Joe Turner's Come and Gone Study Guide

Joe Turner's Come and Gone by August Wilson

BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

August Wilson's *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, first produced in 1986 by the Yale Repertory Theatre, was published in the United States in 1988. The play was inspired both by the 1978 Romare Bearden artwork, *Mill Hand's Lunch Bucket,* and the blues song, "Joe Turner's Come and Gone." The song, which was recorded by legendary blues artist, W. C. Handy, was first sung by many estranged black women who had lost their husbands, fathers, and sons to Joe Turner—a plantation owner who illegally enslaved blacks in the early twentieth century. *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* is the third play in Wilson's ten-play historical cycle, in which the playwright is chronicling the African-American experience in the twentieth century by devoting a play to each decade. *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* represents the 1910s.

Set in a Pittsburgh boardinghouse in 1911, the play examines African Americans' search for their cultural identity, following the repression of American slavery. For Herald Loomis, this search involves the physical migration from the South to Pittsburgh in an attempt to find his wife. Pittsburgh was one of the many urban areas in the North that other blacks migrated to in the 1910s, in an effort to flee the discrimination they faced in the South, while attempting to find financial success in the North. Herald's search for his identity, represented as his song, is unsuccessful until he has embraced the pain of both his own past and the past of his ancestors, and moved on to self-sufficiency. A copy of the play can be found in *August Wilson: Three Plays*, published by University of Pittsburgh Press in 1994.

Author Biography

Wilson was born as Frederick August Kittel on April 27, 1945, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Wilson's white German father largely deserted the family shortly after the playwright was born, and Wilson's mother, Daisy Wilson Kittel, was forced to support her large family by working a number of cleaning jobs. Daisy married David Bedford, an African-American man, when Wilson was an adolescent. Bedford moved the family to a mostly white suburb, where they experienced extreme racial intimidation. Although Daisy encouraged the playwright and his five siblings to pursue an education, the racist treatment he received in the formal school system encouraged Wilson to drop out as a teenager. Instead, Wilson educated himself in his local library, focusing mainly on black writers.

In 1965, at the age of twenty, Wilson moved into a rooming house with a group of black intellectuals, and began publishing his poetry in several small periodicals. Wilson was profoundly affected by the Black Power movement in the 1960s, and co-founded the Black Horizons on the Hill Theater in Pittsburgh in 1968 to show his support. The theater, which was in operation until 1978, provided a medium for Wilson and others to raise awareness of African-American culture and issues. In 1978, Wilson moved to St. Paul, Minnesota, where he wrote his first play, *Jitney*, which was first produced in 1982. Set in a Pittsburgh taxi station, the play was successful in his local theater.

In 1984, however, Wilson's drama reached Broadway with the production of *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, which Wilson revised with the help of Lloyd Richards, a Broadway director who would collaborate with Wilson on many of his plays. The play was the first of Wilson's ambitious, ten-play historical cycle. In this group of plays, Wilson announced that he would chronicle the African American experience in the twentieth century, providing one play for each decade. *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, first produced in 1986, is the third play in this series, and examines life in the 1910s, when many African Americans were migrating north. His latest play is *King Hedley II*, which was produced on Broadway in 2001.

For a professional dramatic career that has spanned only two decades, Wilson has amassed an impressive number of awards from the dramatic community. Chief among these are the Pulitzer Prizes that Wilson won for *Fences* (1986) and *The Piano Lesson* (1990). Wilson is the only African-American playwright who has won two Pulitzer Prizes. Wilson also won an Antoinette Perry ("Tony") Award for best play for *Fences* in 1987.

Plot Summary

Act 1, Scene 1

When *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* opens, Seth is complaining to his wife Bertha about Bynum, a tenant in their Pittsburgh boardinghouse who kills pigeons for his African rituals. Seth and Bertha also talk about Seth's night job at the steel mill, and his third job as a tinsmith, making items out of the sheet metal sold to him by the white peddler, Rutherford Selig. Seth would go into the tinsmithing business by himself, but cannot get approved for a loan unless he signs over their boardinghouse, which he refuses to do.

Selig stops by for his weekly Saturday business visit, buys some pots from Seth and puts in an order for some dustpans. Bynum asks Selig about the shiny man that he paid Selig—a people finder—to find for him. Selig asks Bynum for a better description, and Bynum tells him about the strange man, who gave him the vision in which he acquired the power of the Binding Song. Bynum is now able to bind people together, so that they can find each other if they are separated. Selig leaves. Jeremy, a young tenant, comes in and tells everybody how the police locked him up so they could steal money from him. Herald Loomis and his daughter, Zonia, arrive and rent a room from Seth. Herald is looking for his wife, Martha, and Bynum tells him that he should talk to Selig on his next Saturday visit. Seth shows Herald to his room. Bynum encourages Jeremy to take his guitar to the nightly contest at Seefus's bar, a black gambling house, but Jeremy is leery of contests, after a bad experience with a white contest sponsor.

Seth comes in and says that Herald must be looking for Martha Pentecost, a woman he knows, because Zonia resembles her. However, Seth will not tell Herald this, because he does not trust Herald. Mattie Campbell, a young woman, stops by to talk to Bynum and ask him to bind her old boyfriend, Jack Carper, to her. Bynum says that Carper is bound to somebody else, and that Mattie should move on, although he gives Mattie a small good luck charm to put under her pillow. Jeremy asks Mattie out on a date, and she reluctantly agrees. Outside, Zonia plays in the yard and meets Reuben, the boy next door. Zonia tells him that they are searching for her mother, who ran away when a man named Joe Turner did something to her father. Reuben says that his only other friend, Eugene, died, and that, against Eugene's dying wish, Reuben keeps Eugene's pigeons in captivity, selling the pigeons to Bynum to use in his African rituals.

Act 1, Scene 2

The next Saturday morning, Bertha and Seth argue about Herald. Seth does not trust him, since he does not work, and thinks he might be a thief. Bertha, however, gives Herald the benefit of the doubt. They talk about Bynum's past, then recall how Martha came to see Bynum several years ago, distraught that she could not find her little girl. Selig shows up for his weekly visit, and Seth sells him the dustpans that he has made. Herald hires Selig to find his wife, and Selig explains that his family has been involved in

the people-finding business for a long time, first as slave transporters, then as slave bounty hunters. Now, after the slaves have been freed, he helps black people find lost family members. Selig leaves, and Bertha says that Selig can only "find" people who have hitched a ride on his wagon. Herald is unshaken in his faith, however, and says that Selig will find Martha by the next Saturday.

Act 1, Scene 3

The next morning, Seth talks to Bynum about the fact that he is still unable to get a loan to start his own tinsmithing business. Jeremy pays for Mattie to move in with him at the boardinghouse. Jeremy likes Mattie because she is pretty and treats him well, and Bynum lectures Jeremy, saying that he has to learn to appreciate everything that a woman can offer, besides the physical relationship. Just then, Molly Cunningham, an extremely attractive woman, stops by to see Seth. Molly has missed her Sunday train, and rents a room for a week. Jeremy is smitten.

Act 1, Scene 4

Later that evening, everybody except Herald sits around the dinner table. Seth pulls out a harmonica and everybody starts to "juba," an African-style song and dance that mentions the name of the Holy Ghost. Herald enters in a rage, and tells them that the Holy Ghost is going to burn them up and attempts to mock their ritual dance. In the process, he has a vision, and Bynum guides him through it. Herald imagines that he is looking out on an ocean, where bones—representing his ancestors who died on slave ships—walk on the water and then sink. Herald's vision continues, and the bones become living Africans, lying immobile on the American shore, unable to stand up for them selves under the repression of slavery. Near the end of the vision, Herald himself feels as if he is lying there with the others, and he panics when he realizes that he is not able to stand up.

Act 2, Scene 1

The next morning, Seth tries to kick Herald out, but Herald refuses to leave until Saturday. Mattie leaves for work, and Molly says that she refuses to work, and that she does not need any men or any children. Jeremy comes in, saying that he got fired when he refused to pay a white man an extortion fee to keep his job. Jeremy decides to leave Mattie and run away with Molly.

Act 2, Scene 2

On Monday evening, Bynum and Seth sit and play dominoes, and Bynum sings the song, "Joe Turner's Come and Gone." Herald comes in and tells Bynum to stop it. Bynum tells Herald that he knows that Joe Turner enslaved him, because Herald has lost his song. Herald breaks down and tells the story of his enslavement, and asks

Bynum why Turner would want him. Bynum says that Turner was hoping to steal Herald's song, but could not, because Herald forgot it in captivity.

Act 2, Scene 3

The next morning, Herald and Mattie talk about his vision. They talk about their respective mates who left them, and Herald becomes interested in Mattie. He suggests that they get together, and tries to hold her, but finds that he has forgotten how to touch, another consequence of losing his identity as a slave for Joe Turner.

Act 2, Scene 4

The next morning, Zonia and Reuben play in the yard, and Reuben tells Zonia that a ghost told him to release Eugene's pigeons. Reuben is sad that Zonia will be leaving Saturday with her father, and he says that he will marry her when they grow up. Reuben kisses her and says that he will come looking for her some day.

Act 2, Scene 5

On Saturday morning, Herald and Zonia prepare to leave and Herald tells Mattie that a man would be lucky to find her. Selig arrives, with Martha Pentecost, Herald's wife. Herald and Martha swap their stories, and Herald gives Zonia back to her mother. Martha tells Herald that he should look to Jesus for his salvation, but Herald denies Christianity, saying that Jesus has done nothing for him but bring him pain. Martha tells him that the blood of the lamb will make him clean, but Herald slashes himself across the chest with his knife, wiping his own blood on his face. Herald realizes that he has set himself free with this act of self-reliance and leaves the boardinghouse a new man, having found his song, his identity, once again. Mattie rushes after Herald, presumably to start a relationship with him and Bynum realizes that he has found his shiny man.

Act 1, Scene 1

Act 1, Scene 1 Summary

Joe Turner's Come and Gone is a two-act play about the events and tensions among the owners and boarders in Bertha and Seth Holly's rooming house in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in 1911.

It is a steamy August Saturday when the play opens. Bertha Holly is preparing breakfast in the kitchen of the boardinghouse she owns with her husband, Seth. Seth Holly, an "ornery man in his fifties," looks out the kitchen window; he is watching one of their boarders, Bynum Walker, a conjure man, who is someone who invokes spirits and potions with the intent of bringing about results. Seth cannot understand Bynum's mysterious ways and is startled to see Bynum in another ritual, which involves killing a pigeon and burying it as a prayer to the gods to bless the Holly house.

When Bynum finishes his ritual, he joins Bertha and Seth in the kitchen and the conversation turns to the youngest and newest boarder in the house, Jeremy Furlow, who has some problems with alcohol. Jeremy has recently moved from the South looking for work and is just one of the many people of all races migrating from the depressed South to look for new lives in the Northern states.

Negroes who are former slaves head North, thinking that their plights will be improved when they arrive, but jobs are scarce and competing with white people puts the Negroes in dismal situations with little to hope for in the future.

Each Saturday, Rutherford Selig, a river town peddler, stops in at the Holly boardinghouse to talk and do business with Seth, who makes pots and pans and other metal objects. Selig provides the tin and other metals, and then buys Seth's goods to sell to the people who live up and down the Monongahela River.

Selig is also known as a people finder because he travels so much and talks to so many people along the way. Selig finds it particularly difficult to keep track of the Negroes in the area because they move around so much; however, he prides himself on being able to locate anyone who may be in the area. One dollar is all Selig charges to find a person, and Bynum has paid to have Selig find what Bynum calls the "shiny man," whom he met on the road one night and who promised to tell Bynum the secret of life.

Bynum shares the story of his encounter with the shiny man, wherein the man leads Bynum around a bend in the road so that Bynum can meet his dead father. Bynum's dead father then tells Bynum how to find his own song in life. Bynum's father shares the "Binding Song," which gives Bynum his own identity as being able to bind people together as if they are glued. Selig is not sure if Bynum's encounter with the shiny man is real or just another of the old man's visions; nevertheless, Selig promises to keep on the lookout for this shiny man.

Young Jeremy comes downstairs and shares the difficult night he has had, having been arrested for drinking and being out too late. It sounds to Seth as if Jeremy has been unfairly treated, but Seth admonishes Jeremy not to make any more trouble. Seth does not need any negative publicity cast upon his boardinghouse because of the foolish behavior of his boarders.

The housemates assembled in the kitchen are interrupted by a knock at the door. A man named Herald Loomis accompanied by his young daughter, Zonia has arrived. Herald is looking for his wife, Martha Loomis, and he and Zonia request a room for a couple of weeks as Herald conducts a search in the area. Bynum suggests that Herald hire Selig for help finding Martha.

Seth escorts Herald and Zonia upstairs to their room and returns to the kitchen where Selig shares that he knows a woman named Martha Pentecost, who very well may be Martha Loomis, but Selig is concerned about telling Herald because Herald looks a little threatening.

Another knock at the door brings Mattie Campbell, a young black woman who is looking for Bynum in the hopes that Bynum can find Jack Carper, the man who has run out on Mattie. Mattie wants a spell to make Jack come back to her, because she believes Bynum can bind people together. Bynum hesitates because his binding song can only bind people who are already together, so he suggests to Mattie that perhaps she and Jack are not intended to be together. Bynum gives Mattie a charm to put under her pillow so that she can wipe Jack out of her mind while she sleeps.

Jeremy witnesses this encounter and is intrigued by Mattie. He offers to be her man until Jack returns. Mattie is ready to take a chance, and she leaves to prepare for her date with Jeremy.

