an actor wants to relay a certain emotion within her objective, she must alter it into a playable verb. The emotions that I try to convey are adjectives and are not as effective as using a verb, which is active.

a. In Act Two Scene One, Rose must listen to Troy talk about why he wants to continue seeing Alberta. This is not a scene with numerous interjections. Although anger is the emotion Rose feels, anger is not a playable verb. In rehearsal, I tried a few different actions to fulfill this part of my objective, such as to annoy, to offend, to provoke, and to elicit. They all had me performing too insular, because I isolated the character this made me inactive, which did not move the scene forward. When I chose to channel the energy toward my scene partner through direct eye contact, he reacted to this and this conflict pushed the action forward. During performance, if I found myself wanting to cry I would hold eye

contact with Tyler so he could see the anger and sadness in my eyes. This helped propel the scene forward.

- 3) The objective must involve your partner. “Theatre relies on the back-and-forth interaction between performers so that the audience can vicariously slip in. Completely self-involved actions are not interesting to watch” (Waxberg 43). The scene partner is the person the actor must engage with to create a dynamic scene. The objective must do the same. If the actor’s objective does not include their scene partner then they have secluded them from the character’s life in the scene and the relationship will be non-existent.

- a. Rose never spends more than three minutes alone onstage, therefore her scene partner must always be present when creating objectives. Act Two, Scene One, involves Troy and Gabriel. Gabriel is her mentally ill brother-in-law, who sometimes has the mind of a child. When Gabe enters the scene during the middle of the argument between Troy and Rose, on page 64, her objective must to change to include Gabriel even though her focus was on Troy. In performance, this moment played out as Rose’s objective serving a dual purpose: to interact with Troy and to assuage Gabe. During performance, I did this by splitting my focus between the two of them onstage. Whenever Gabe would try to come between

Rose and Troy, I would push him further back. After more extra physical movement, I was able to get Gabe into the house.

Waxberg's two spices are Stakes and Urgency (Waxberg 47). Stakes are what the character has to gain or lose if they do not attain their objectives. If the situation is not "life or death" onstage it is often mundane. Urgency encompasses the defining question, "Why is this important right now at this moment in time"? Rose's stakes and urgency laid in her marriage. Troy's affair and outside child represented a failure in her marriage. Expressing Rose's emotions is urgent because it is a culmination of everything she has been feeling and what she might be losing after 18 years. The stakes are if she did not tell him how she feels she could lose everything for which she had worked. When something is urgent one works expeditiously to complete the task. If the actor does not have a sense of urgency, then there is a sense of complacency.

Once the actor has created their character's objectives then the actor must implement them while defining their beats. A beat or beat change occurs whenever new information is introduced, therefore changing the action within a scene. A beat can also be an emotional shift in the script. Waxberg signifies a beat shift with two backslashes (//) (Waxberg 75). With a new beat, there is a change in tactic or way that the actor goes about achieving their objective. The tactic is an active verb that always refers to your objective. My objective for Rose was "to express her emotions to Troy". Therefore, some of the tactics were *to confess*, *to spit out*, and *to declare*. These are different verbs that fall under the umbrella of the word "express." The different verbs were supposed to

stimulate different physical choices within me, but sometimes did not. This is when I had to start analyzing Rose from a physical perspective.

Because I connected my body to the types of characters I played, I became somewhat stuck in a physical routine when approaching a character. During the early stages of the rehearsal process, specifically the first blocking rehearsal, I realized that I was leading or entering the space with most of the energy being pushed through my pelvis. This was indicative of Paula, not Rose. Leading with the pelvis and lower body has the capacity to convey unreserved sensuality. This is not the message I wanted to convey with Rose. Rose speaks a lot about the importance of settling down and maintaining family, so her sexuality was not to be the main focus of my physical analysis as Rose. I want to make it clear that women can be extremely sexual beings that ooze sensuality in their every move and also raise children with their husbands. However, this is not what I wanted to convey with Rose.

In Rose's actions throughout the text, I realized she is the earth element that I learned in Movement One class with Professor Erin Crites. She is studied in her actions and measured in her speech. Rose rarely flies off the handle. Wilson even remarks, in Act One, Scene One, that she is a part of the men's Friday routine. To me, this means that she calculates her schedule in a way that gives her the freedom to have fun with them. Even though she is a part of their routine, she also keeps her feeling and actions straightforward and honest to her life. One can see this perfectly during Troy's exaggerated story about

his battle with death. In Act One, Scene One Rose lets the audience know that Troy is lying and his so-called fight with was actually time he spent in the hospital because of pneumonia. Through these interactions in the text I realized that Rose was rooted and therefore of the earth element. I realized Rose was rooted in juxtaposition to the other characters in the play. Troy and Cory both have tempers and can get upset easily. This changes how they respond and sometimes they do not think through their emotions before responding. This is the opposite of Rose. In most cases, she thinks through what she is about to say in a substantial way because she understands that her actions affect others. I believe Rose is the earth element based on how she thinks through every interaction with the people she encounters. Rose does not have a quick temper.

Habitually, I connect to the water element. I am a mobile being with the tendency to be blunt and dense. Being physically blunt means that I can be direct when it comes to my physicality. I do not know how to move subtly. My movements are dense meaning that they are intense and heavy. Physically, I engage with this element by being able to run at a moment's notice or be slow and controlled. I had to change how I moved in the space. I had to discover a greater sense of foundation every time I entered onstage. The water element does not have this footing because of its mobility. I had to nurture Rose's true saunter in the space. I worked on this outside of the rehearsal space and concluded that Rose is more balanced and upright than I am in everyday life. I had to learn to balance my weight in a different way. Thinking about how I used my weight to manipulate my performance leads me to how I came to use Fat Studies as a theoretical lens.

Regarding the fat body, I believe it was a crucial part of my nurturing process to understand the importance of wanting to hide my body and the lack of fat narratives. In a public space, fat people are often overlooked and when attention is being put on them, it has the tendency to be negative. Fat bodies are not desired and some fat people go to extreme lengths to hide theirs. I never thought I was one of those people until I began to read fat studies literature and think about myself as an actor. During this rehearsal process I found myself rather obsessed with Rose's physical actions like pinning laundry, cooking dinner, or dancing. I was trying to do anything but show my body off in its still form. When one is still people can see the imperfections. I did not want to show mine. After reading pages 90 and 91, I realized that Rose hides too. Rose allows Troy's actions to hide her place within their marriage:

ROSE: When your daddy walked through the house he was so big he filled it up. That was my first mistake. Not to make him leave some room for me. For my part in the matter. But at that time I wanted that. I wanted a house that I could sing in. And that's what your daddy gave me. I didn't know to keep up his strength I had to give up little pieces of mine. I did that. I took on his life as mine and mixed up the pieces so that you couldn't hardly tell which was which anymore. It was my choice. (Wilson 91).

