Gem Stuff

## What are your feelings about Aunt Ester, who is the centerpiece of Gem of the Ocean? She seems to me to be a pillar of the entire cycle, whether she appears on stage or not.

She represents the entire body of wisdom and tradition of the African American –going back all the way to 1619, our first presence here in America. So that memory and that experience, that tradition and wisdom are kept alive in the person of Aunt Ester. She really hovers over the whole cycle, whether she’s mentioned by the other characters or not. She has emerged for me as singular, she’s the most important character: all the cycle’s characters are her children. But she’s a symbolic representation of that. Obviously, no one can live to be 365 years old, or 387, 385… my math is terrible. As for the decision to put her on stage, I knew from the beginning that I didn’t want just this mystical presence hanging over every-thing, I wanted her to be very human. Then we find out that this position of being Aunt Ester – this body of wisdom and memory that is her – has been passed down from one Aunt Ester to the other over a period of time. Though technically, I think, she is 285 years old, the actual person is probably 72 or 73.

## Do you have anything in particular you want audiences to walk away with after they see your plays?

No, no, no. I’m not trying to send a “message” other than good theatrical experience. I’m simply trying to tell a story within each of those plays. If you take the whole body of plays, and look at them, a lot of them point toward reclaiming your past, and making connections with your past so that you can understand who you are in the present. Or as Aunt Ester says in Two Trains Running, if you drop the ball you’ve got to go back and pick it up. There’s no point in continuing to run because you get to the end zone and there won’t be a touchdown. You’ve got to have the ball. So I think that may be the central idea of all the plays: go back and pick up the ball if you’ve fumbled it.

<https://www.huntingtontheatre.org/August-Wilson-Monologue-Competition/AWMC-Plays/Gem-of-the-Ocean/>

## Some names

Queen Esther, Bible

Julius Caesar, Roman emperor

Elijah P Lovejoy, murdered Abolitionist

King Solomon

King David

Harriet “Moses” Tubman