Outside in the yard, Zonia has found a new friend named Reuben, a young boy from the neighborhood. Zonia explains to Reuben that she and her father have been traveling for a long time trying to find her mother. Herald calls out to remind Zonia not to stray away from the house, and Reuben comments that Zonia's father has mean eyes. Reuben distracts Zonia by offering to show her the pigeons he keeps in memory of his dead friend.

Act 1, Scene 1 Analysis

The author introduces the theme of lost identity in this scene. The black men who have migrated from the South are trying to recover a sense of who they are and come to the North hopeful for answers. It is notable that the author places the boardinghouse in Pittsburgh because it is historically a city to which many blacks migrated for its industrial economy. The city represents a hope for a better life and the establishment of new roots and a new identity.

Identity is important to all of the characters in the play because it is the early 1900s and the ravages of slavery during the Civil War still haunt the country, particularly in the

South. Bynum hangs onto the image of his dead father, who tries to provide Bynum with a sense of himself. Jeremy, representative all young blacks, suffers from restlessness and lack of place, which forces him to wander in search of himself. Herald and Zonia most directly represent the concept of searching, with their quest for Martha being conducted as if the two cannot be complete again until reunited with Martha. Likewise, Mattie feels incomplete without Jack and yearns to have him return so that she can resume the life she knew.

The introduction of Selig, whose secondary job is that of a people finder, and Bynum, whose secondary vocation is that of a people binder, is important because they represent positive forces in restoring the people, relationships, and some sense of security that the wandering characters crave.

Act 1, Scene 2

Act 1, Scene 2 Summary

As the scene opens, it is the following Saturday morning and Bertha and Seth are once again in the kitchen; Bertha is cooking while Seth talks about his reservations about Herald Loomis. Apparently Herald has been acting suspiciously, such as standing outside a church and just staring for long periods of time. Seth knows the woman named Martha Pentecost and finds it hard to believe that she would be the Martha for whom Herald is searching.

Bynum passes through the kitchen and heads upstairs, and Seth makes disparaging remarks to Bertha about the old man's weird habits. Seth then returns to the topic of Martha Pentecost who has migrated from the South, become established with a local church, and then moved with that church to Rankin, one of the river towns along the Monongahela. Although this information could be helpful to Herald, Seth does not want to get involved.

Bynum returns to the kitchen and informs Bertha and Seth that Herald intends to ask Selig for help in locating Martha. Just at that moment, Selig arrives for his weekly visit to the boardinghouse. Herald enters the room and enlists Selig's help in finding Martha and provides a description of the woman. Selig accepts Herald's dollar and agrees to help locate the woman. Selig prides himself on his people finding abilities, a business in which Selig's family has engaged for many years, such as having tracked down slaves for plantation owners, and then looking for displaced relatives of former slaves after the war.

Bertha, who is quiet throughout the negotiation, informs Herald that he has wasted a dollar after Selig leaves the house.

Act 1, Scene 2 Analysis

It is important to note Seth's behavior in contrast to the other black characters. Having been born and raised in the North, Seth has always enjoyed freedom and does not know the fear of enslavement or the devastating loss of family and sense of identity. It is this difference in experience which distances Seth from the other black men and Seth cannot relate to them. Seth does not understand Bynum's rituals which are a way for the old man to find himself and help others. Seth thinks Bynum's voodoo ways are ridiculous and inconsequential. Likewise, Seth does not think highly of Herald Loomis with his desperate behaviors, but Seth has never experienced the despair and longing which plague Herald; the chasm between the characters will continue to exist. Seth does not want any part of the lives that cross the threshold of his boardinghouse perhaps because they remind him of how close he came to being one of the wanderers himself.

While Seth is a passive thwart to reconnecting people, Selig represents the destruction and devastation of black families. Selig's family business of tracking down runaway slaves is ironically continued through Selig, who finds people who may not want to be found. Bertha makes the remark that Selig doesn't find anybody that he hasn't already taken away, meaning that Selig's ancestors took blacks away from Africa to be sold into slavery and then Selig's own father tracked down slaves who ran away.

Act 1, Scene 3

Act 1, Scene 3 Summary

This scene takes place on the next day and Bertha and Seth prepare to go to church. Seth is disgruntled because of his inability to persuade some of the area's businessmen to support his start-up metal working business. Bertha is impatient with Seth's whining and encourages Seth to hurry so they can get to the Sunday service.

Jeremy comes downstairs and shows off the dollar he won at a guitar contest at a club the night before. He then asks if he may invite Mattie to Sunday dinner, and ultimately inquires if Mattie may move in with him. Seth agrees but tells Jeremy that his rent will increase and Jeremy agrees to pay. Bynum is drawn into the conversation and tries to give Jeremy advice on women; Bynum tells Jeremy he needs to be mindful of with whom he chooses to associate.

According to Bynum, a man cannot indiscriminately pick a woman off the streets and take her home with him. Looking at a woman is like viewing a whole way of life, and if a man chooses the right woman, she will be like water and berries: everything a man could ever want or need to live. Bynum counsels Jeremy to look at the complete person when looking at a woman, not merely the anticipation of physical pleasure.

Bynum's words go unheeded by Jeremy, who is distracted by the sight of a young woman named Molly Cunningham at the boardinghouse door. Molly has missed her train to Cincinnati and needs a place to stay until she can catch the next train. Seth offers Molly a room and the young woman tells Seth that she likes to have company, a fact which unnerves Seth. Seth then tells Molly that the boardinghouse is a respectable establishment and he cannot allow any offensive behavior.

Molly agrees to Seth's terms and leaves to find her room, unaware that Jeremy has watched the encounter. Jeremy is quite taken with the newcomer and tells Bynum that he now knows what the old man had been saying about looking at a woman as a person who can change one's whole life.

Act 1, Scene 3 Analysis

The old conjure man, Bynum, symbolizes the need for black people to find their family ties and some security. Bynum attempts to advise Jeremy about choosing a woman for the right reasons in an attempt to stave off the short encounters which plague not only the young black men but also the black women who have been separated from their families. According to Bynum, the only way to stop the frantic behavior and begin to bind people together again is to join with another for proper and long-term reasons.

Jeremy and Molly symbolize the instability and restlessness which still exist for black people in the early 20th century. Although the Civil War has long been over, the residual

prejudices and practices force young black people to be always on the move so as not to be detained in any form. Ironically, it is this very restlessness which perpetuates the constant migration and lack of establishment of solid family structures which are the goals of the wandering.

Mattie inherently knows her objective to settle and begin to establish roots, but Jeremy is too restless to meet her needs and is turned by the appearance of Molly at the boardinghouse. It is not only Jeremy's youth which drives his disloyalty but the fact that he has lived a day-to-day existence and the road is always beckoning.

It is important to note that although Seth is a free man and grew up in the North, he still suffers the pangs of racial prejudice as evidenced by the white businessmen who will not fund the business Seth wants to start. Seth wants to be perceived as different from the other black men who have migrated from the South but is perilously close to their own predicament, in spite of his own heritage of freedom.

Act 1, Scene 4

Act 1, Scene 4 Summary

It is now later Sunday evening. Mattie has moved in and dinner has just ended. Mattie offers to help Bertha with the dishes but Bertha has already enlisted the help of the young girl, Zonia. The residents gather to juba, which is a call-and-response form of African song and dance. Bynum and Jeremy create the rhythm by drumming on the table as the others sing and stomp in the African slave ritual.

After awhile Herald can take no more of the incantations and hollers for the group to stop. Herald begins ranting about the imminent presence of the Holy Spirit which will burn up all of them and begins to unfasten the fly of his pants. Seth thinks that Herald has gone crazy, especially when Herald begins to dance around, speaking in tongues.

Herald stops abruptly and Bynum encourages Herald to describe what he has just experienced; Bynum feels certain that Herald has had some sort of spiritual vision. Herald explains that he sees bones coming out of water and coming to a place "bigger than the whole world," and then sees the bones walking across the water, where they quickly sink. A wave washes the bones onto the shore and the bones fill with the flesh of black men. Herald lies on the floor as if to demonstrate the position of the bones he has just described.

Herald is unable to stand on his own at this point and Bynum encourages Herald, telling him that the whole world is standing and walking toward the road. Herald wants to stand and Bynum continues telling Herald that everyone is walking now, men just like Herald and himself, coming out of the water. Herald continues to struggle to stand but cannot do it and collapses on the floor.

Act 1, Scene 4 Analysis

This scene is heavy with symbolism, beginning with the juba ritual which is a combination of African song and dance. Combining African heritage with the ways of the new life in America, the dance symbolizes the melding of the two cultures for the black people. The preservation of the native heritage is strong but the people also realize the need for adaptation into their new lives. The dance is a way to blend the two perspectives.

The juba is also a device to unify the residents of the boardinghouse and creates a sense of family.For the time being, the wandering souls can feel like they have found a home among these kindred spirits.

The juba is also a spiritual representation of differing religions: that of the African nations with the new religions experienced in America. Herald's vision is brought about by his own rejection of the melding of Christian and African religions. The purpose of the

juba is to call forth the Holy Spirit, found in Christianity, which is in opposition to the African religions. It is as if the juba attempts to keep the old religion alive while calling up the Holy Spirit of the new religion, a conflict which sends Herald over the edge in despair and confusion.

Herald's vision is dramatically poignant as it symbolizes the black people who were torn away from their homes in Africa and transported across the ocean to America, where they were sold into slavery. The bones which sink into the water in Herald's vision represent the countless black people who died on the slave ships through illness and violence, their bodies tossed overboard as if they were some sort of refuse.

The remainder of the bones in Herald's vision represent the black people who arrived on the shores of America and were sold into slavery. The bones fill with black flesh but are lifeless because of the enforced slavery. Eventually the bones are able to stand and move but Herald is not yet capable of the same action, symbolizing his own enslavement in both body and spirit.

Herald is still trapped in the personage of forced labor and cannot yet comprehend a life free from umbrage. Bynum's attempts to help free Herald from the psychological chains which bind him are not yet successful because Herald is not able to give himself permission to be free like the others around him.

Act 2, Scene 1

Act 2, Scene 1 Summary

The next morning Seth is again complaining about the disruptive presence of Herald in the boardinghouse. Bertha tries to get Seth to have some compassion for Herald and to think about Zonia, who needs a place to stay. Bertha passes off Herald's behavior of the previous night as drunkenness, but Seth wants no more excuses and plans to ask Herald to leave.

When Herald appears in the kitchen, Seth tells Herald that he must leave because of his odd behavior, but Herald reminds Seth that he has prepaid and will be staying until the end of the week. Seth cannot argue with this fact and is forced to relent.

The other residents of the house are now gathered for breakfast and the young girl, Molly, is impressed by Bynum's intervention during Herald's outburst from the night before. She asks Bynum if he is one of those "voodoo people." Bynum explains only that he is able to bind people with a song just like his father before him. Molly's mother used to believe in this sort of behavior, but Molly has no interest in it, a fact which insults Bynum, so the old man leaves the house to be away from this limited thinking.

Mattie must leave for her job cleaning and ironing at the home of Doc Goldblum. Molly declares that she has no intention of ever cleaning or ironing for anyone else. According to Molly, Mattie would not have to work if Jeremy were truly her man and taking care of her like he should. Mattie informs Molly that Jeremy is only a temporary man, to which Molly responds that men are no good and she has not met one yet that can be trusted. Molly only loves her mother and has no intention of being tied down to any unfaithful man and a house full of babies.

Jeremy returns unexpectedly from work, having been fired because he will not pay a white man a fee to be permitted to keep working. Seth thinks that the nominal fee is not worth making a fuss and losing a job, but Jeremy is outraged by the principle of the matter. To Jeremy, another job and another place to stay are just down the next road.

Jeremy sees Molly and asks her to leave with him, but Molly contends that Jeremy is already attached to Mattie. Jeremy's intentions with regard to Mattie had only been temporary because Jeremy felt sad for Mattie's loneliness. Molly is the opposite of this, and it is Molly's independence which is so appealing to Jeremy; her independence makes Molly the type of woman with whom he wants to align himself.

Molly states her criteria for going with Jeremy, who feels he can make a decent living by winning guitar contests. Molly will not work and definitely will not go south; both of these demands are terms to which Jeremy agrees, and the two make plans to leave the boardinghouse together.

Act 2, Scene 1 Analysis

The theme of tolerance is important in this scene beginning with Seth's continuing impatience with Bynum. Bertha is the calm voice of reason for her husband's behavior and Seth always calms down when presented with rationality. Mattie has no tolerance for Bynum's rituals and practices and she symbolizes the new thinking of the younger black generation trying to free itself of old restrictions and ways of thinking, represented by Bynum.

The two young black women, Mattie and Molly, have little tolerance for the other's point of view and lifestyle. Mattie does not understand Molly's need to be unfettered and Molly does not understand Mattie's need for employment and stability. Ironically, it is Mattie's employment and search for security which provide the freedom that Molly does not have, yet desperately craves, as Molly is dependent on her mother and any man she can find to provide her with financial support.

Act 2, Scene 2

Act 2, Scene 2 Summary

Later the same day, Bynum and Seth play dominoes in the parlor when Herald returns home. Seth reminds Herald that Herald must leave on Saturday; Seth then returns his attention to the game and Bynum's absentminded singing of the song "Joe Turner's Come and Gone." The lyrics are the story of a man who has been taken by the infamous Joe Turner, who stole black men to work on chain gangs in Tennessee.

Herald is offended by the song and asks Bynum to stop, which the old man does, as he has other songs he can sing. Bynum tries to engage Herald in conversation and asks if Herald has ever worked in farming. Herald admits to having picked cotton during his life. Bynum feels as if Herald is familiar in some way, as if he has seen Herald near the town where Bynum saw his own shiny man.