Rose allowed Troy's joyous and boisterous behavior to take over her own life. This caused her to be hidden in his shadow for quite some time. I relate this to me as a performer, because my need for directorial approval stems from this need to hide. I want the director to tell me what to do or if I am doing it right so that I can hide behind the choices I make on my own. Physically, I want the approval or permission to focus my

attention on something that will take the eyes off me until I am ready to be seen. Fat studies aided in the nurturing of weening myself from this, because I realized that I cannot hide my body. Everyone sees it no matter how hard one works to hide it, and it is only that when one sees her body for what it is, fat or thin, that she finds comfortability with the gaze of others. Once Rose realized that Troy was overshadowing her then she made the decision to step out and change her life. This happened to coincide with the birth of Raynell, but it still helped her reveal herself in a way that was evident to the audience and myself. This revelation was crucial to the end of the play, but also my narrative as a fat actor and tricky issues that arise when they are portrayed in theatre.

A narrative is a story or account of events. There are millions of narratives. When someone puts pen to paper to decide to tell the account of her life, this creates a new narrative. Narratives are essential to life because they have the power to become examples for others on how to behave and even succeed. But what happens when one is fat and the narratives are not complex? What if they only depict fatness in one vein? This is the reality of narratives that depict fatness.

I found the use of narrative particularly insightful in Susan Koppelman's article, "Fat Stories in the Classroom: What and How Are They Teaching About Us?" Within this empirical study, Koppelman seeks to understand the effectiveness of Andre Dubus's story, "The Fat Girl", in the classroom. The story depicts the life of Louise, a fat girl who faces internalized fat hatred taught by her parents. Louise tries many diets until she starts

college and with the help of her skinny friend, begins to recognize that she is a compulsive overeater. After thinking she overcomes the eating disorder, she loses numerous pounds and is finally considered beautiful. After graduating college, she returns home and her family showers her with the affection, which they should have given her growing up. Louise marries and during her first pregnancy she cannot control her eating disorder and begins to compulsively eat in secret. After her baby is born, Louise continues to eat and her husband no longer finds her attractive. He leaves. She is left to raise her child alone and she is heavier than before.

Through individual interviews with professors and critical analysis of the syllabi that included the story, Koppelman concluded that the story was used in various ways from literature classes to depict obesity, medical classes to teach doctors different perspectives of patient reaction to illness, and psychology courses to illustrate the social constructions of the perfect body and its impact on the individual. However, when included on a syllabus it was often the only narrative about a fat person, especially fat women. This is a pattern that I see throughout theatre. There are not many plays that speak about the experience of fat individuals. If the narratives do exist they are not authentic. For example, *Hairspray* is a popular musical that won eight Tony Awards and was adapted into a film. It centers on Tracy Turnblad, a fat teenager who muses about wanting to dance and be a part of the revolution in the 1960s. In addition to Tracy, there are two other fat women depicted in the musical, her mother, Edna Turnblad, and Motormouth Maybelle, the owner of the record shop and host of the “Negro Day” on the

Corny Collins show. At face value, these depictions seem to be effective, but I believe they are not. The role of Edna Turnblad is played by a man, and her downtrodden attitude about her weight sends an incomplete message to the audience. Motormouth Maybelle is hypersexualized throughout the musical and must deal with fat stigma in addition to racism. The musical is beautiful and buoyant but its narrative is inaccurate because it gives unreal expectations about how easy it was for Tracy to find self and social acceptance. Through the lacking depictions of fat women in musicals and plays such as *Hairspray*, the narratives about fat people and their place in society stay incomplete, lacking true depth and vulnerability.

Once I realized that fat narratives in theatre were lacking, I realized that my depiction of Rose would be something to note in my nurturing process. I have only seen Rose performed through the lens of slender African American women. This is a limitation of my analysis, because I have not seen every single production of *Fences*; I am drawing upon the 2016 film adaptation in addition to well-known regional theatre and Broadway productions. In these instances, Rose has always been portrayed by a slender woman which substantiates my claim that fat female actors are not given the opportunity to perform complex roles. Without roles of substantial depth, the narrative of the fat female actor does not change. My portrayal of Rose as a fat woman, brings visibility to the ideas about sexuality in the fat community, more importantly how I depict sexuality onstage as a fat woman. Fat women are often thought to be asexual or are hypersexualized, there is no in between. However, I believe Rose as a character is the in

between, which is revolutionary when a fat woman portrays her. She and Troy engage in subtle flirtation, embrace often, and Rose speaks about her sexual desires.

This supported my nurturing process because it gave me the chance to diversify my narrative as a fat actor. First, I have never had the opportunity to portray a healthy romantic relationship onstage. The closest I came to doing so was when I took on the roles of Persephone in Naomi Iizuka's *Polaroid Stories*. Persephone's ideals about love were a conundrum because of her drug addiction. As an addict, Persephone has no healthy love for her romantic interests, G and Orpheus. She uses them to feed her drug habit. Therefore, Persephone displays no romantic love.

For these reasons, portraying a wife in an 18-year marriage was extremely different and difficult. The challenge itself was liberating, because it forced me to break out of my comfort zone by getting in touch with a part of my vulnerability that I have never tapped into onstage. In the beginning, I felt very embarrassed during rehearsal. Even though Rose does feel embarrassment with Troy's sexual remarks, as an actor I felt uncomfortable and this prevented me from moving the scene forward. Half of the discomfort came from the fact that aside from the stage management team, I was the only woman in the rehearsal space. The other half stemmed from the fact that I had never been a theatrical love interest and I had never seen a fat love interest onstage. Once I realized that this was where my embarrassment came from, I realized that I had to change this. Even though I could not change the production team, I had the ability to change the

narrative about fat actresses and sexuality if I depicted this role from a truthful place and not a place of fear. This change was gradual, but I do feel that I achieved this. This gradual change was assisted by my views as a womanist. Learning about womanism allowed me to free myself and take a more brazen path in pursuing the role of Rose.

Even though Rose precedes womanism, the theory still supported my nurturing process because it helped me understand Rose's need to always care for her family. A principle of womanism is about caring for mankind and its survival. As a housewife, Rose's duties center on making sure those around her are well taken care of; making sure that her family is not only surviving, but thriving, is what Rose does best. When it comes to her husband, Rose lets Troy be his boisterous self and finds her place within this. Rose raises Cory to be a respectful man, despite his struggles with his father. She teaches him to pick his battles wisely. When it comes to Lyons, Rose nurtures him by fostering acceptance of his lifestyle and music career. In these ways, I believe Rose is committed to the survival of the people who surround her. This is especially prevalent when it comes to Raynell. Of the seven women in my family that I talked to about Rose, each of the seven said that they would not keep the baby nor would any of them stay married to their husbands when he committed similar actions of infidelity. I believe the reason why Rose stayed is because of her inherent need to foster the lives of the people she encounters. In Rose's last moments of dialogue with Cory, she says the following about Raynell:

ROSE: By the time Raynell came into the house, me and your daddy had done lost touch with one another. I didn't want to make my blessing off of

nobody's misfortune . . . but I took on to Raynell like she was all them babies I had wanted and never had. (*The phone rings.*) Like I'd been blessed to relive a part of my life. And if the Lord see fit to keep up my strength . . . I'm gonna do her just like your daddy did you . . . I'm gonna give her the best of what's in me. (Wilson 91).