Bynum shares that it is funny that Herald is looking for his wife and Bynum still looks for his shiny man. Everyone is looking for someone. Bynum tells Herald that he knows who Herald is just by looking at him, a skill taught to Bynum by his own father. According to Bynum, Herald is a man who has lost his own song and no longer knows who he is. Bynum instinctively knows that Herald was "one of Joe Turner's niggers," men who lose their own songs. Herald tries to deny Bynum's statement but ultimately reveals that Bynum is correct.

Herald had been a married man with a baby when he was caught by Joe Turner's men near Memphis in 1901. For seven years, Herald worked on the notorious chain gang and lost all contact with his family. Joe Turner's practice was to keep men for seven years and release them on his own birthday. After his release, Herald returns to the place where he lived with his wife, Martha, and daughtetr, Zonia, but they are no longer living at the farm where they were sharecroppers. Martha has left Zonia with her own mother and headed north.

Since that time, Herald and Zonia have been trying to find Martha because Herald feels that all he needs to regain his life is to simply see Martha's face. If Herald could have his wife back he knows his life would begin again.

Bynum asks Herald if he knows why Joe Turner wanted Herald. Seth interrupts by answering that Joe Turner obviously needed work done, but Bynum thinks that Joe Turner wanted Herald's song. The theft of Herald's song has left Herald an empty man, but Bynum feels that Herald still knows the song and encourages Herald to find it within himself again. As Bynum speaks, Herald comes to the realization that Bynum had been one of the bone people from his own vision, and understands that Bynum had been a slave.

Act 2, Scene 2 Analysis

The plight of black men improved very little in the South in the years following the Civil War as verified by Herald's story of being taken away in chains to work for the notorious Joe Turner. Although not technically a slave, Herald has led a diminished life and lost everything dear to him, including his own sense of self. Bynum tries to get Herald to understand the need for finding his song, a metaphor for his own identity. This is an issue very familiar to Bynum, who has himself struggled with the issue of reclaiming his life after surviving a lifetime in slavery. Bynum received his song from the "shiny man," his own father, and hopes to help Herald in the same way so that the younger man can claim his life and begin to live again.

Act 2, Scene 3

Act 2, Scene 3 Summary

The next morning Bertha is once again in the kitchen and listening to Bynum and Mattie discuss the charm that Bynum had given Mattie. Sometimes, he says, a person does not recognize good luck because it is not what they had been looking for. Bynum leaves the room as Herald enters. Bertha warns Mattie not to take Bynum's rituals too seriously and to let the thought of Jeremy go on. Bertha tells Mattie that Jeremy is just a young man who does not know himself well enough yet to be able to offer Mattie anything of any value. Molly's arrival at the boardinghouse and luring away of Jeremy is probably a stroke of luck for Mattie, although she may not view it like that now.

Bertha urges Mattie to just continue living her life, and then one day what she has wished for most will be standing right in front of her. At this moment Herald enters the kitchen and enters into a discussion with Mattie about loss. Since both people have experienced the loss of their partners, Mattie and Herald feel a bond beginning to bloom. Herald admits that he has been attracted to Mattie and knows that she thinks of him, too. Herald attempts to touch Mattie but his advances are awkward and he realizes that he has lost his ability to communicate with a woman.

Act 2, Scene 3 Analysis

Bynum's and Bertha's advice to Mattie about waiting for her good fortune is a form of foreshadowing which has almost immediate consequences. Bertha advises Mattie to be patient and then her future will one day appear in front of her. As if on cue, Herald enters the room and he and Mattie share their own personal disappointments, which draws the two of them together. Herald needs some further personal development and some more self confidence in order to proceed with the relationship, but the groundwork is laid, bringing Bynum's and Bertha's advice full circle.

Act 2, Scene 4

Act 2, Scene 4 Summary

The next day is Saturday and Reuben and Zonia are outside the boardinghouse, where Reuben shares the disturbing events of the night before; he heard Bynum's moans and incantations and he also witnessed the unnerving sight of Miss Mabel, Seth's dead mother. Miss Mabel wants Reuben to release the pigeons which had belonged to Reuben's now dead friend, Eugene, whom Reuben sorely misses. Reuben hates to lose another friend, but he realizes that Zonia too will be leaving with her father today to resume the search for Martha.

Bertha suggests another boardinghouse to Herald and offers breakfast to him and Zonia before they leave. Mattie offers up the idea that Martha may be involved with another man since it has been eleven years since Herald has seen Martha. Mattie hates to see Herald and Zonia leave, and she gives Zonia a ribbon for her hair as a memento. Mattie wishes Herald good luck in finding his wife, and Herald tells Mattie that any man would be lucky to find Mattie and make her his own.

Soon after Herald leaves, Selig arrives for his weekly visit; he is accompanied by Martha Pentecost, whom he has found in Rankin. Martha is anxious to see Zonia, and suddenly Herald and Zonia return. Herald accosts Martha for not waiting for him to return when he was taken by Joe Turner's gang. Martha tries to explain her actions, stating that she could not maintain the farm after Herald was gone and consequently lost their sharecropping rights, and was then forced to move in with her mother.

Martha waited at her mother's home for five years, but no word from Herald prompted Martha to believe that Herald was probably dead. Martha decided to move North and left Zonia with her mother until she was able to establish a life for the two of them. Martha had no way of knowing that Herald would show up only two months after she had gone away. Martha has been looking for Herald and Zonia since this time.

Now that Herald has seen Martha's face, he can relinquish his obsession over her and begin to live his life again. Herald releases Zonia to Martha because the girl needs her mother's influence in her life so that she will not grow up unbalanced. Zonia hesitates to go to, but Herald tells the girl that he will always love her and that it is time for her to be with her mother.

Years of frustration and rage release from Herald, who turns on Bynum and accuses the old man of binding Herald to the road. However, Bynum's powers have bound only Martha and Zonia. Herald refuses to be bound anymore in his life and pulls a knife, prompting Bynum to urge Herald to stand and sing his own song again. Martha urgently suggest Herald seek comfort in Jesus, but Herald rejects the religion and slashes his own chest, claiming that he will bleed for himself.

Suddenly Herald realizes that he is literally standing on his own two feet again and has the confidence to face the world unencumbered. Herald tells Martha goodbye and leaves with Mattie running after him. Bynum realizes in moment of clarity that Herald is the new "shiny man" for whom Bynum has been searching and yells after Herald, claiming that Herald is shining like new money.

Act 2, Scene 4 Analysis

Herald has instinctively known that he must see Martha's face in order to begin his life anew and his catharsis is almost instantaneous when he does encounter her. Symbolically speaking, Martha has changed her last name from Loomis to Pentecost, which is the religious occasion for the visit of the Holy Spirit where courage and fortitude are passed on. Herald receives his new life; interestingly enough, he claims he will "bleed for himself," a reference to Jesus Christ, and therefore a reference to Christianity. His previous malcontent with Christianity is gone and he now references it in his own rebirth. He is finally a man free from all the haunts of his past; the threat of slavery, Joe Turner's gang, and the search for Martha.

Characters

Mattie Campbell

Mattie Campbell is one of Seth's tenants, who wants nothing more than to get married and have children, and who chases Herald at the end of the play. When she first comes to Seth's boardinghouse, Mattie, a twenty-six-year old woman, is seeking out Bynum's help. She is hoping the conjurer can bind her old boyfriend, Jack Carper, to her so that he will not leave again. Mattie had two babies with Carper, but they both died and he thinks she is cursed. However, Bynum says that she and Carper are not meant to be together. Although Mattie is desperate and ends up living with Jeremy, he leaves her, too. At the end of the play, Mattie realizes that she and Herald would make a good match and rushes to catch up with him when he leaves.

Molly Cunningham

Molly is one of Seth's tenants who desires nothing more than to be independent, and who ends up with Jeremy. Molly, an extremely attractive twenty-six-year old woman, comes to see Seth about a room when she misses her train. Jeremy, who immediately falls in love with her, eventually asks if she will accompany him on the road. She is hesitant at first, but does agree as long as he does not expect her to work, does not try to buy her, and does not take her South.

Jeremy Furlow

Jeremy Furlow is one of Seth's tenants, who ends up with Molly. Jeremy is a young, impulsive man in his twenties who does not want to be tied down to a needy woman or a place. Jeremy is illegally held in jail by the local police when they are on the lookout for stray black men from whom to extort money. Although he works on a road crew for a while, Jeremy gets fired when he refuses to pay an employment fee to one of the white men. He would rather earn money by gambling and playing his guitar in contests. Although he stays with Mattie for a little while, Molly attracts him, and he ends up leaving Mattie to travel around the country with Molly.

Bertha Holly

Bertha Holly is Seth's wife, who offers advice to many of the tenants at their Pittsburgh boardinghouse. Bertha has been married to Seth for twenty-seven years, and has learned to deal with her husband's prickly nature. While Seth is extremely critical of many people, Bertha generally gives people the benefit of the doubt. Bertha is in charge of the cooking and cleaning at the boardinghouse, while Seth collects the rent and works two side jobs. Although Bertha is a Christian woman, she also performs other rituals. Although the play does not indicate whether Bertha and Seth have any children,

she does adopt a maternal role for many of her tenants. For example, when Jeremy leaves Mattie to run away with Molly, Bertha tells Mattie that she is better off without him. When Herald leaves the boardinghouse, and is nice to Mattie in the process, it is Bertha who implies that Mattie and Herald might make a good match.

Seth Holly

Seth Holly is Bertha's husband and the owner of the Pittsburgh boardinghouse where the play is set. Unlike his open-minded wife, Seth is a suspicious man, and is constantly on the lookout for anything that could make his boardinghouse seem less than respectable. When he hears that Jeremy has been arrested for drinking, he is quick to confront him. When Herald causes a disturbance during a Sunday night juba dance, Seth threatens to throw him out the next morning. Seth was born a free black man and cannot understand and does not sympathize with the many Southern blacks who have wandered up to the American north following the abolition of slavery. Seth inherited the boardinghouse from his father, who also taught Seth how to be a tinsmith. In addition to his night job at a steel mill, Seth buys sheet metal from Selig, a white peddler, and then makes items out of the metal, selling them back to Selig. Since Selig provides the materials and sells the items, he makes a bigger profit than Seth does. Seth knows this, and would like to go into business for himself, but nobody will give him a loan unless he signs over his boardinghouse. As the boardinghouse is his only security, Seth refuses to do this.

Seth is initially suspicious of Bynum, the African root worker, who kills pigeons in Seth's yard for his African rituals. Seth notes that Bynum is like many other Southern blacks, who wander on the road most of their life before finally settling down like Bynum has. As much as he does not understand or accept Bynum's conjuring, however, when Herald first arrives at the boardinghouse, Seth likes him even less. Although Seth knows Martha Pentecost, Herald's wife, he chooses not to tell Herald where Martha is because he does not believe that Herald could be married to a respectable woman like Martha. At one point, Seth thinks that Herald might be a church thief since somebody spots Seth hanging around an old church but refusing to go inside. While Seth keeps tabs on Herald, he tells Bertha that he does not like to get involved in other people's business, and so will not tell Martha where Herald is, even though he knows that Martha is looking for Zonia. Even after Herald and his daughter have left and are standing on the street corner, Seth keeps a suspicious eye on him.

Herald Loomis

Herald Loomis is a former deacon who was illegally enslaved by Joe Turner, an experience that made him lose his song or identity. One day, Herald tried to stop some black men from gambling and all of the men, including him, were illegally snatched up by Joe Turner, the brother of the Tennessee governor, to work on his plantation for seven years. When Herald was released, he went to his mother-in-law's house, where he found his daughter, Zonia, but not his wife, Martha. Herald and Zonia walked north

for four years, searching for Martha. At Seth's boardinghouse, he hires Selig to find Martha. In the meantime, however, Herald, who is noticeably angry, causes a major disturbance in the boardinghouse. When all of the tenants are performing a juba—an African-style song and dance that invokes the name of the Holy Ghost—Herald tries to mock it by unzipping his pants while speaking in tongues. However, this act inspires Herald to have a vision, in which he imagines that he is looking back on his African ancestors who were transported to America, where they were forced into slavery. Bynum guides Herald through the vision.

Seth threatens to kick Herald out for causing the disturbance, but Herald stands his ground. When Bynum sings the song, "Joe Turner's Come and Gone," Herald opens up about his slave experience. Herald does not understand why Joe Turner would want him, until Bynum says that Turner wanted to steal Herald's song and make it his own. Because of this, Herald has subconsciously forgotten his song. Herald shows interest in Mattie, but realizes that he has forgotten how to touch—another consequence of his captivity. When Selig brings Martha to the boardinghouse, she and Herald reunite. They swap their stories, and then Herald passes Zonia on to Martha. Although Martha encourages Herald to look to Jesus Christ and the blood of the lamb for salvation, Herald uses a knife to slash his chest and draw his own blood which he wipes on his face. He realizes that with this act of self-reliance he is free and leaves to start his life over. Mattie rushes after him.

Martha Loomis

Martha Loomis is Herald's wife, who has been separated from him for eleven years since Herald was illegally enslaved by Joe Turner. When Herald was captured, Martha was unable to work their Tennessee farm by herself and was evicted by their landlord. After she and Zonia lived at Martha's mother's house for five years, Martha assumed that Herald was dead and moved on with her life. Martha moves north to avoid racial persecution, and leaves Zonia behind at her mother's house, intending to pick her up in a few months. However, Herald is released while Martha is up north, and Herald goes to pick up Zonia. Herald and Zonia search for Martha, while Martha searches for Zonia. Martha stays at Seth's boardinghouse briefly where Bynum binds Zonia to Martha, so that they can find each other someday. By the time Martha and Herald reunite, her name has changed to Martha Pentecost. She has also gotten more involved in religion, and tries unsuccessfully to convince Herald to look to Jesus Christ for his salvation. At the end of the play, Zonia goes to live with Martha.