In this way, Rose's devotion to Raynell stems from her devotion to make life better for all, even those who are not specifically family but may become family, like Raynell. Being committed to the survival of someone is moving forward past your desires for them in the given situation, but thinking about how your actions can affect others. Rose had the choice to ignore Raynell, but she did not. Although we do not see much of Rose's interactions with Raynell outside of the last scene of the play, one could deduce that she has been and is going to raise her with the best intentions. Raynell could have been raised much worse or seen as the embodiment of adultery to Rose. In the article "Coretta King Revisited", Walker ruminates on the following quote given by the late civil rights leader: "Women in general, are not a part of the corruption of the past, so they can give a new kind of leadership, a new image for mankind" (Walker 153). For Rose, I take this to mean that she is not rooted in the poor decisions of Troy's past. She has the ability to show others that they can make the best of any circumstance and be the person to guide others.

Womanism also speaks to spirituality, and as I mentioned earlier, Rose's recommitment to God and the Bible is worthy of analysis. I see womanism's connection to the bible through faith. Faith is the confidence or strong belief in someone or something. When it comes to religion it is having faith in God. It is stated throughout the

Bible that you must have faith to make it through any hardship. Matthew 17:20 says it like so:

He replied, “Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you”.

Faith is a part of womanism because it is confidence in the spiritual systems that she may practice as a womanist. This also speaks toward one of womanism’s fundamental tenets: being committed to survival of all people. I draw parallels because if she is committed to making sure all that all thrive, she must have confidence that her actions are helping people, even those she may not like.

The Bible became a lens for me to understand some of Rose’s actions and responsibilities vis-à-vis my own. The duties or responsibilities of a wife and mother are subjective. This is because it all depends on the individual family. For my purposes, I will be using the duties as laid out in the New International Version of the Bible to illustrate the many roles that Rose represents. I argue that Rose Maxson is building an invisible fence, parallel to Troy’s real one, to keep her family together by nurturing strong interpersonal relationships between her husband and children. The readers first meet Rose in Act One, Scene One. Wilson describes her in the following way:

She is ten years older than TROY, her devotion to him stems from her recognition of the possibilities of her life without him: a succession of abusive men and their babies, a life of partying and running the streets, the Church, or aloneness with its attendant pain and frustration” (Wilson 11).

From this short statement, we are given a lot of information about what Rose's life could have been like without Troy. This helps us understand why she commits herself to him so much. It can be deduced that her first priority is being a wife to Troy, because without him she would not have the things that she loves so dearly like her children or household. Family is important to Rose, because her whole family is comprised of half brothers and sisters. Rose vowed to herself that this would not be true of her family once she got married. As a wife, Rose submits herself fully to Troy and is a loyal wife. These are two duties I will use to illustrate Rose's fulfillment to her role as a wife.

The book of Ephesians 5: 22-24 states:

Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

This passage from Ephesians exemplifies some facets of Rose and Troy's relationship until the conflict in Act Two. Rose is not submissive in a sense that she has no will and opinions other than what Troy gives her, but she recognizes his place as the head of the household. Rose puts Troy's ambitions before her own because of her love for him. This is evidenced when Rose says:

“You not the only one who's got wants and needs. But I held on to you, Troy. I took all my feelings, my wants, my needs, my dreams...and I buried them inside you. I planted a seed and waited and prayed over it. I planted myself inside you and waited to bloom. And it didn't take me no eighteen years to find out the soil was hard and rocky and it wasn't never gonna bloom” (Wilson 67-68).

Portions of her autonomy were lost because she allowed herself to submit to Troy. This submission is believing that Troy as her husband will lead her and fulfill her. Troy did lead, but when he failed she was forced to reevaluate her life for the past eighteen years.

Troy's affair further damages the physical and emotional covenant he and Rose share as husband and wife. 1 Corinthians 7: 1-3 states:

It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman. But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband. The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband.

The passage states that husbands and wives should have sex, but only together, and there should be faithfulness or chastity and not withholding of sex for fear of cheating on one another. Troy and Rose have sex often, which is articulated when Troy makes jokes about "stroking," or having sex with Rose to his friend Bono, which makes Rose uncomfortable. He says this during his Friday night routine in which he later describes to Rose:

TROY: Woman ... I do the best I can do. I come in here every Friday. I carry a sack of potatoes and a bucket of lard.... We go upstairs in that room at night ... and I fall down on you and try to blast a hole into forever. I go out. Make my way. Find my strength to carry me through to the next Friday (*pause*) That's all I got, Rose. That's all I got to give. I can't give nothing else" (Wilson 41).

This establishes a pattern. The couple is sexually active, even if it is once a week and Rose is not withholding from her husband. Furthermore, she does not make sexual

contact with anyone else outside of their marriage even though she may have thought about it before as she says on page 67:

ROSE: Don't you think it ever crossed my mind to want to know other men? To want to lay up somewhere and forget about my responsibilities. That I wanted someone to make me laugh so I could feel good (Wilson 67).

When Rose finds out of Troy's affair she told him that she thought about relinquishing the responsibilities in her life, but she does not. Rose is too committed to making sure Troy and Cory have a comfortable home. Although she may have thought about seeing another man and leaving her responsibilities, Rose stayed to fulfill her marital vows to Troy, again fulfilling her duties as his wife and nurturing their bond. Rose and Troy remained married even though their bond was tested. A bond that cannot be broken for Rose is that of the one between her and her children.

Although Troy may be one of Rose's top priorities, her role as a mother shifts and becomes more important than her role as a wife by the end of Act Two, Scene Three. The duties of a mother are vast, but a few that Rose displays are disciplining children and being involved in their lives. Proverbs 23:13-14 states: Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish them with the rod, they will not die. Punish them with the rod and save them from death.

Discipline is a good thing for children. The passage suggests that it will only benefit them in the long run. Discipline is training someone or something to follow rules or to conduct themselves in a certain manner. If the one does not follow the rules there is

usually some type of consequence. A disciplinarian refers to a person who practices rigid or firm discipline. By definition, Troy and Rose are both disciplinarians, however Troy is much stricter than Rose. Rose disciplines Cory with a softer touch. Throughout the play, Troy thwarts Cory's attempts at being scouted by a college football team. Even though Rose does not agree with Troy, she stands by his word nonetheless: "You did Gabe just like you did Cory. You wouldn't sign the paper for Cory . . . but you signed for Gabe. You signed that paper."³ (Wilson 71). This is also an example of Rose submitting to Troy as head of their household; however, she supports her son. Rose makes Cory complete his chores every weekend. Even though he may be mad at his father, she teaches Cory to fight his battles with Troy.

Rose is also very involved in her children's lives. Ephesians 6:4 says this about involvement: "Fathers (parents) do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord". This means that instead of provoking or irritating ones' children, she must take the time to teach them through conversation and interaction. Rose does this with all three of her children. I saw it most notably at the end of the play when she spoke to Raynell and Cory. At the opening of Act Two, Scene Five,

³ Rose is referring to the fact that Troy would not sign the permission slip that would have allowed Cory to be scouted for college football, but he signed the paperwork to make Gabe a patient at the psych hospital to get a portion of disability check.

Raynell is playing in her garden instead of getting ready for Troy's funeral. Rose finds her outside and they have the following discussion:

ROSE: Raynell!

RAYNELL: Mam?

ROSE: What you doing out there?

RAYNELL: Nothing.

(Rose comes to the door.)

ROSE: Girl, get in here and get dressed. What you doing?

RAYNELL: Seeing if my garden growed.

ROSE: I told you it ain't gonna grow overnight. You got to wait.

RAYNELL: It don't look like it never gonna grow. Dag!

ROSE: I told you a watched pot never boils. Get in here and get dressed.

RAYNELL: This ain't even no pot, Mama.

ROSE: You just have to give it a chance. It'll grow. Now you come on and do what I told you. We got to be getting ready. This ain't no morning to be playing around. You hear me?

RAYNELL: Yes, mam (Wilson 83-84).

Despite just planting her garden a few days prior, Raynell is desperately waiting for the bloom. Instead of Rose yelling at Raynell for not getting dressed, she explains to her that she has to let the grow before she can play with it. This is similar to Rose burying her "wants and needs" in Troy and waiting for them to bloom. One is metaphorical and one is physical. Harvesting a garden as well as a marriage takes time. Even though Rose is grieving and must bury the man she tried to blossom with, she still takes time to teach her daughter about the importance of patience. In the following excerpt, we see how Rose has been involved in Raynell's life since her birth:

(Rose enters from the house. Troy hearing her steps behind him, stands and faces her.)

TROY: She's my daughter, Rose. My own flesh and blood. I can't deny her no more than I can deny them boys. *(Pause.)* You and them boys is my family. You and them and this child is all I got in the world. So I guess what I'm saying is . . . I'd appreciate it if you'd help me take care of her.

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. *(She takes the baby from him.)* From right now . . . this child got a mother. But you a womanless man.

(Rose turns and exits into the house with the baby. Lights go down to black.) (Wilson 74-75).

Despite Rose's heartache, she decides to raise Raynell as her own because she realizes the importance of a child having a mother in this world. She sees Raynell as the innocent party and makes the decision to be involved in her life, and not just in a superficial way. It would have been easy for Rose to disregard Troy's plea to help raise his daughter, but she became attached to Raynell and raised her like the daughter she never had. This costs Troy a wife, but I believe Rose had the right to deny him since she took on Raynell as her own child.

Another example of Rose's involvement is when Cory return home and his desire to not attend his father's funeral with her other children, because he is tired of feeling controlled by him. Rose sits him down and explains to him that true manhood does not come from being spiteful or stubborn. It comes from self-discovery:

ROSE: I know you and your daddy ain't seen eye to eye, but I ain't got to listen to that kind of talk this morning. Whatever was between you and your daddy . . . the time has come to put it aside. Just take it and set it over there on the shelf and forget about it. Disrespecting your daddy ain't gonna make you a man, Cory. You got to find a way to come to that on your own. Not going to your daddy's funeral ain't gonna make you a man" (Wilson 89).

Rose is not disregarding Cory's emotions or experiences, but speaking to him as the adult he is still becoming. She is trying to make him realize that although Troy may have been a large force within his life growing up, Cory is ultimately in control of himself and the trajectory of his life. These are examples of involvement. Involvement is not just being around, but it is about the immersion of one's entire self for the development of another. Rose fulfills two motherly duties outlined in Proverbs 23:13-14 and Ephesians 6:4: the disciplining of children and involvement in their lives throughout the various stages. We see from her roles as wife and mother that self-sacrifice is not something new to Rose. She sacrificed much of her own life to give to others.

Rose's altruism is put to the test when she learns of Troy's affair. Even as Troy tells her she is a good wife:

TROY: It ain't about nobody being a better woman or nothing. Rose, you ain't the blame. A man couldn't ask for no woman to be a better wife than you've been. I'm responsible for it. I done locked myself into a pattern trying to take care of you all that I forgot about myself" (Wilson 66).

Rose still combs Troy for answers. In these few sentences, Troy continues to acknowledge himself as the breadwinner of the family and insists that he is the only who

is locked into a pattern. I believe it was at this moment that Rose began to understand that her effort and selflessness to build a fence around her family unit was lost on Troy. From this point on in the play it was no longer about Rose making Troy her first priority, but more so her getting Troy to understand her point of view instead of always trying to understand his. This is apparent in her long monologue in Act Two, Scene One. It is her rebuttal to Troy's assertion that he has been in the same place for eighteen years alone. Rose maintains that she has been alongside Troy the whole time trying to build their life together even though she knew it would not always be easy. From this point on I believe Rose's autonomy shifts in an amazing way. She is no longer just focused on Troy and her children, but also herself and the things that fulfill her. Rose begins to spend more time at church. She participates in bake sales and attends service. In addition, Rose takes Raynell everywhere she goes.

My beliefs about autonomy have changed drastically since working on *Fences*. Initially, I took a very closed minded view of autonomy. This means that I did not believe Rose could have autonomy within her daily activities as a homemaker. I thought she was being oppressed and did not realize it. What I failed to realize is that autonomy, like feminism, is rooted in choice. It was Rose's choice to marry Troy and become a homemaker and she found joy in this as she says on page 91:

ROSE: I married your daddy and settled down to cooking his supper and keeping clean sheets on the bed. When your daddy walked through the house he was so big he filled it up. That was my first mistake. Not to make him leave some room

for me. For my part in the matter. But at that time, I wanted that. I wanted a house that I could sing in. And that's what your daddy gave me. I didn't know to keep up his strength I had to give up little pieces of mine. I did that. I took on his life as mine and mixed up the pieces so that you couldn't hardly tell which was which anymore. It was my choice. It was my life and I didn't have to live it like that. But that's what life offered me in the way of being a woman and I took it. I grabbed hold of it with both hands (Wilson 91).

Troy gave Rose the house and the child that she had always wanted, even though it came at a price. Rose realized that she made a mistake in her choice, but it was her choice nonetheless.

Rose Maxson is a literary figure that I see leaping off the page. I see her in my mother, grandmother, and other women in my life. Rose's selflessness to create a stable family unit ruminates throughout the entire script. We see her nurture as a wife, a mother, and then nurture herself. Rose's autonomy changes throughout the course of the text, making her a dynamic character.

With this analysis of Rose, I endeavored to answer the questions that arose after I read the play. These questions assisted me because they urged me to work with tools I received during my undergraduate and graduate school training. I began by analyzing the script as literature to find moments that compelled not only me but with the audience. After discovering these moments, I went back to the given circumstances and began to construct Rose's story. In addition, working with Waxberg's ideas about constructing an objective gave me a means to convey a series of strong actions with my scene partner. Further, the element work distinguished my body from Rose's. Through the theoretical

framework of fat studies, I found the ways that Rose and I hide onstage. Womanism helped me nurture the idea of being committed to the survival of all people, even those who may not want your help. Finally, through passages from the Bible I was able to comprehend the role Rose played as a nurturer through her duties to her husband and children.

SECTION FOUR:

PAULA'S PROCESS

Aside from reiterating the ephemerality of theatre, *Fences* also made me realize how pivotal it is that I develop a personal sustainable acting process that enabled me to perform to the best of my ability no matter what the script, character, or director may call for. The fleeting six-week rehearsal process went by so quickly that I felt I did not get a chance to grasp or accomplish everything I wanted to in terms of process, but writing my thesis has been a good way to catalogue the effective and ineffective moments. Overall, my thesis performance was successful, but I could have done more to consistently implement the theories and acting techniques detailed here in my thesis. In this final section I will detail the rehearsal process using the theories and acting approaches I reviewed for my thesis. First, I will begin with textual analysis work that I did during my personal reading rehearsals.