Zonia Loomis

Zonia Loomis is the daughter of Herald and Martha, who has been traveling with her father in search of Martha for four years. Zonia helps Bertha in the kitchen to help pay for her board. Zonia meets Reuben, the boy next door, and agrees to be his girl. At the end of the play, Bynum reveals that when he first met Martha, he bound Zonia to her, so

that Martha would eventually find her daughter. Zonia reluctantly leaves Herald to go with Martha in the end.

Martha Pentecost

See Martha Loomis

Reuben Scott

Reuben Scott is the boy next door who befriends Zonia and tells her he will marry her someday. Reuben used to have a friend named Eugene, who died. Reuben keeps Eugene's pigeons in captivity, selling them to Bynum to use in his rituals. However, after a ghost appears and tells Reuben to honor Eugene's wish, Reuben lets them go.

Rutherford Selig

Rutherford Selig is a white peddler and people finder who finds Martha Loomis and brings her to Herald. Selig is the only white character in the play. He stops by the boardinghouse every Saturday to sell sheet metal to Seth and put in orders for the items that he needs made out of the metal. Since Selig makes a profit on both the sheet metal and the items that he buys from Seth, he makes more money than Seth does. In addition to his peddling, Selig is a people finder, who charges one dollar to find somebody. As he lets the others know, his family has been finding people for a long time, first as slave transporters, then as slave bounty hunters, and now, after the slaves have been freed, as a lost-person service—helping reunite families. Selig writes down the names of every one of his customers, and he cross-references this list when he is hired to search for a specific person. However, Bertha believes that Selig can only "find" people who have previously hitched a ride on his peddling cart. Despite this fact, Herald is confident that Selig will find his wife, Martha, and Selig does.

Bynum Walker

Bynum Walker, an older resident of the boardinghouse, is an African root worker, a conjurer who has the power of the Binding Song, which he uses to bind Zonia to her mother, Martha. Bynum received his binding power as the result of a vision he had on the road when he used to travel. A strange man came up to him and offered to show Bynum the Secret of Life. During Bynum's vision, the strange man began to shine. Bynum's father appeared as a guide, telling him that if he ever saw a shiny man again, he would know that his song has been accepted. When Bynum came out of his vision, he had the power of the Binding Song, and was able to bind people together so that if they became separated they would be able to find each other. This is how he has gotten the name Bynum, which sounds like "bind 'em." Ever since he had this vision, Bynum has been searching for another shiny man and he pays Selig, the people finder, to try to find his shiny man for him.

Like Bertha, Bynum helps provide advice to various tenants. He advises Mattie to move on from her old boyfriend, and gives her a good luck charm. He tries to counsel Jeremy on the many virtues of women, but Jeremy ignores his advice and runs off with Molly. Bynum also acts as a spiritual guide to Herald. When Herald has a vision of his African ancestors during a juba dance, Bynum helps guide Herald through it. Also, when Herald reacts badly to Bynum's singing of the song, "Joe Turner's Come and Gone," Bynum realizes that Herald has been enslaved by this notorious man. Bynum gets Herald to tell his story, and tells Herald that Joe Turner captured Herald because he was trying to steal his song—his identity. However, Bynum lets Herald know that when Herald was captured, he forgot his song so that Turner could not steal it. Bynum is the one who lets Herald know that he is bound to his song and that he only needs to sing it to be free. At the end of the play after Herald has slashed himself and found his identity again, Bynum tells Herald that he is shining. Bynum has found another shiny man.

Themes

Identity

The primary theme in the play is the search for identity. Although Herald Loomis believes he is searching for his lost wife, Martha, the African conjurer, Bynum, lets him know that Herald is really searching for his song or identity. Herald has forgotten his song as a result of his seven-year enslavement by Joe Turner, a notorious Tennessee plantation owner that illegally enslaved free African Americans to work for him. Bynum tells Herald that Turner captured him, not just to work on his plantation, but to try to steal Herald's song. Says Bynum: "Now he's got you bound up to where you can't sing your own song. Couldn't sing it them seven years 'cause you was afraid he would snatch it from under you." Herald's plight is representative of many African Americans in this time period who felt cut off from their African heritage as a result of the crippling effects of slavery.

The various characters in the play represent a cross-section of the different options that are open to African Americans trying to find their identities. At one extreme there are people like Seth, an African-American man who was born free in the North. Seth devotes his life to making money, embracing capitalism like many other American businessmen. When Selig tries to overcharge him for some inferior materials, Seth lets him know that he is not going to be fooled. Says Seth: "Don't come talking that twenty-five cent stuff to me over no low-grade sheet metal." In addition, Seth can do math quickly in his head, he demands payment in advance from his tenants, and he is shocked when Jeremy quits his job after refusing to pay an extortion fee. Says Seth: "What kind of sense it make to get fired from a job where you making eight dollars a week and all it cost you is fifty cents. That's seven dollars and fifty cents profit!" Seth is also very disparaging toward his African heritage, calling the African rituals that Bynum performs "old mumbo jumbo nonsense."

Bynum represents the other extreme, people who attempt to maintain a tight hold on their African heritage. An African root worker, or conjurer, Bynum has the "Binding Song," a power that binds people together so that they can find each other. At one point in the play, Herald says that Bynum is "one of them bones people," referencing Herald's vision of his African ancestors. In between these two extremes, there are people like Bertha, a Christian woman who also performs traditional African rituals. Says Bertha to Seth: "It don't hurt none. I can't say if it help . . . but it don't hurt none." Some, like Mattie, choose to find their identities in motherhood, searching for a man to make them complete, while others, like Molly, choose to live the single life.

Migration

When Bynum first meets Herald and asks him where he and his daughter are coming from, Herald says, "Come from all over. Which everway the road take us that's the way

we go." This was true for many African Americans at the time. Later, Bynum refers to one of the causes of this mass migration, when he is discussing the individual situation of Herald. Says Bynum: "See, Mr. Loomis, when a man forgets his song he goes off in search of it . . . till he find out he's got it with him all the time." Herald wanders, unknowingly searching for his identity. However, Herald is not the only character who wanders in the play. Bynum has wandered his whole life, and Seth notes that this is a common trend: "I done seen a hundred niggers like him. He's one of them fellows never could stay in one place. He was wandering all around the country till he got old and settled here."

This migratory trend has been passed down to the new generation. Jeremy, one of the younger tenants, does not care when he loses his job. As he tells Seth: "There's a big road out there. I can get my guitar and always find me another place to stay. I ain't planning on staying in one place for too long no way." He lives with Mattie for a while, but feels tied down. When he finds Molly, a fellow traveler, he thinks he will be happy with her, and tries to encourage her to come with him. Says Jeremy: "Don't you wanna travel around and look at some places with Jeremy? With a woman like you beside him, a man can make it nice in the world." Likewise, Mattie keeps searching for her lost man, Jack Carper, whom she thinks will make her whole once again. Still, she notes that this strategy is not working for her, saying that "I ain't never found no place for me to fit. Seem like all I do is start over." The trend of searching for a lost mate continues even with the youngest generation, as demonstrated by the two children, Reuben and Zonia. When Reuben finds out that Zonia is leaving, he tells her that she is his girl, and says: "When I get grown, I come looking for you."

Racial Exploitation and Discrimination

Throughout the play, the African-American characters are exploited or discriminated against in various ways by white people. In the American South, this was fairly common at the time and some, like Martha, left to avoid intense racial discrimination. When Herald finally catches up with Martha, she explains why she migrated to Pennsylvania. Says Martha: "Reverend Tolliver wanted to move the church up North 'cause of all the trouble the colored folks was having down there."

However, discrimination and exploitation also happened in the . Jeremy gives two examples where this happens to him. Jeremy relates an example where some white policemen came up to him and one of his co-workers, after they had just bought a drink. Says Jeremy: "Asked us if we was working. We told them we was putting in the road over yonder and that it was our payday." However, even though Jeremy and his co-worker have a valid occupation, the police still "snatched hold of us to get that two dollars." The local police use their power to steal money from any black men that they find on the street, even if they are not vagrants. Later in the play, Jeremy is the victim of extortion. As he notes to Seth and Molly, at Jeremy's job, a white man goes "around to all the colored making them give him fifty cents to keep hold to their jobs." Jeremy refuses to pay, is fired, and notes the unfairness of the white man's actions: "He go

around to all the colored and he got ten dollars extra. That's more than I make for a whole week."

Even Selig, who is a business associate of Seth's and who is welcomed in the boardinghouse with free food, comes from a family that has exploited African Americans. As Selig notes, "My great-granddaddy used to bring Nigras across the ocean on ships." In addition, Selig's father "used to find runaway slaves for the plantation bosses." Selig's people-finding business, on the other hand, is viewed as a positive endeavor by most of his African-American customers. However, this business is itself built upon the businesses of his forefathers, because if there had not been any slavery, there would not be a mass of dislocated African Americans trying to find their families. Selig himself notes this to Herald: "After Abraham Lincoln give you all Nigras your freedom papers and with you all looking all over for each other . . . we started finding Nigras for Nigras."

Style

African American Drama

Wilson is considered to be one of the premier African-American dramatists, and *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* is a prime example of African American drama—plays that generally depict the struggle African Americans have faced in the United States. Wilson's play is the third in his series of historical plays, each of which is meant to represent a decade from the twentieth century from an African-American point of view. In this case, the play depicts the 1910s, a time when many African Americans were migrating to the northern states to find work, as Seth notes in the beginning: "Word get out they need men to work in the mill and put in these roads . . . and niggers drop everything and head North looking for freedom." African-American dramas often have mostly black characters, just as in this play, where Selig is the only white character who appears on stage. African American dramas also often rely on urban settings, and often feature the urban poor, as this play does. With the exception of Selig, everybody who comes to Seth's boardinghouse struggles to survive. Even Seth, a landowner who has a boardinghouse and two side jobs, cannot make enough money to go into business for himself and get ahead in life. Says Seth: "I can't get nowhere working for Mr. Olowski and selling Selig five or six pots on the side."

Setting

The play takes place in a boardinghouse, a confined location that provides a common meeting place for several distinct characters. By limiting the action to the boardinghouse and its yard, Wilson does not need to spend any extra time establishing several different locations. As a result, Wilson is able to examine the various characters in greater depth in a shorter period of time than plays with several locations. The actual location of the boardinghouse is important, too. Pittsburgh was one of the key Northern cities that many African Americans migrated to from the South, and so was a symbol of the freedom that blacks expected to find in the North. As Wilson notes in his preface, entitled "The Play," these "sons and daughters of newly freed African slaves" come to the city "carrying Bibles and guitars, their pockets lined with dust and fresh hope." However, as Seth notes, the idea of northern prosperity was not realized by many blacks, because whites often competed for these jobs, and whites were generally favored over blacks. Says Seth: "White fellows coming from all over the world. White fellow come over and in six months got more than what I got."

Metaphor

A metaphor is an implied meaning or significance of a word or object that is different than the original meaning. In the play, Wilson uses many metaphors, the chief one being the search for one's song, or identity. Says Bynum to Herald: "Now, I can look at

you, Mr. Loomis, and see you a man who done forgot his song. Forgot how to sing it. A fellow forget that and he forget who he is." Bynum does not mean that Herald has literally forgotten how to sing a song that he used to know. Instead, the song is a metaphor for Herald's identity, and the African-American cultural identity in general. Since this identity is derived from Herald's African past, in which music plays a large part, the metaphor becomes very fitting—and resonates with audience members if they are aware of this well-documented connection. The search to regain this song, by Herald and others, introduces several other metaphors into the play. For example, the boardinghouse, which is technically just a building, becomes a place of healing for many of the tenants, who are searching to fix their lives. Characters like Bertha and Bynum help to underscore this idea, since they both help to guide these wandering, searching souls in various ways. When Jeremy leaves Mattie, Bertha helps Mattie, by telling her not to worry about love, which will find its way to her in time. Says Bertha: "Trying to figure it out don't do nothing but give you a troubled mind. Don't no man want a woman with a troubled mind."

Most of the metaphors in the play link in some way to the idea of identity. Other metaphors include the idea of the shiny man, a man that signifies African-American independence. Bynum meets a strange man on the road when he is younger, and this man has Bynum hold out his hands. He has Bynum rub their hands together, and when Bynum looks at their combined hands, he sees that "they got blood on them." The man tells Bynum to "take and rub it all over me . . . say that was a way of cleaning myself." This act causes Bynum to have a vision, in which life is magnified and the strange man starts "shining like new money." Although this collection of ideas might be confusing to an audience member when it appears in the first scene, the significance makes more sense at the end of the play. When Herald hears from his wife, Martha, that he should "be washed with the blood of the lamb," he tells her, "I can bleed for myself." After slashing himself across the chest with his knife, Herald wipes his blood on his face, just as Bynum did with the shiny man. This act frees Herald from his past, and as Bynum notes, causes Herald to shine "like new money!" The man that Bynum met on the road was an independent black man, someone who had found his song and was self-sufficient, with no chains to the past. To Bynum, therefore, this man shone, just as Herald is now shining, "*Having found his song, the song of self-sufficiency,*" as Wilson notes in the stage directions.