In addition to reading *Fences* in high school and numerous times throughout my undergraduate studies I read it five times over the summer. At this point I thought I had discovered everything there was to know about Rose, but I was wrong. I began to figure this out shortly after rehearsal began. Our director, Dr. Baron Kelly, decided that due to

the depth of the text and schedule given we should start rehearsals about two weeks earlier than usual. Rehearsals began on August 1st. Everyday for the first two weeks in August we had small reading rehearsals. During these rehearsals, Dr. Kelly would call those in the scene to come and read the script at a table. During these two weeks, the actors had the chance to ask questions about their character, script, process, etc. I was ready to begin. I wanted to get into the room and talk about the discoveries I made, what I learned about Rose, and share strategies for performance. I wanted to have one of those substantive moments of breakthrough that all my favorite actors talk about. I was ready for the challenge. I told myself that this was my thesis role so the experience had to be different. What I did not count on is how much of this was left up to me.

By the end of the first week some of my aspirations were dashed. I realized that although Rose may be in every single scene she is not always speaking. This frustrated me because I found myself sitting for hours at a time waiting for the chance to say my one cue line. It felt dejected to be in the rehearsal space and not actively rehearsing. After explaining my vexation to the director, he suggested that I take the time that I am not being utilized, but still in the building, to do more character work. He suggested that I still had much left to discover since my readings of the play did make me realize how much time I would spend in the background. He was right. So, I went back to my own reading rehearsals.

I make multiples copies of any script I am working on because sometimes it is beneficial for me to read the play without extraneous pencil markings. After grabbing my clean copy, I began to read *Fences* as literature, as assistant director Johnny Jones had taught me in his Playscript Interpretation class, and I began to underline and annotate the things that compelled me. This time I annotated things that may or may not have been related to Rose, with the challenge to find the relation. Then I related them back to the techniques that Waxberg spoke about. One of the first things I found was Troy's account about his battle with Mr. Death in Act One, Scene One pages 16-18. I read this portion of the scene two or three times and laughed out loud each time. What was compelling to me was how Wilson draws the line between comedy and sincerity when talking about mortality. Troy can joke about death and at the same time be furious about the repercussions of it. This intrigued me because I am very aware of my own mortality and it frightens me. When I read this play, I realized that death cannot stop you from living. I must live fully. This is also how I began to act towards the production. I know that Troy is going to die at the end of the play, but I cannot start the show as if I knew this all along. I need to be present in the moment and allow experiences to materialize naturally.

The monologue during Act One, Scene One is Troy's first time mentioning death as an entity that he constantly battles. In these three pages, Rose has a few interjectional lines, so the challenge became figuring out how Troy's monologue connected to Rose and her narrative, and furthermore if I could connect it to Rose's given circumstances?

Wilson says this of Rose in stage directions in Act One, Scene One: “Though she doesn’t drink, her presence is an integral part of the Friday night rituals. She alternates between the porch and the kitchen, where supper preparations are underway” (Wilson 11). This is a given circumstance for Rose. She is a part of the Friday night routine and is therefore used to Troy’s tall tales. Therefore, I had to make her lines more than just interjections and give them purpose. When Rose says, “Troy was right down there in Mercy Hospital. You remember he had pneumonia? Laying there with a fever talking plumb out of his head” (Wilson 17), Rose is not attacking Troy, she is enjoying the Friday night ritual too. Everyone knows that Troy is lying, but it is all in good fun. So instead of using an active verb like attack, I chose counter. My playable action for that line became *to counter*. I chose counter because it allows me to dispute what Troy is saying, but it does not evoke aggression.

As I continued to read and underline captivating parts of the play, I found myself drawn to the dynamic of Rose and Troy in a way that I had not been before. Before, I saw their playful banter as just the way their relationship was, but upon further reading I realized that the banter in Act One was in direct opposition to the conversations they would have in Act Two. In Act One, Scene Four the couple has the following exchange:

TROY (*calling*): Hey, Rose! (*To Bono.*) I told everybody. Hey, Rose! I went down there to cash my check.

ROSE (*entering from the house*): Hush all that hollering, man! I know you out here. What they say down there at the Commissioner’s office?

TROY: You supposed to come when I call you, woman. Bono’ll tell you that. (*To*

Bono.) Don't Lucille come when you call her?

ROSE: Man, hush your mouth. I ain't no dog . . . talk about "come when you call me." **TROY** (*puts his arm around Rose*): You hear this Bono? I had me an old dog used to get uppity like that. You say, "C'mere, Blue!" . . . and he just lay there and look at you. End up getting a stick and chasing him away trying to make him come.

ROSE: I ain't studying you and your dog. I remember you used to sing that old song.

Troy beckons Rose to the front porch to tell her of his job promotion. In this short exchange, we see the subtle flirting between the two. Troy suggests that Rose should be more obedient and come to see what Troy needs as soon he calls. She tells him she's not an animal and pays him no attention. The stage directions indicate that Troy is to put his arm around Rose, but our production would have them take it a bit farther and the couple would dance in the front yard. This shows the beautiful intimacy between the pair.

Making these beautiful moments sincere is what makes Act Two of the play so heartbreaking. The audience must be able to see this couple's journey from endless love to questioning their love. After defining this as a compelling moment I set out to understand how I could portray this onstage so that the audience had an idea of what was happening. I accomplished this through making sure that my objective for the scene included my scene partner, Tyler Madden, who was playing Troy.

Tyler Madden (Troy Maxson) and I have a good working relationship. Before the process began we sat down and had talk about the things that each of us would and would not be comfortable with during the rehearsal process. Tyler is an easygoing person who

allows his acting partners to experiment freely with him onstage. I am always one who is ready to discover, but I need more notice if you are going to do something that I may be uncomfortable with. Tyler and I dealt with intimacy early on in the play, but in Act One, Scene Four it became clear to me that I needed to step outside of my comfort zone to for our relationship to be realistic.

The intimacy between Rose and Troy cannot be accomplished if Tyler and I were not working together. In Act One, Scene Four pages 43- 44 I made my objective, *to celebrate with Troy*. Making this objective was not easy; I went through a few different objectives. I started with the verbs commend, applaud, revel, and observe, however they were ineffective in capturing the full excitement that Wilson is trying to capture in his writing. I found this objective, *to celebrate with Troy*, effective because it called for me to focus on Troy and his happiness to make the scene dynamic. Before I chose *to celebrate with Troy*, I was using the objective *to praise Troy*. This was ineffective because Rose is not praising Troy for getting this promotion. She is happy for him, but she is not praising him because that is not the dynamic of their relationship or the Friday night ritual. It was during the third week of rehearsal that I figured this out. This scene is about celebrating Troy's accomplishment as the first Black man to drive the garbage truck. Before his promotion black men had only been allowed to ride on the back, pick up and load trash. The celebration ends when Cory comes in and throws his football helmet. To play the opposites of the scene it is crucial that the celebration be present at the

beginning. I define playing the opposites as the playing the contrasting moments within the scene. If I play the contrasting moments in the scene the audience can see the full story, not just one character's point of view.

In Act One, Scene Three, I found some substantial images that carried me through the play. The first phrase that struck me was Troy's mentally disabled brother, Gabriel, saying:

GABRIEL: Ain't got my name in the book. Don't have to have my name. I done died and went to heaven. **He got your name though. One morning St. Peter was looking at his book . . . marking it up for the judgment . . . and he let me see your name. Got it in there under M.** Got Rose's name . . . **I ain't seen it like I seen yours . . . but I know it's in there.** He got a great big book. Got everybody's name what was ever been born. That's what he told me. But I seen your name. Seen it with my own eyes. (Wilson 29).

The sections of the passage that I highlighted, activated my imagination. The passages are not highlighted in the script. Rose and Troy have very different ideas about death. Troy chooses to fight death head on and is ready for the fight. He has no problems talking about it. Rose is more conservative when it comes to mortality. She does not want to talk about it, but she knows that it is inescapable.

In those few lines, I began to see the battle that Troy is always dealing with. I began to think of a battlefield. This image of a battlefield helped me because it made me realize that Troy and Rose are not fighting the same battle, nor do they fight the same.

When Troy argues, he is selfish. Troy focuses on what people owe him and what he has been missing:

“It’s just . . . She gives me a different idea . . . 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” (Wilson 66).

With these lines, Troy is arguing that Alberta allows him to view himself differently.

With her he does not have to be the devoted husband and father. When he and Alberta are together he can be a younger, more carefree version of himself. He is only thinking about what he needs, not what Rose may deserve.

When Rose argues, she is selfless. She focuses on everything she could lose:

“Maybe you want to wish me and my boy away. Maybe that’s what you want? Well, you can’t wish us away. I’ve got eighteen years of my life invested in you. You ought to have stayed upstairs in my bed where you belong” (Wilson 65).

Rose is not just thinking about her life, but also Corey’s. She is invested in the family unit she has cultivated.

I began to look at Act Two, Scene One as a battlefield. On a battlefield, each side takes turn and tries their best to understand the other teams’ strategy. Once I realized that Troy was going to focus on everything that missed out on because he’s been married for eighteen years, I knew it would not behoove me to focus on everything that Rose missed too. I had to focus on the things that Rose could lose like her family and home. Since

Troy raises his voice, I could not raise my voice all the time because two people yelling at each other are seldom listening.

Rose talking about her family in Act Two, Scene One provided another example of the imagery I worked with:

ROSE: And you know I ain't never wanted no half nothing in my family. My whole family is half. Everybody got different fathers and mothers . . . my two sisters and my brother. Can't hardly tell who's who. Can't never sit down and talk about Papa and Mama. It's your papa and your mama and my papa and my mama . . . (Wilson 65).

These words made me realize just how important family is to Rose. Her desire to have a stable family comes out of the fact that she never had one herself. She was never able to talk with her siblings about their mother and father because everyone had different parents. The imagery I came to was a revolving door. A door where loved ones come in and out, but never stays. This revolving door helped me hold on to Rose's need for a stable family and for a physical as well as a figurative, invisible fence that she could keep her family inside. This is only a small a portion of the textual analysis work I completed for the show.

After I completed this work, I used the imagery and objectives to propel me into blocking rehearsals and activate my creative subconscious. I had never worked extensively with my creative subconscious until this process. I was afraid of it because it seemed like I supposed to let of the work I had done, but it was supposed to inform me. This was especially helpful to build my relationship with Gabe. Through the text work I

concluded that Rose and Gabe have a playful relationship, but she is also his protector. Rose does her best to make sure that he is fed, clean, and happy. She shields him from Troy when she thinks he is being unnecessarily harsh and she encourages him. He brings her a gift in almost every scene they are in together, and each time she expresses joy This played out lovely during Act One, Scene Four. Onstage, after I would fix Gabe's ham sandwich I would clean his face to remove the crumbs and adjust his clothing. Joe Monroe, the actor who played Gabe, and I incorporated small amounts of stage business to convey our relationship. I was only able to do this because I allowed myself the work I had done to inform my blocking.

The next phase in the production process was the blocking rehearsals. Blocking is the positioning or movement of actors onstage designed by the director and/or assistant director. We started the blocking rehearsals on August 15th and what I began to realize is that Rose's blocking was not as concrete as other characters. Of course, I had steady entrances and exits, but during Act One most of Rose's blocking centered around performing household tasks. Some of these tasks are in the script and some were not. While Dr. Kelly was blocking the men on the outside, I was focused on what Rose would be doing as a homemaker. This was challenging and exciting since I do not consider myself to be very domestic. When it came to cooking, the script already tells you one thing she is cooking so from there I had to decide what else would she doing. Would she be cooking side dishes or washing dishes? In Act One, Scene One Rose is baking chicken

so I decided when she enters the scene with Bono and Troy she would be making side dishes for dinner. I had a few different side dishes in mind, including peas, green beans, potatoes, and cornbread. I chose to be snapping green beans and peeling potatoes. First and foremost, these would be easy activities to complete onstage while saying my lines and being an active participant in the scene. The potatoes also fit into the narrative since Troy says that he brings home a sack of potatoes every Friday. These were two things I had to learn how to do well. After making this decision one night during rehearsal I went to Kroger and brought one pound of green beans and 12 white potatoes. During the days or nights when I was not in rehearsal I would spend my nights snapping green beans and peeling potatoes. My first goal was to learn to trim the green beans in a realistic way. Through internet research I found a few different ways to trim them, but what worked best for me was snapping the ends off. This was very easy, but then as time went on the challenge became not to trim too much because this does not look realistic either. Peeling potatoes was the next activity. The props department gave me a potato peeler, but I did not know how to use one nor did I think Rose would have utilized this so I decided to learn how to peel with a small knife instead. The goal of peeling the potatoes was to be able to do it in a way that did not seem like I was acting. I did not want to look down at my hands constantly because this would signify that I did not know how to peel potatoes. Through practice I taught myself how to cut the potatoes in a safe and efficient manner. I did not cut myself one time during the run of the show. This was a turning point for me because I began to understand how the “outside homework” that Dr. Kelly always talked

about plays into the rehearsals. The outside homework is the work that the actor does before they even get to rehearsal room. I needed to come into rehearsals with these skills so that Dr. Kelly could help me to make them better.

This was evident in the song that Rose sings in Act One, Scene Two, “Jesus Be a Fence”. For the first few weeks I barely sang the song, because I thought Dr. Kelly would give me a rendition. Then I realized that this was the homework I needed to be doing. So, I listened to a few renditions of this song found two that I felt were applicable to Rose and the time period. I chose the versions sung by the groups The Meditation Singers and The Voices of Tabernacle Choir. I chose these two because they were being sung in my vocal range so I knew I would be able to find the pitch and the tempo for performance. When I did sing the song, it was just too slow and melancholy. These two interpretations helped me exude the gospel ambiance that I was looking for. When I brought in a new rendition of the song, Dr. Kelly gave me notes about how he wanted the song to sound. He would sing a few lines and have me imitate him. It was here that we found the rendition used for performance. This could have been done sooner, but I had to do the work first. This was also the case when it came to private coaching lessons with Dr. Jenn Calvano and Professor Rachel Hilmer.