Historical Context

Joe Turner

As one of the plays in his ten-play historical cycle, chronicling the African-American experience in the twentieth century, Wilson's *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* is an overtly historical play. In this case, the play concerns what life was like for African Americans in the 1910s. Although slavery was technically illegal at this point, the notorious Joe Turner ignored the law and illegally impressed African Americans into slavery for seven years on his plantation. Says Herald, "Kept everybody seven years. He'd go out hunting and bring back forty men at a time." Actually, the name, "Joe Turner," is incorrect, historically speaking. Although the W. C. Handy song that Wilson bases his play on was called, "Joe Turner's Come and Gone," the actual man that the song referred to was named "Joe Turney," the brother of Tennessee governor Pete Turney. This discrepancy is rarely mentioned by critics, most of whom still refer to the man as "Turner." Part of the reason for this oversight may come from the fact that, with the exception of Wilson's play and Handy's song, Turner's exploits are often overlooked. Says Jay Plum in his 1993 *African American Review* article, "Although the chain gang affected the personal lives of many African Americans, traditional histories of the United States make little or no mention of the phenomenon."

Peonage

In addition to Turney's blatant disregard for the law, another form of slavery existed in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century—peonage, or debt slavery. Although the federal government outlawed the practice of peonage with the 1867 Peonage Abolition Act, southern states still passed a number of laws that allowed African Americans to be fooled into signing contracts that committed them to debt slavery. Some of these contracts were disguised as good opportunities to work off a debt or court fine. In these cases, a landowner would offer to pay an African American's debt, in exchange for having the man work the debt off on the landowner's farm. However, this was often a trap, because many landowners would simply charge the unwitting slave more room and board than he could pay for, effectively keeping the slave in perpetual debt and bonding him to the landowner forever. Eventually, the ban on peonage was enforced, although the first conviction of a landowner engaged in the act of peonage did not happen until 1901; and the defendant was later pardoned by President Theodore Roosevelt. In 1911, when the play takes place, peonage was still widely practiced, despite a Supreme Court ruling the same year that declared state peonage laws unconstitutional.

The Great Migration

Even when African Americans were not coerced into slavery, many of them worked in slave-like conditions, especially in the South. Many newly freed slaves, unable to find work elsewhere, were forced to work Southern lands as sharecroppers, or tenant farmers. Slaves who became sharecroppers would generally lease a portion of a landowner's cropland, farming it and giving a portion of the crop—or the money earned from selling the crop—to the landowner. However, while blacks were now paid for their efforts, it was rarely enough to survive. In the play, Herald and Martha are sharecroppers, until he is abducted by Joe Turner. When Herald is released, he recounts how he tried to return to his life. Says Herald: "I made it back to Henry Thompson's place where me and Martha was sharecropping and Martha's gone. She taken my little girl and left her with her mama and took off North." When Herald decides to take Zonia and go up North to find Martha, he joins many other African Americans who were also hitting the road, for a variety of reasons. In her 1995 book, *The Dramatic Vision of August Wilson,* Sandra G. Shannon discusses this massive northward movement of African Americans, known as the Great Migration. Says Shannon: "The historical context out of which the play evolves includes a backdrop of frustrated sharecroppers; hundreds of unemployed, unskilled laborers; countless broken families; and a pervasive rumor of a better life up North." This northward movement of American Americans was one of many such migrations that happened during the twentieth century, as many moved from the rural South to Northern cities. Herald Loomis's migration in the early twentieth century directly preceded a much larger movement, called the "Great Migration," which took place during World War I.

W. E. B. Du Bois and the NAACP

The beginning of the twentieth century also witnessed the rise of W. E. B. Du Bois, one of the most important figures in African-American history. Du Bois, who received his doctorate from Harvard University in 1896, took America by storm when he published his 1903 book, *The Souls of Black Folk.* In the book, Du Bois publicly denounced the policy of Booker T. Washington—an influential black leader who encouraged African Americans to put up with discrimination from whites, and to concentrate their energies instead on educating themselves. Du Bois's attack on Washington created a split in African-American political support. Conservatives aligned themselves with Washington, while more radical members followed Du Bois. In 1905, Du Bois led a group of almost thirty African Americans in secret to Niagara Falls, Ontario, where they founded the Niagara Movement. Although this organization—which was effectively set up to oppose Washington's conservative policies—never gained a massive following, it did provide a forum to discuss civil rights issues. In 1909, the Niagara Movement, under the direction of Du Bois, merged with a group of concerned whites, to create the interracial organization, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Since 1909, the NAACP has been extremely influential, especially in a legal sense, in the fight to promote equal civil rights for African Americans.

Critical Overview

When *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* debuted on Broadway in 1988, it received overall good praise from the critics. However, not all audiences responded as well. As Peter Wolfe notes in his 1999 book, *August Wilson,* "Playgoers comfortable enough with the African retentions built into Wilson's two earlier plays recoiled from the ethnicity of *Joe Turner*." The play has enjoyed a strong critical reputation since then, with the majority of critics focusing on the main idea of the play, African Americans' search to find their identity. Says Sandra G. Shannon, in her 1995 book, *The Dramatic Vision of August Wilson,* "The theme of finding one's song, which permeates *Joe Turner*, is simultaneously a personal and collective ambition for Wilson and for all of black America."

In addition, critics have also noted the two main influences of the play, the 1978 Romare Bearden painting, entitled *Millhand's Lunch Bucket,* and the historical person of Joe Turney. Although most critics have failed to recognize that "Joe Turner" is an incorrect name, Wolfe says, "The difference in the names of the blacks' captor, though small, deserves a look." Wolfe notes that:

> The mistake evokes the famous Kansas City blues singer Big Joe Turner (1911-1985) in a play that not only relies heavily upon music but also includes, in Jeremy Furlow, a blues guitarist in its cast.

Other critics discuss Wilson's portrayal of women in his plays, including *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*. Although Wilson himself has said many times that he does not focus on women in his works, Shannon, in her 1994 essay, "The Ground on Which I Stand: August Wilson's Perspective on African American Women," disagrees. Says Shannon, "Despite Wilson's grounding in a decidedly male frame of reference, his portrayals of African American women cover as wide a range as do those of his men."

Many critics notice the combination of African and Christian ideas in the play. In her 1995 book, *August Wilson and the African-American Odyssey ,*Kim Pereira notes of Bertha that her "strength derives from a blend of two religious traditions perfectly synthesized in her abundant spirit." However, Pereira also notes that, by the end of the play, Wilson has demonstrated through the character of Herald "that the path to the true destinies of black people begins in their African roots: only when they embrace their African identities completely will they really be free."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2

Critical Essay #1

Poquette has a bachelor's degree in English and specializes in writing about literature. In the following essay, Poquette analyzes the significance of names in Wilson's Joe Turner's Come and Gone.

At one point in Wilson's play, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, the boy who lives next door to the boardinghouse, Reuben Scott, questions the meaning of the name of Herald's daughter, Zonia, saying, "What kind of name is that?" Although the name Zonia does not have a traditional translation, this focus on names is representative of Wilson's technique in the play, where names play an important role. When playwrights choose names for their characters, the choice sometimes helps to influence the story or underscore a message that the playwright wishes to get across. In the case of *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, the emphasis on names is both overt and subtle. Wilson uses both specific names and the general concept of naming to underscore the main theme of the search for an African-American identity.

Several characters in the play have distinctive names that invite attention. This is first noticeable with Bynum Walker in the first scene, where Bynum refers to the vision that he had when he was younger. During the vision, Bynum is granted the gift of "the Binding Song," his own personal song, which gives him the power to bind people together, making it easier for wanderers to find their lost family members. As Bynum notes, "Been binding people ever since. That's why they call me Bynum. Just like glue I sticks people together." Bynum is not the character's real name, but it is one that he has adopted since it symbolizes his purpose in life. In her 1999 book, *Understanding August Wilson,* Mary L. Bogumil notes the significance of names in the play. Says Bogumil, "some of the characters' names exemplify their internal and external struggles." Bogumil is one of many critics who note that in the case of Bynum, his last name, Walker, underscores Bynum's former status as one of the migratory African Americans, who walked around the country, aimlessly searching for an identity. Seth remarks on Bynum's migratory nature: "I done seen a hundred niggers like him. He's one of them fellows never could stay in one place. He was wandering all around the country till he got old and settled here."

Bynum is not the only character whose name is deliberately intended to signify a purpose or greater meaning. Herald Loomis's first name is also very distinctive, because of its spelling. Normally, the name Herald would be spelled, "Harold." The use of the more unusual spelling draws attention to the name and leads to the interpretation of Herald as a literal herald—somebody who announces something. In this case, Herald's transformation in the play announces a new era of black awareness. Herald is able to transcend his painful slave past by reconnecting with his African heritage. In the process, he becomes a shiny man—the metaphor that Wilson uses in this play to signify a self-sufficient African-American person.

As Peter Wolfe notes in his 1999 book, *August Wilson,* Wilson himself has talked about the significance of Herald's name. Says Wolfe, "When asked by a theater critic from the

New York Post about the origins of Loomis's name, Wilson said, 'Herald, because he's a herald. Loomis because he's luminous.'" However, since this is theater, where many people hear the name before they read it, the phonetic sound of the name, "Harold," is just as important as the spelling. Harold is a name that, in most cultures, means a warrior, somebody who is a strong fighter. This is an appropriate designation for Herald, since the play concerns his ability to embrace the painful collective past of African Americans, find the strength to "stand up," and move on.

Martha, Herald's wife, also has a distinctive last name, in this case the new name of Pentecost. The Pentecost is a Christian feast that is held to celebrate the Holy Spirit's descent to the apostles. This extremely religious last name serves two purposes. First, it indicates that the Martha that Herald knew is dead, a fact that Martha indicates when she tells Herald that she waited five years for him before moving on with her life. Says Martha: "I killed you in my heart. I buried you. I mourned you. And then I picked up what was left and went on to make life without you." Just as Martha's name invokes the name of the Holy Ghost, it also implies the death of both her marriage and her former identity. As Anne Fleche notes in her 1994 essay, "The History Lesson: Authenticity and Anachronism in August Wilson's Plays," "when Martha shows up she's like a ghost (her new name is 'Pentecost'), and it's too late for her and Loomis."

In addition to underscoring the death of Martha's old identity, her last name sets her up as Herald's main opponent, and sets up Christianity as the main opponent of African Americans who are in search of their own identity. In the play, Herald denounces Christianity, starting with his interruption of the juba dance which mentions the Holy Ghost. Says Herald to the others, "You singing for the Holy Ghost to come? What he gonna do, huh? He gonna come with tongues of fire to burn up your woolly heads?" When Martha arrives at the end of the play, she tries to get Herald to embrace Christianity, and quotes Bible passages to support the idea that Jesus Christ will save Herald. However, Herald's response indicates that he is not interested in salvation in the next life; he wants equality in this life, and does not think he will get it from the white man's god. Says Herald: "Great big old white man . . . your Mr. Jesus Christ. Standing there with a whip in one hand and tote board in another, and them niggers swimming in a sea of cotton." Since Christianity supported slavery, Herald cannot bring himself to follow it. In fact, his final act denounces the belief that Christ bled for humanity's sins. Martha tells Herald that he must "be washed with the blood of the lamb." This idea of blood inspires Herald to use his own blood to wash himself clean, and he slashes his chest in an act that both defies Martha's Christianity and affirms Herald's belief in himself.

Bynum, Herald, and Martha all have names that have overt meanings. In other cases, the meanings of the names are subtler. For example, Jeremy Furlow is a wanderer, like Bynum, and like many others of his time. If one ignores the spelling of Jeremy's last name and pronounces it as "furlough," the name is given added meaning. A furlough is a leave of absence. This fits with Jeremy's nature, since he would rather leave any situation that intrudes on his lifestyle. Life is a constant vacation for Jeremy, who would rather live a life of wandering than settle down with a job and a family. When Jeremy gets fired from his job, he is happy, because he does not want to be tied down. He

proposes that he and Molly travel together, but Molly notes that Jeremy is with Mattie. Says Jeremy, "I was just keeping her company 'cause she lonely. You ain't the lonely kind. You the kind that know what she want and how to get it." As Jeremy indicates to Molly, the hedonistic or pleasure-seeking lifestyle—something that Molly is used to—appeals to him. Says Jeremy, "I need a woman like you to travel around with."

Other character names that have subtle meanings include Seth and Bertha Holly, whose last name has two meanings. First, a holly is a type of shrub. In a play where many of the characters travel around searching for their identities, the Holly's boardinghouse becomes a place for them to get their bearings, and in some cases, guidance. Like a shrub, the Hollys have set down roots, and their stability and immobility is a sharp contrast to the migratory nature of the others. Traditionally, holly is also another word for holy, which once again underscores the religious nature of the play and the desire for Seth, especially, to live a holy, respectable life. When Herald first comes to Seth's boardinghouse, looking for Martha, Seth does not believe that he could be married to Martha. Says Seth: "Martha's a good Christian woman. This fellow here look like he owe the devil a day's work and he's trying to figure out how he gonna pay him."

In the case of Mattie Campbell and Molly Cunningham, the emphasis on their names is not in their meaning, but in their construction. Both women have the initials M. C., a significant coincidence, especially since they are both twenty-six. As Wolfe notes, "Being the same age and having the same initials makes them, if not alter egos, then possible directions for one another." Mattie is devoting her life to becoming a housewife and mother while Molly is just the opposite—she prefers to pursue a life of independence.