By the time Dr. Jenn Calvano came into the rehearsal process I had a physical approach to Rose that was becoming too measured and studied. Although I did not get too engrossed with the Grotowski work, there was a session that made a notable

difference in my physicality for Rose. For this Grotowski exercise, I used Rose's monologue in Act Two, Scene One. This is a pivotal scene for Rose. Troy tells her about his affair and unborn child. Rose begins to tell Troy about her role in his life and their eighteen years of marriage. She starts with, "I been standing with you! I been right here with you, Troy. I got a life too" (Wilson 67). I started by saying a sentence and then executing a large action influenced by the sentence. For the line, "What about my life? What about me?" (Wilson 67), I threw my arms into air violently. I did this repeatedly. The influence of gesture did not have to make logical sense, but it was just about responding physically. When I stopped thinking about what gesture to make and just said the words while responding physically I found success. Sometimes I would say a sentence repeatedly, seeking a different physical response each time. Once I found a set of large gestures that worked for the monologue I began to make them smaller, but with the same intensity and emotion that I had found them in when they were larger. These movements became a physical score for me, but I was not stuck doing the same thing. Since the movement was rooted in emotion I had a freedom that led to new discoveries every night of performing. This is the type of work that I dreamt of as a young actor. How do I keep the work fresh without doing a complete overhaul every night? It was not until after the rehearsal process that I realized how blessed I was to have this experience of personal coaching. Even though Dr. Calvano guided me, I created this score through my actions. This meant that I could find discoveries without constant validation. This was exact moment where I felt like a graduate student actor. I let go of the need to have Dr.

Kelly or Professor Jones tell me what to do and I just did it. I did not need their validation or approval and I still found great results. Dr. Calvano worked with me in her office. I found physical choices in an office instead of a designated rehearsal space. This made me realize that the work of an actor can take place anywhere. It is not about working *onstage*, but just working. Working anywhere and everywhere so that your work is worthy of a stage. I will keep this approach to work as I move forward. I will not wait for a rehearsal space to do the work, but instead I will turn whatever space I am using into a workspace. I believe I had been learning this slowly when I would peel potatoes on my sofa or singing “Jesus Be a Fence” while I was cleaning my bathroom, but this solidified that type of work for me. The actor’s work is not about just showing up for rehearsal, but the work she does before rehearsal to make it count.

Creating nontraditional workspaces is something that the graduate program’s Alexander-trained voice professor, Rachel Hilmer, and I worked on during our coaching sessions. Alexander Technique, or AT, relates to the voice because if I am using my body properly then I create a free and open channel for voice work. During my first coaching session with Rachel we worked on finding my feet. For me, finding my feet means finding greater balance. This helped me find the foundation I was searching for with Rose. Finding my feet meant that my body was placed in a different way than my habitual stance. It felt uncomfortable at first, but it was because it was not what I was used to. Just finding my feet and walking as Rose took an entire coaching session.

During the second coaching session, Professor Hilmer then incorporated the text. We used Rose's last monologue in Act Two, Scene Five because my vocal choices had become redundant here. This is Rose's final monologue where she is convincing Cory to come to Troy's funeral by chronicling her and Troy's love story. I found my feet and began walking around the space. After about five to seven minutes I began to incorporate the text. These are a few lines: "You can't be nobody but who you are, Cory. That shadow wasn't nothing but you growing into yourself. You either got to grow into it or cut it down to fit you. But that's all you got to make life with. That's all you got to measure yourself against that world out there" (Wilson 90).

Every time Professor Hilmer thought I was being repetitive she would say things like, "I don't believe you, say it again". or "Who cares"? This meant that what I was saying was not reaching her as an audience member and therefore ineffective. This forced me out of my vocal comfort zone because I could not rely on the choices that I had made in the past. The new choices became effective in a joyous way because the more I told this story about love the more I fell in love with it and Troy. Loving the story I was designated to tell changed my perception of Rose. She was not the same woman from the beginning of the play. Through this vocal work, I found autonomy and freedom for her. In the wake of Troy's death, she still finds happiness. These coaching sessions helped me find new choices within the rehearsal process and my challenge became trying to hold onto them when we started running the play all the way through each night.

At this point in the rehearsal process I was worn out. It was the first week in September and I felt like giving up. I was felt like giving up because I was not retaining all of the information I needed to. Classes were getting too difficult for me and I injured my back. Ultimately, it felt like I had too things to balance and everything that had been doing to stay on top of my classwork and rehearsals was not working. I injured my back from picking Adriana, the little girl who played Raynell in our production. I felt awful. Although I am a fat person, I've never had a back injury before. I have never felt immobile. This is exactly what that back injury did to me. I strained my lower back on my right side. My doctor said it was harsh strain and that I would need a few months of physical therapy and rest to fully recover. I did not go to rehearsal for two days and this is when I began to give up. The thought of trying to recover enough before the run of the show became daunting. I felt like screwed up my whole process. I could not do the dances or fight choreography the same way that I had before. Even when I came back to rehearsal I was still in pain, but I did not say anything because I was afraid that I would be perceived as weak.

Being the fattest person in an acting program there are so many fears that I work against. For instance, the assumption that I do not exercise or lead a healthy lifestyle. Or, there is the assumption that I cannot do the movement work like my colleagues. And the stereotypical assumption that I cannot do the work, because I am fat, I am lazy. These are statements that I have dealt with before I started graduate school. The last thing I wanted to do is injure myself and be perceived as the fat actor who could barely move. I have

worked hard to be strong and capable. If I were to be weak during this time I would have felt that I was giving into expectations of fat people. This is when my knowledge of fat studies informed my process. I should not have been working so hard to prove to people that I was capable because I was fat. I should not have to work against assumptions, because people should not think less of me because I am fat. After thinking about all this I realized that it is not up to me to control other people's perceptions, but to control myself. Therefore, I became more patient with my body. I did the exercises that the physical therapist prescribed and I realized that I would not be fully healed by opening, but I could still do an amazing job. I needed to accept where my body was at this point in this process and be okay with it. This was easier said than done.

Shortly after I returned to rehearsal, there was one night that was exceptionally awful. I was low energy during the entire run of Act Two. I had my lines down at this point, but I was not acting. Dr. Kelly asked the cast what was wrong? And I replied that I was tired. In retrospect, I see why this was a sorry excuse, but it was my truth due to the fact the I was specifically I was tired of feeling immobile in class and outside of rehearsal because of an unforeseen back injury. I was tired of not being able to retain the information from night to night. I was tired of being surrounded by men. I was tired of the new stimuli in my classes with all new instructors. Essentially, I was tired of being in graduate school. I was feeling the burnout that people talk about when one continues education without any type of break in between. Looking back on it, this should have been the moment where I took a deep breath and remembered that I asked for this

challenge, but I did not. I continued to feel pity for myself for another few days until I had a talk with my mother. She helped me realize that this was just a small battle that I was going through and that I could not give up. I could not let the fatigue of coursework or life get in the way of this performance because I truly wanted a role where I could showcase my skill and training. I let self-pity keep me from the process, but enough was enough. In the future, I know that I must take more preemptive measures before I get exhausted to the point of no return. I will do more outside homework every single day so that I do not feel rushed for time as the rehearsal process moves forward. I will learn all my lines so that I am not constantly searching for lines when I should be acting in the moment. I will take care of my body through adequate rest, hydration, and nutrition.

The next few days I began to pull myself together. I took more time before rehearsal to get myself to a calm mental space through deep breathing and relaxation so that I could perform with all the outside stimuli. I made a space for myself in the rehearsal room that was just for me and no one else. In this space, I kept my water bottle, script, and Bible close by. To finish this production process, I had to change my mindset and with that, shift my spiritual focus.

Spirituality began to inform my acting because I realized that I had to recommit myself to God just as Rose had. I needed to spend more time in prayer and meditation before I even walked into the rehearsal space so that I could disregard any negativity. I would pray over learning my lines, pray for my body in fight choreography, and I prayed

for the rest of the cast. I realized that I could combine my spiritual life and my career. This process made me realize that I did not need to separate the two anymore. I also began to have more faith in myself as an actor. I would not have been allowed in the program if I did not meet their standards. I had to stop thinking that I could not do this and realize that I can.

I began to say no to things that were not important to me and this process at the time. I tried to handle small tasks, including classwork, in a timely manner so that I would not become overwhelmed. Most importantly, I started to become patient with my body. I let the fear of judgement and re-injury go so that I could perform. I started to do the exercises that the physical therapist gave me so that I could regain full use of my lower back. I wish I had done these things sooner instead of giving up. I started to look at rehearsals as a chance to grow from my previous failures. This began to happen more as we got closer to technical rehearsals.

One night a week before we started our first technical rehearsal, Dr. Kelly introduced Stanislavski's method of physical action into rehearsal with Tyler and me. During this exercise, Dr. Kelly had me push into the wall of the rehearsal room repeatedly while thinking about the emotions and intentions behind the scene in Act Two, Scene One. This is the scene where Troy reveals to Rose that he has cheated on her and conceived child with another woman. To start the exercise, I slowly began to push my arms into the wall while saying "Why Troy? Why?" (Wilson 65). The repetitive motion

began to heighten my awareness of Rose's frustration. I breathed deeply into my body so that the movement was present throughout my whole body, not just my upper body. Dr. Kelly clapped his hands and I began to move faster, pushing my body into the wall, slamming my arms and now saying the phrase a little louder. At this point I had been saying the same phrase and slamming my arms for five minutes and I became very agitated. Dr. Kelly yelled, "ACTION!" and I began the monologue moving after Troy with all my pent-up frustration. I tried to hold onto this energy, but because of the new stimuli I forgot my lines and lost the energy. Dr. Kelly sent me back to the wall. I began to slam my body and my arms into the wall faster. Now I began saying the next part of line, "After all these years to come dragging this in on me now" (Wilson 65). The word 'dragging' made me speak from a guttural part of my voice. I then followed this up with my arms dragging away from the wall slow at first, then faster. I continued this series of motions for five minutes until Dr. Kelly yelled action and instructed me to begin the monologue. The physicality of this action connected me to the emotion and circumstances of this scene. When my body was connected, then I could connect to the truth of the scene. With this exercise, I found new depth in the scene. I found the hues that I had been looking for in my monologue. This was powerful; it was unlike anything I had done before. I was not yelling the entire time or relying on my stature as a fat woman to evoke power, but using my words and training. During the run of *Fences*, I would do this exercise every single night before I entered the scene. Act Two, Scene One, went

best for me the nights that I fully invested in this process, taking a minimum of 10 to 12 minutes.

Initially, I felt awkward doing this exercise because it seemed like everyone was watching me and waiting. This is when I realized I must let go of perceived expectations and do the work. The more I pushed into the wall the more I released of any inhibitions that I had been holding onto. I went after Troy in a way that I never had done before. I needed this moment in the process because it made me realize that I can do this work. I must continue to build the stamina needed for this profession, but if I keep working I can achieve the success that I desire. This journey will not be easy though. The closer we got to opening night, the more confident I became in my ability to have a great performance. I started to settle into the role more, and it enabled me to take more risks in my acting. I continued to take the time that I needed to prepare so that I could do my best.

Throughout this whole process I had been waiting for direction, seeking validation, or letting fear get the best of me. These actions represented me trying to hold onto some expectation that I had coming into the process. It was not until then that I realized that I should not be trying to work to fulfill anyone's expectations. I should be working to tell the story that the playwright put on the page and using my training to the best of my ability. I needed to look inside myself, trust and do the work instead of waiting or searching. Looking back on this performance process I have realized that my beginning notion of wanting to have a strict process for each role is not effective. Every

role will call for something different and sometimes curveballs maybe thrown in my path. It is about being able to get back up and continue to use the different tools to be successful. The important part of the process is not giving up like I did at first. If I give up on the process, I am giving up on myself and the work.

My journey to become Rose Maxson in August Wilson's *Fences* is one that I learned from in many ways. I learned that my teachers have taught me well, but my biggest challenge will always be myself. I need to recognize when my attitude is getting in the way of doing my work. I need to find the happiness in the work no matter how difficult it is. I have a hard time finding the freedom to play and explore in my work because I let my anxiety and fear of judgement control me. This process made me realize that I do my best work when I put any anxiety and fear to the wayside.

This process gave me a new appreciation for my body. I have always felt comfortable in my own skin, but learning about fat studies made me realize that it is not enough to feel comfortable. I need to appreciate my body. I need to appreciate all of things that my body can do and not focus on everything it cannot. Injuring myself during the rehearsal process showed me that I can no longer neglect my body. I must practice more self-care. Furthermore, I need to work on the relationship to my body in different spaces. The work I did with Dr. Calvano and Professor Hilmer was invigorating because I discovered different things that my body was capable of.

In terms of womanism, I realized that I needed to take more agency in my life. I needed to establish more autonomy with my training. I do not have to do the same thing as everyone else, in fact I should make different choices so that I learn from them.

Religion played a huge part of my process. I realized that Rose and I both needed to commit ourselves to Christ so that we can thrive. I now know that I need to spend more time making sure that I am spiritually focused so that I can do the work. I must also have faith.

Throughout this process, I learned to confront and challenge myself in ways that I had not before. I realized that I do not take criticism well, even if it is constructive. It taught me that that my emotional self is one that must be present in all my work without inhibition, but I must be willing to put my emotions aside at times and do the work to the best of my ability. Validation should not be what I search for as an actor. I should be working towards truth. If I can continue to work on my process to becoming a fearless, hardworking, performer I believe that I will continue to do good work.

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 - *'How much woman am I: The redefinition of womanhood through the chthonic realm in August Wilson's 'The Piano Lesson'*
- Organization for the Study of Communication, Language, and Gender Annual Meeting, 2015
 - Feminist Backlash To Michelle Obama And Black Girls
- Rock! (Panel)
- Comparative Drama Conference, 2016
 - *How Much Woman Am I: The Redefinition of Womanhood through the Chthonic Realm in August Wilson's The Piano Lesson*
- Organization for the Study of Communication, Language, and Gender Annual Meeting, 2016
 - Broadway, What's Good? An Exploration of Non-Traditional Female Characters through Performance and Critical Discussion

- Organization for the Study of Communication, Language, and Gender Annual Meeting, 2016
 - Black Mothers Matter: An Exploration of the Black Mother Narrative in Angelina Weld Grimké’s *Rachel* and August Wilson’s *King Hedley II*
- August Wilson Society 10th Annual Conference, 2016
 - Ruby Red Siren: The Exploration of Sexuality as a Storytelling Device in *Seven Guitars* and *King Hedley II*

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