Wilson's emphasis on names goes beyond literal translations of the names of specific characters. The idea of naming in general also serves to underscore the cultural search that many African Americans were undergoing at this time, when characters like Herald were searching for a true identity, a name to call their own. Wilson further emphasizes this idea through the character of Rutherford Selig, the People Finder. Selig, a white man, is able to help people like Herald find living relatives. Selig writes down the names of every customer, and refers to this list of names whenever he is trying to help somebody "find" a lost loved one. Also, as Bertha notes, Selig adds to his lists by including the names of blacks who travel with him: "They wait till he get ready to go, then they hitch a ride on his wagon. Then he charge folks a dollar to tell them where he took them." While this list of names works when Selig is searching for a specific person, it fails him when he tries to search for Bynum's "shiny man." Bynum first saw the shiny man during the vision in which he acquired his binding talent. The shiny man represents any independent black man who has embraced his cultural heritage and forged a new, self-sufficient identity. As Bynum relates to the others, during his vision, Bynum's father had told him that if he saw another shiny man before his death: "I would know that my song had been accepted and worked its full power in the world and I could lay down and die a happy man." Ever since, Bynum—like other African Americans—has been searching for the shiny man.

Since the shiny man has no specific identity that is recognizable to white men like Selig, the people finder is unable to find him. Says Selig to Bynum: "Well, I done told you I can't find nobody without a name." In addition, Selig does not have a list to help Herald find his African ancestors, many of whom died nameless on slave ships that were brought to America. To connect with his African heritage, Herald must rely on Bynum, an African conjurer. Likewise, Bynum must rely on Herald, not Selig, to find his shiny man for him. By tapping into their shared African heritage, Bynum helps guide Herald through his transformation into the shiny man, at which point, Bynum's search is over. By extension, Wilson informs his African-American audience that if they follow the path of Herald and Bynum and work together to embrace their African past, their search for a concrete identity could be over, too.

Source: Ryan D. Poquette, Critical Essay on *Joe Turner's Come and Gone,* in *Drama for Students,* The Gale Group, 2003.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Anderson explores how Wilson's play illustrates that "in reclaiming the self by recovering the past, the individual becomes capable of constructing a future."

A character in August Wilson's play *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* tells a story about how he was "cure[d]" of playing in guitar contests. Called out to play his guitar for an unspecified prize offered by a white man, Wilson's character does his best to demonstrate his skill against his two black opponents until he realizes that the white man is tone deaf and cannot distinguish the quality of each man's music. All three players finally substitute volume for skill, and the white judge, unable to declare a winner, pronounces "all three . . . the best guitar player" and divides a paltry prize of twenty-five cents between the contestants with a "penny on the side."

The anecdote related by Wilson's character serves as a reminder that white efforts to understand the products of black cultures can be attended by arrogance and insensitivity, a tendency to hear one essential black voice speaking of a single black experience. White readers of Wilson's play should want to avoid both the arrogance of the tone-deaf white man who assumes that economic and social privilege qualify him to judge a black culture, and his insensitivity to the different voices within that culture. This insensitivity, as the anecdote makes clear, always renders the same leveling judgment, a judgment of unimportance or non-worth.

The anecdote and Wilson's play as a whole, however, are not primarily about an insensitive, indifferent or hostile white society but about the process of recovering and recreating black voices after the white judge has turned individual music into noise. The premise of the play, and the focus of my argument about the play, is that this recovery and re-creation can only occur with the recognition that Joe Turner, the personification of white oppression of African Americans, has "come and gone." Joe Turner is part of a past that, acknowledged and appropriated for the self, loses its power to determine the future. Consigning Joe Turner to the past does not mean naively believing that white oppression is at an end. Wilson's play depicts ongoing efforts by white society to deflect and misdirect black progress toward community and individual identity. But if white oppression extends into the present, its power to diminish or impugn the self is denied when the history of that oppression is confronted and countered with the collective and personal memory that grounds identity. In reclaiming the self by recovering the past, the individual becomes capable of constructing a future.

A play about recovering the past and leaving it behind, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* appropriately treats a transitional phase in African-American history: the Great Migration. Over a period of twenty years, from 1910 to 1930, some one and a half million African Americans, a sixth of the nation's black population, left rural and urban areas of the South for industrial cities of the North—New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Detroit, and the city that is the setting for August Wilson's play, Pittsburgh. What the migrants left behind, what they hoped to find and what kind of life greeted them in the

North are questions of fact that historians of this period generally agree on. The migrants left racial violence, segregation, and disfranchisements in the South. They also left a Southern economy hurt by a boll weevil invasion that reduced cotton yields, low cotton prices, and a pattern of Northern investment that turned the South into a dependent colony with a shrinking labor market. They were drawn to the North by the promise of higher wages and after 1916, by the employment possibilities created when World War I stopped the flow of European immigrant labor. In leaving for the industrialized cities of the North, the migrants hoped to find not only higher wages but also economic and political equality, educational opportunities, and social justice. What the migrants found in the North was something less: voting rights that did not translate into political power, discriminatory hiring and promotion practices that kept them at the bottom of the employment ladder, segregated and substandard housing and education. Some gains were made in economic well-being, political rights, and opportunities in education. But, as James Grossman suggests in *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration,* "the dreams embodied in the Great Migration eventually collapsed under the weight of continued racial oppression and the failure of industrial capitalism to distribute its prosperity as broadly as the migrants expected." In Carole Marks's succinct summary in *Farewell—We're Good and Gone,* reality never matched the dream of the Great Migration."

Though Grossman and Marks agree about many of the facts surrounding the Great Migration and though both find that the migration achieved little in the way of concrete economic, social and political gains, they do not agree about the meaning of this mass movement of people, particularly its meaning for those who made the journey. For Marks, the Great Migration was a drama in which the migrants themselves were "minor actors." The real stars of this drama were economic forces: the declining Southern economy, the need of Northern industrialists for cheap and expendable labor after World War I ended European immigration and, at the most abstract level, an economic order in which developed, capitalrich cores draw natural resources and cheap labor from undeveloped peripheries. Though the migrants created many of their own lines of communication and institutional supports for the move, labor agents were pivotal in inducing them to leave, and "much of the mobilization of the migration was orchestrated in the board rooms of Northern industrial enterprises."

In a review essay of Marks's and Grossman's books ["The Beginnings of a Renaissance: Black Migration, the Industrial Order, and the Search for Power," *Journal of Urban History,* May, 1991], Earl Lewis observes that Marks's claim for the primacy of economic forces will be disconcerting to "social historians who have dared to understand how African Americans empowered themselves during the industrial age. As one of these social historians, James Grossman rejects historical accounts that portray migrants as objects of economic and social forces and suggests that we can better understand the Great Migration by viewing it "as a conscious and meaningful act rather than as a historical imperative." This act, Grossman suggests, grew out of migrants' consciousness of their identity as black Americans and their willingness to adapt and recreate that identity in a new urban, industrial context. The same pride in racial heritage and identity that Marcus Garvey drew on in the twenties, he suggests, was central to the "ideology of the Great Migration." By migrating to industrialized cities of

the North, black Southerners affirmed their power to make themselves, just as they had proved their freedom through spatial mobility of a more limited kind following emancipation.

As a "second emancipation," the Great Migration represented a break with the past but also its preservation and adaptation. Though migration entailed the abandonment of a long-standing ideal of land ownership as the route to independence and the ability to recast the self as industrial worker and city dweller, "the migrants," as Grossman puts it, "did not leave their cultural baggage at the train station." This cultural heritage informed the decision to migrate and the migrants' response to the institutions and social forms that they found in the North, at the same time that it changed that environment and was changed by it, a mutual reshaping evident, Grossman suggests, in "the aromas of southern cooking . . .; the sounds of New Orleans jazz and Mississippi blues; styles of worship; patterns of speech . . ."

However, not all differences of cultural heritage or of interest were reconciled in quite so harmonious a way, and in focusing on the Great Migration as a historical process in which African Americans asserted a common heritage and identity, Grossman does not assume a monolithic African-American culture. As Lewis points out in his review of *Land of Hope,* Grossman recognizes the interethnic conflicts that frequently marked relations between the "Old Settlers" and the new arrivals, conflicts generated by differences of class as well as region and that were often manifested as the fear that the newcomer's rural lack of sophistication in dress, manner, or religious expression would injure community image. In spite of these differences, however, migrants and the established black community shared a sense of ethnic identity which synthesized much of the experience of both groups and redefined African-American cultural identity both North and South. It is as a process of cultural self-creation that Grossman sees the Great Migration's chief significance and promise. Viewed from the perspective of subjects recreating themselves, from "forward" rather than "backward," the Great Migration, he suggests, was not a failure, for in this singular reversal of the historian's perspective, we see the migrants not as the objects of historical forces and the histories written about them but as agents in their own history.

Grossman's analysis of the Great Migration as a process in which African Americans drew on the past to remake themselves is close to August Wilson's dramatic interpretation of the migration in *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*. Like Grossman, Wilson see[s] the Great Migration not merely as a demographic or geographical shift but a historical transition to a new identity, and in his play the image of movement, of traveling the roads, serves as an apt metaphor for the search for self. *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* presents this search as both personal and collective. Though Wilson's characters seek an individual "song" that will guide them along the road into the future, they are enabled to recover this song only through recovery of a collective as well as a personal past. Recovery of one's song, however, is not easy, and, as Jeremy's anecdote of the guitar contest suggests, that song is in continual danger from the effects of white racism.

Before I go to look more closely at what the search for self or "song" entails, I think it is important to understand something of the conditions and the world in which Wilson portrays that search. The world depicted in Wilson's drama consists of material and spiritual parts or aspects which must be brought into meaningful synthesis, a synthesis in which each is informed by or exists through the other. The search for self or "song" can be viewed as a personal version of this broader task of creating a world in which the spiritual and the material infuse one another. Or, again, since Wilson suggests the individuals, couples and communities can be worlds of their own, the two tasks are substantially the same task. Recovering the unique self of one's song is also the creation of a world in which the material and spiritual are in harmony.

Both interdependence of the material and the spiritual and the need to bring them into fuller relation are suggested in the opening scene of *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*. The setting for this scene and for the rest of the play is a Pittsburgh boardinghouse in 1911. When the play opens, the owner of this boardinghouse, Seth Holly, is watching one of his tenants, a "rootworker" or shaman named Bynum, perform a religious ritual or rite. Seth reports the progress of this ritual to his wife, Bertha, while she cooks breakfast and they exchange comments about Seth's work in a Pittsburgh steel mill and his efforts to get a loan to finance a small shop for the manufacture of pots and pans.

The staging of this scene, dialogue, and characterization suggests that the material and spiritual aspects of the world are in intimate contact but somehow not fully integrated. On the one hand, the staging dramatizes separation. The material world of everyday concerns, of seeking business loans and baking biscuits, is located inside the boardinghouse, where it can be directly witnessed by the audience. The spiritual realm is outside and offstage, accessible to the audience only through Seth's description of it. This description, moreover, is made by a man who is somewhat scornful of what he witnesses. A skilled craftsman and a property owner, a practical man accustomed to dealing in the materials of his craft and the economic realities of running a boarding house and resisting exploitation in his work life, Seth is prone to see the ritual performed by Bynum as "mumbo jumbo nonsense," as something not quite civilized. Watching a ritual in which Bynum kills a pigeon and pours some of its blood into a cup, Seth speculates: "I believe he drink that blood."

Bertha's immediate reproach to her husband for this fantasy suggests that Bynum is not so far outside social norms as Seth likes to believe:

"Seth Holly, what is wrong with you this morning?
. . . You know Bynum don't be drinking no pigeon
blood."
"I don't know what he do."
"Well, watch him, then. He's gonna dig a little hole
and bury that pigeon. Then he's gonna pray over that
blood . . . pour it on top . . . mark out his circle and
come on into the house."

Yet Bynum does function as a foil for Seth. Described in the play's notes as a man "lost in a world of his own making and [able] to swallow any adversity or interferences with his grand design," Bynum represents a spiritual world that is antagonistic to the material and practical one, but different from and somewhat indifferent to it. This indifference and the potential for tension between Bynum's spirituality and Seth's materialism are humorously represented in Bynum's apparent unconcern for the vegetable garden in which he conducts his ritual, unconcern that leads Seth to yell, "Hey Bynum . . . Watch where you stepping!" from his station by the window.

While characterization and staging tend to present the material and the spiritual as separate realities, they do not present this separation as absolute or even as clearly marked. Though the vegetable garden provides bodily sustenance and ostensibly belongs to Seth, it is also the site of Bynum's ritual and the place where Bynum grows plants for use in magical preparations. The division of "Seth's" garden, moreover, reflects a similar division (or amalgamation) in Seth's character, for though he calls Bynum's rituals "mumbo jumbo," he has the conjure man bless his house. Likewise, though Bynum represents the claims and needs of the spirit, he is no enemy of the material world or of pragmatic, commercial realities that Seth deals in. He both relishes Bertha's biscuits and accepts payment for spiritual services. In a similar way, the staging suggests the intimate connection as well as separation of the material and spiritual. Though the spiritual world is off stage, it is connected to the material, the practical and the everyday by a window, and Seth's report on that world while Bertha bakes biscuits suggests that these two realities exist in close relation. Indeed, Bertha's matter-of-fact response to Seth's sacrilegious speculation about how Bynum will use the pigeon's blood suggests that, in some fundamental way, the spiritual or extramundane is part of everyday, pragmatic reality. Bertha knows the course of Bynum's ritual without looking because she has seen it many times, because it is a regular part of everyday existence.

The first scene's dialogue continues a pattern of showing the material and spiritual to be separated and interrelated, but it also shows how their integration can be subverted. Seth's commentary on Bynum's off-stage ritual is interspersed with discussion of more material, pragmatic concerns—his unsatisfying work on the night shift at a mill and his desire to start his own business with the financial help of white businessmen. Despite the practicality of Seth's plan, however, the white men he approaches refuse to lend him the money he needs unless he signs his house over to them. It is here that we begin to see why Seth's house needs to be blessed and in what way the spiritual and material may become not integrated and complementary but opposed realities. At least part of the material, pragmatic, and everyday world inhabited by Wilson's characters, that part dominated by whites, opposes their spiritual being because it is organized to oppress them.

Much of the oppression experienced by Wilson's characters might be described as material or economic. Thus, Seth's guitar-playing tenant, Jeremy, is jailed without cause and fined two dollars and later fired from his job on a road crew when he refuses to pay a white coworker fifty cents in protection money. Steady work and home ownership give Seth a certain financial security, yet he too is vulnerable to a white society bent on

extracting what it can from him and limiting his opportunities for economic advancement. Commenting on the hopes of black migrants for prosperity in Pittsburgh, Seth notes that though he has lived in Pittsburgh all his life, white European immigrants have "come over and in six months got more than what I got."

Though the oppression encountered by Wilson's characters may seem to be solely economic or material, that oppression is spiritual as well in its capacity to deprive the individual of a sense of himself or of his unique "song." Since the play presents the material and the spiritual as interwoven or integrated, material oppression necessarily has an effect on the individual spirit, denying it value and even existence. The individual spirit or song, in Wilson's play, can only exist as a manifestation in the world, as an act or *expression* of self that "marks" or makes the world. This expression, in a sense, uses the self up to create the world, translates the spirit into material form. Bynum's song, for example, consists in the act of binding people together, but this use of his song "cost[s] me a piece of myself every time I do it." The use of self to create the world does not really entail the sacrifice or loss of self, however, but leads rather to that self's realization. As Bynum puts it at one point, "[I] got so I used all of myself up in the making of that song. Then I was the song in search of itself." Because the world created through the individual's song is a place in which the self is reflected, a place in which the individual is able to see and know how to identify himself, to use the self in the expression of one's song is also to create and affirm that self.

Material oppression as it is depicted in Wilson's play denies this essential bond with the world of one's creation and, consequently, the being of the subject who creates the world. To be defrauded of the products of one's labor, or to see that creation diminished (as that of Jeremy and the other musicians is in the guitar contest), is to be denied a reflection of individual worth and identity in the world. It is to be exiled from self and world together. This alienation and displacement of the individual, moreover, is accompanied by the severing of relationships and the fragmentation of community. "People cling to each other out of the truth they find themselves," Bynum says at one point. Hence, if they have been separated from this truth through the operation of oppression, their capacity to bond with one another, to form friendships, couples, families, or a people, is undermined. The social effects of the alienation felt by Wilson's characters are expressed in their stories of broken relationships and in the uncertainty or suspicion that they feel toward one another. As Seth puts it, "Anybody liable to be anything as far as I'm concerned."

The connection between oppression, alienation from self and inability to form bonds with others is clearest in the character of Herold Loomis, the hero of Wilson's play. Accompanied by his young daughter, Loomis arrives at Seth's boarding house while searching for his wife, Martha. Loomis became separated from his wife ten years earlier when he was imprisoned and forced to work on a chain gang for seven years by a white man named Joe Turner. When Loomis was finally released, he returned to the farm where he had been a sharecropper to find that little remained of his former life. Though he found his daughter in the home of his wife's mother, his wife had gone to the North with the church. Taking his daughter with him, Loomis went in search of his wife, but he also sought himself and the ability to connect with others. Joe Turner had separated

Loomis not only from his family and the life in which he knew himself but, in a more fundamental way, from his sense of self-worth and identity. Turner's ability to oppress Loomis carried a judgment of non-worth which a guard made explicit: "He told me I was worthless." This judgment of worthlessness, which Loomis was forced to accept by the reality of the white man's power, has "marked" Loomis as "one of Joe Turner's niggers" at the same time that it has caused him to forget "how he's supposed to mark down life." It has, in other words, transformed Loomis from a subject into an object, a condition in which he remains bound to Joe Turner even after he has been released.

Marked by Joe Turner as a worthless object without agency or power, Loomis is not only alienated from himself but displaced from his relation to the world, for the world is home only to selves able to create it in their own image. He is unable to establish bonds with people around him ("I done forgot how to touch," he tells Mattie Campbell), and he wanders without a clear sense of either his origin or destination. Asked where he is from, Loomis replies: "Come from all over. Which everway the road take us that's the way we go." Deprived of a place in the world through oppression, Loomis is "bound up to the road." By finding the wife he has lost, Loomis hopes to reconnect with the past life which had grounded his identity and, in this way, to find a "starting place" for remaking the self in the future. As Loomis tells Martha when he finally sees her, "now that I see your face I can say my goodbye and make my own world."

In his search for the past and himself, Loomis enlists the services of a white traveling salesman or trader named Selig, who, besides selling pots and pans he purchases from Seth, hires himself as a "people finder" to blacks looking for lost loved ones. For a dollar fee, Selig writes down the name and description of the missing person and watches for that person as he travels around the country selling his wares. If one of the purchasers of his goods happens to be on Selig's list of missing persons, then that person has been "found" and can be reunited with Selig's client. By performing this service for African Americans in search of one another, Selig follows a calling he has inherited from his father and grandfather. As he tells Loomis,

[W]e been finders in my family for a long time.
Bringers and finders. My great-grandaddy used tov bring Nigras across the ocean on ships. . . My daddy, v rest his soul, used to find runaway slaves for the plantation bosses. . . After Abraham Lincoln give you all Nigras your freedom papers and with you all looking all over for each other . . . we started finding Nigras for Nigras.

In a recent interview in which he was asked if Selig is an evil figure, Wilson replied, "[H]e's not evil at all. In fact, he's performing a very valuable service for the community." Given the continuity between Selig's "finding" and that performed by his father and grandfather, Wilson's defense of his character and his commercial sideline seems disingenuous. And the play presents Selig's people finding in quite another light.

In order to be "found" by Selig, a black man or woman must first buy something from him, must, that is, enter the market economy as customer. While this leveling of identity within economic relations does not reproduce quite the radical denial of intrinsic human worth entailed in the professions of Selig's ancestors, the parallel nevertheless seems clear. The economic system represented by Selig, a system which exploits and excludes blacks, is one that they can be "found" in only as "Nigras." And to be found in this way is to experience the same alienation from self and community that created the need for Selig's services in the first place. As Bertha Holly informs Loomis after he has hired Selig to find his wife,

> You can call him a People Finder if you want to. I know Rutherford Selig carries people away too. . . Folks plan on leaving plan by Selig's timing. They wait till he get ready to go, then they hitch a ride on his wagon. Then he charge folks a dollar to tell them where he took them. Now, that's the truth of Rutherford Selig. He ain't never found nobody he ain't took away.

Selig represents economic forces which not only exploit African Americans but deny their intrinsic worth as persons, in the terms of the dichotomy discussed above, as spirit. Though these forces may not be self-consciously "evil," the injury they inflict through indifferent exploitation resembles that inflicted by Joe Turner's more direct oppression.

If the search for the past and self through the economic system represented by Selig seems to be doomed to failure, a second possibility for self-recovery is presented through Bynum's account of how he learned "the Secret of Life" and discovered his essential self or "song." Bynum's experience of revelation and self-recovery is described in terms of a spiritual journey. While walking along a road, Bynum met a man who, saying he has not eaten for three days, asked him for food and for information about the road Bynum had come by. The stranger then offered to show Bynum "the Secret of Life" and led him back the way he, Bynum, had come. The stranger was able to serve as guide on this unfamiliar road because he had "a voice inside him telling him which way to go." After cleansing Bynum's hands with blood, the stranger led him to a place where "everything was bigger than life" and there left him, disappearing in a light streaming from his body so that Bynum "had to cover up my eyes to keep from being blinded." After the "shiny man" left, the spirit of Bynum's father appeared and took over his instruction, taking him to an ocean where he witnessed "something I ain't got words to tell" and teaching him how to find his song. Bynum chose "the Binding Song," he tells Selig, "because that's what I seen most when I was traveling . . . people walking away and leaving one another." Possession of this song conferred on Bynum both a new identity and a unique task in the world: "Been binding people ever since. That's why they call me Bynum."

Bynum's narrative of revelation and self-recovery resembles Afro-Baptist conversion narratives. In these narratives, according to Michael Sobel [in *Trabelin' On: The Slave*

Journey to an Afro-Baptist Faith], a "seeker" makes a journey that leads him not only to rebirth in Christ but to recovery of his essential self, "the 'little me' in the 'big me.'" Though unique, this self is also a manifestation of a collective spirit that, Sobel suggests, "the Black had brought . . . with him from Africa, not as a deity but in his own inner self." By recovering the 'little me,' the convert is both reborn in Christ and "brought . . . back to his African heritage." As in Afro-Baptist conversion, the self recovered by Bynum was both unique (his personal "song") and already there and waiting for him as part of his African heritage, a self related to an ancestral or ethnic past. Thus, the place where Bynum was taught "the Secret of Life" and learned how to find his song was one that lay on a road Bynum had already traveled, and he received instruction from an ancestor, the spirit of his father. As "the One Who Goes Before and Shows the Way," the shiny man was potentially both spiritual guide and spiritual ancestor.

Elements of Bynum's narrative of revelation and self-recovery evoke the Biblical story of Saul's transformative encounter with a risen Christ on the road to Damascus. Reading Bynum's story through the Biblical one suggests that the shiny man who guided Bynum toward his song and then disappeared in blinding light was a Christ figure from whom Bynum received a new identity, just as Saul, the persecutor of Christians, was transformed into Paul, the great preacher of the gospel. Bynum himself, according to this paradigm, would be a reborn Paul and his "binding song" the task of uniting African Americans in anticipation of a returning savior or messiah. Bynum does, in fact, hope to see the shiny man again, but the person and the advent he waits for do not have quite the meaning that they have in the Biblical paradigm. If the shiny man is a messiah figure, he is not an otherworldly or even exceptional individual. As Bynum tells Selig, "I ain't even so sure he's one special fellow. That shine could pass on to anybody. He could be anybody shining." The shiny man is an ordinary man who, possessing his song as "a voice inside him telling him which way to go," is able to guide others toward repossession of their songs, toward becoming shiny men in their own right. And since "that shine could pass on to anybody," the shiny man is also the individual who has not yet found his song, one who searches for himself. That search takes place in the world, and for Bynum to see the shiny man "again" means assisting that search by acting as the shiny-man guide to another. Seeing the shiny man again does not entail Bynum's deliverance from the world but confirmation of his contribution to it. As Bynum's father told him, "There was lots of shiny men and if I ever saw one again before I died then I would know that my song had been accepted and worked its full power in the world . . ."

The shiny man is an ordinary individual who seeks himself or is sought by others in the world, so it is not entirely strange that Bynum engages Selig's help in this search, paying him a dollar to find that shiny man for him. Given that this search is for an individual's self, song or soul, however, Bynum's use of Selig's services is highly ironic, and his greetings to the "People Finder" carry more than a hint of sarcasm:

Bynum: If it ain't the People Finder himself.
Selig: Bynum, before you start . . . I ain't seen no shiny man now.
Bynum: Who said anything about that? I ain't said

nothing about that. I just called you a first-class People Finder.

Selig cannot find the shiny man because neither he nor the economic system he represents is able to recognize African Americans as persons or individuals. Bynum's description of the shiny man as "anybody shining" is an affirmation of the intrinsic value of each individual. The shiny man could be anybody because each individual possesses the potential for self-realization which the shiny man represents. Selig's observation that "there's lots of shiny Nigras," by contrast, implies that African Americans are indistinguishable from one another, that they are, in fact, not individual subjects but bodies that are ultimately the same body: "The only shiny *man* I saw was the Nigras working on the road gang with the sweat glistening on them" (emphasis added).

Though the economic system which Selig represents cannot see black persons, the shiny man cannot be found wholly outside that system since persons realize themselves in a world of concrete material relations. Bynum acknowledges the material basis of the search for self in his employment of Selig and in his description of the shiny man as one who "shine like new money." The shiny man's spiritual or inner shine cannot be divorced from the material or economic world, but it also transforms it, makes it serve the expression of soul, self, or song. Bynum uses Selig, then, but he does not rely on him, and the real "People Finder," as Bynum hints at one point, is Bynum himself: "I binds them [people] together. Sometimes I help them find each other."

Bynum can act as "People Finder," however, only to people who carry within themselves a sense of their own humanity. He can act as a spiritual guide only to the "anybody" who already searches for himself. As a man cut off from self and community, seeking himself through the recovery of the past, Herold Loomis is that anybody, as Seth unconsciously reveals when he voices suspicions about Loomis's identity: "Anybody can tell anybody anything about what their name is. That's what you call him . . . Herald Loomis. His name liable to be anything." Though Seth's distrust expresses the fragmentation of community that accompanies the self-alienation of its members, a community of anybodies is also one that might cohere as its members find their own identities through a past that is collective. Since Loomis is the anybody who could be the shiny man, his search and Bynum's are the same. Loomis is searching for himself through recovery of the past, and Bynum is searching for the man whom he can guide to himself and whose self-recovery will validate the efficacy of Bynum's own song, its "power in the world." The search for the shiny man is a collaborative and, indeed, a collective project, for the self that is its object can be found only in a past that is held in common with others.

Searching for the self in the past presupposes that the past is one which can ground a self, that it was made by other selves whose agency can function as the precedent for and promise of one's own. Initially, Loomis is unable to see the collective African-American past in this way, as can be observed in a powerful scene that begins when the lodgers of Seth's boarding house perform a variant of the "ring shout," an Afro-Christian ritual in which frenzied dance and ecstatic shouts mediated an experience of possession or inspiration by the Holy Ghost (Sobel). When Loomis walks in on this

dance, he is angrily contemptuous of the boarders' evocation of a past which he clearly considers to have been marked by passive suffering and useless piety: "You singing for the Holy Ghost to come? What he gonna do huh? He gonna come with the tongues of fire to burn up your wooly heads?" Loomis, however, is fundamentally connected to the past and people he scorns, and his own challenge, giving way to dance, glossolalia and a visionary trance, merges with and continues the act of the collective memory which he has interrupted. The lodgers' ecstatic ritual, in fact, produces precisely the state of trance and vision which it was originally intended to, and the vision which Loomis witnesses is given expression in a collective act, a call-and-response exchange between Loomis and Bynum:

Bynum: What you done seen, Herald Loomis?
Loomis: I done seen bones rise up out of the water.
Ride up and walk across the water. Bones walking on
top of the water.
Bynum: Tell me about them bones, Herald Loomis.
Tell me what you seen

Asking questions, prompting, repeating images and phrases, interpreting earlier lines, Bynum is essential to the realization of Loomis's vision as more than a private experience.

The past evoked in Loomis's vision is one which affirms the possibility of agency Loomis has defined. Briefly, Loomis's vision records two journeys. The first is a journey of bones traveling across a body of water, a journey symbolizing the trans Atlantic voyage in which Africans, enslaved and taken from their homes, both died by the thousands and were treated as mere bodies without identity of human worth: "Wasn't nothing but bones and they walking on top of the water." The enslaved Africans of Loomis's vision do not remain insentient bones however. The bones sink into the ocean from which they are then resurrected as bodies with flesh and restored to life by a wind that fills them with breath or spirit. Resurrected, the Africans then begin a second journey which requires individual agency and decision. Standing up from the shore of the New World where a wave has thrown them, the Africans bid each other goodbye and leave the place to pursue their different paths: "They shaking hands and saying goodbye to each other and walking every which away down the road."

Loomis's vision is one which affirms the presence of agency in the African-American past, suggesting that it is not one of victimization alone, but of agency and self-empowerment. The vision suggests, moreover, that even the history of victimization can be and has been redeemed. The people of Loomis's vision exercise agency not only in the present following their resurrection, but in relation to the past that brought them to the New World. By beginning a second journey which parallels or repeats the first but adds the new dimension of choice and self-determination, the people of the vision change the meaning of the past, remake it retrospectively. This re-creation of the past might be called an act of transformative repetition such as is embodied in the call-and-response form itself. Moving from statement to repetition and restatement, the call-and-

response exchange shared by Loomis and Bynum continually remakes itself as it develops, symbolically remaking the events which are its theme.

This history of self-empowerment is Loomis's by right of inheritance, for the people of his vision are his people: "They black. Just like you and me. Ain't no difference." But the connection that justifies the claim of co-possession of historical agency seems to go beyond inheritance and precedent, as Loomis becomes not simply like his ancestors but one of them:

Loomis: They ain't moved or nothing. They just
laying there.
Bynum: You just laying there. What you waiting on,
Herald Loomis?
Loomis: I'm laying there . . . waiting.
Bynum: What you waiting on, Herald Loomis?
Loomis: I'm waiting on the breath to get into my body.

Here the collapse of differences of time and identity would seem to open the possibility of reentering and enacting the past in order to fully claim its legacy of self-empowerment. Loomis, however, is not yet able to claim this legacy by standing up with the people of his vision. The part of the vision in which the Africans stand up, say goodbye to one another, and depart on their different journeys is recounted by Bynum alone, suggesting that this part of history does not yet exist for Loomis and cannot exist until he realizes it through an act of his own.

Before Loomis can claim the legacy of empowerment left him by his ancestors, he must confront and understand his own experience of oppression: seven years of false imprisonment and forced labor on the chain gang of Joe Turner, brother to the governor of Tennessee. Though this experience is part of Loomis's personal past, it is not one that he has suffered alone, but with the men imprisoned with him, those who lived in fear of imprisonment and the families deprived of their men. Loomis's experience, then, is once again part of a collective past, a past preserved for collective memory in a song. The refrain of this song is, "They tell me Joe Turner's come and Gone." As sung by "the women . . . down around Memphis" who "made up that song," the song is a testimony of loss. If "Joe Turner's come and gone," then husbands, sons, fathers and brothers have been taken away from their families. By singing this song, Bynum uses collective memory to confront Loomis with his personal loss and with the way this loss still affects him:

Now, I can look at you, Mr. Loomis, and see you a
man who done forgot his song. Forgot how to sing it.
A fellow forget that and he forget who he is. Forget
how he's supposed to mark down life . . . See, Mr.
Loomis, when a man forgets his song he goes off in
search of it . . . till he find out he's got it with him all

the time. That's why I can tell you one of Joe Turner's niggers. 'Cause you forgot how to sing your song.

Bynum's suggestion that a song of loss and victimization has displaced Loomis's own song and that Loomis is still in bondage to Turner, still "one of Joe Turner's niggers," provokes first violent denial, then implicit acknowledgement as Loomis recounts the story of his imprisonment, his release to find nothing left of his former life and his efforts to see his wife once more so that he can begin again: "I just wanna see her face so I can get me a starting place in the world." By acknowledging the past, Loomis is enabled to confront the judgment of worthlessness which keeps him bound to Joe Turner and counter it with his own truth. Joe Turner did not catch and keep him for seven years because he was "worthless": "Worthless is something you throw away. . . I ain't seen him throw me away." Rather, it was envy of Loomis's song that led Joe Turner to imprison him. As Bynum puts it, "What he [Joe Turner] wanted was your song. He wanted that song to be his. . . But you still got it. You just forgot how to sing it."

Once Loomis has understood the past in which he was victimized and has rejected the judgment of worthlessness which oppression forced upon him, it remains for him to say "goodbye" to what he has lost and reclaim the self that Joe Turner has not been able to take away. What Loomis has lost is the life he had with his wife, Martha, before Joe Turner entered it. He cannot reclaim that life except as a past he confirms by seeing Martha again: "I just wanted to see your face to know that the world was still there. Make sure everything still in its place so I could reconnect myself together." Loomis must "say goodbye" to Martha and the world they made, but this goodbye is everything. By relinquishing the past, Loomis also reclaims it as his own, in a sense, nullifying Joe Turner's expropriation. Loomis's declaration, "Well, Joe Turner's come and gone and Herald Loomis ain't for no binding," transforms the meaning of the words sung by women whose men had been taken away. The words no longer communicate present loss but consign Joe Turner to a history of which Loomis is the subject. Repossessed of the past, Loomis is no longer its victim but the measure of its meaning, free to judge it and reject what seems false, including the Christian faith that Martha tries to lead him back to:

Great big old white man . . . your Mr. Jesus Christ. Standing there with a whip in one hand and a tote board in another, and them niggers swimming in a sea of cotton. And he counting. He tallying up the cotton. "Well, Jeremiah . . . what's the matter, you ain't picked but two hundred pounds of cotton today? Got to put you on half rations." And Jeremiah go back and lay up there on his half rations and talk about what a nice man Mr. Jesus Christ is 'cause he give him salvation after he die. Something wrong here. Something don't fit right!

Loomis rejects Christian promises of salvation as complicit with African Americans' historical oppression and, declaring that "I don't need nobody to bleed for me!" slashes himself across the chest. This declaration of self-sufficiency and of break with the pieties of the past is also one in which Loomis reconnects with a collective identity and a heritage of self-empowerment: he finds that "I'm standing now" just as the ancestors in his vision had stood up. Reclaiming himself and translating a collective past to the present, Loomis becomes indeed the shiny man who knows his own song and, "shining like new money," shows the way.

Source: Douglas Anderson, "*Joe Turner's Come and Gone,*" in *CLA Journal,* Vol. XL, No. 4, June 1997, pp. 432-57.

Topics for Further Study

Research the history of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and choose one of the major legal cases that it has won. Examine the background for this case, and discuss the effects that the legal victory had on the lives of African Americans. Write a short description of what life might be like today for African Americans if this case had not been won.

In the play, Jeremy is jailed without cause and fired from his job when he refuses to be extorted. Research modern forms of discrimination against African Americans and other minorities in America and compare these to the discrimination endured by Jeremy and others in the play. Also, discuss what ongoing efforts are being made to fight discrimination in America.

Research the history of slavery, and choose another nation, besides African nations, that has been subjected to widespread slavery. Write a journal entry from the perspective of a slave in this other nation.

Research the cultural and social climate in Pittsburgh in 1911, including the statistics that concern African Americans. Compare this information to modern-day Pittsburgh and discuss the economic, social, and cultural changes that have taken place in the city.

America is often referred to as either a mixing bowl—in which various cultures exist together but are separated by their differences—or a melting pot—in which these separate cultures are blended together to create one increasingly similar, multicultural identity. Research the current state of multiculturalism in America and decide whether you think the nation is best defined as a mixing bowl or a melting pot.

Compare and Contrast

Late 1900s/Early 1910s: Jack Johnson becomes the first black man to hold the world heavyweight boxing championship title in 1908. When he successfully defends his title in 1910, race riots break out in the United States.

1980s: African Americans riot in Liberty City, Florida, following the acquittal of police officers accused of killing an unarmed black man.

Today: The largest protest of police brutality in New York's history occurs after police officers shoot forty-one bullets at Amadou Diallo, a black immigrant.

Late 1900s/Early 1910s: Many African Americans are denied their freedom when they are impressed into slavery by the influential Tennes-see plantation owner, Joe Turney, whose exploits are memorialized in the blues song, "Joe Turner's Come and Gone." Other blacks face severe segregation and discrimination.

1980s: Tensions escalate between South Africa's black majority and the white South African leadership, in part due to the government's longtime practice of racial segregation and repression—known as apartheid. Through apartheid, the white minority passes laws that restrict the rights of non-whites, including denying blacks the right to vote. Both the United Kingdom and the United States institute a selective number of economic sanctions against South Africa, in protest of its racial policies.

Today: Following the first all-race national elections in 1994, South Africa's government now features a black majority and a permanent, non-racial constitution.

Late 1900s/Early 1910s: W. E. B. Du Bois helps found the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) with the help of Jane Addams and John Dewey, two concerned white activists. Du Bois is one of the most influential public figures of his day.

1980s: The Reverend Jesse Jackson runs for the Democratic presidential nomination twice and wins a significant amount of support each time from both blacks and whites.

Today: General Colin Powell is the United States Secretary of State under President George W. Bush and is the first African American to hold this position.

What Do I Read Next?

In *Brotherman: The Odyssey of Black Men in America* (1996), editors Herb Boyd and Robert L. Allen have collected an impressive number and variety of writings by African-American men. The book features more than one hundred entries of fiction and nonfiction works, including slave narratives, autobiographies and biographies, essays, poems, and short stories. Some works are excerpted, while others are reproduced in full. The book also features some previously unpublished writings.

W. E. B. Du Bois was one of the most vocal African-American leaders in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. A prolific writer, he also produced several sociological studies that illuminated the African-American experience. One of the first of these, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Special Study,* first published in 1899, offers an in-depth examination of African-American life in Philadelphia at the end of the nineteenth century. The book featured groundbreaking techniques in urban ethnography, social history, and the use of statistics and is today considered a classic work of social science literature.

Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches,* originally published in 1903, was not well received by white audiences, largely due to the book's depiction of the unfair treatment of African Americans. In addition, Du Bois shocked both whites and blacks when he publicly announced in the book that he was opposed to the philosophy of Booker T. Washington, a prominent African-American man who was willing to put up with racism—in exchange for promises from white leaders to help educate blacks.

In *Joe Turner's Come and Gone,* Herald searches for his song, or identity, throughout the play. In Velma Maia Thomas's *No Man Can Hinder Me: The Journey from Slavery to Emancipation through Song (2001),* the author explores the African tradition of music and its many variations in the United States. The lavishly illustrated book is accompanied by a compact disc, which includes eighteen representative songs—many of which are sung by the author.

Critics have compared Wilson's play to Toni Morrison's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *Beloved,* which was first published in 1987. Sethe, the main character in the novel, is a former slave, who has escaped to Ohio. However, like Herald Loomis, she is initially unable to bury her past, which includes the loss of her family. This novel can be a tough read, employing extended metaphors and other complex literary techniques, but it is well worth the effort.

Wilson's drama is also compared to the plays of Eugene O'Neill, one of the few other American playwrights to win two Pulitzer Prizes. Like *Joe Turner's Come and Gone,* O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh* (1946) features a diverse group of characters who collect in one setting to discuss their hopes and dreams. However, in O'Neill's play, the characters inhabit a barroom, not a boardinghouse. This play is considered by many critics to be one of O'Neill's best works.

Wilson's Pulitzer Prize-winning play, *Fences,* was first published in 1986. The play is the second work in the playwright's ten-play historical cycle, which seeks to chronicle the African-American experience in the decades of the twentieth century. Set in the 1950s, *Fences* details the conflict between Troy Maxson—a former baseball player who was denied the opportunity to play in the major leagues because of his race—and his son, Cory, who is offered a college football scholarship.

Wilson's play, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (1984), was the play that made him famous and was the first play that he wrote in his ten-play historical cycle. Set in the 1920s, the play features the real-life historical figure of Ma Rainey, one of the first successful female blues singers, although the action primarily focuses on the conflict among Rainey's black, male band members. The play takes place in a single afternoon at a recording studio, where frustrations created by racial exploitation manifest themselves in a violent climax.

Further Study

Aptheker, Herbert, ed., *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United State 1910-1932,* 1973, reprint, Carol Publishing Group, 1993.

Aptheker's renowned historical study of African-American history relies on original documents—including essays, reports, speeches, letters, and news articles—from people who lived during this time period. Collectively, the book offers a good picture of what life was like for African Americans from 1910 to 1932. Among the many topics covered is peonage.

Earle, Jonathan, *The Routledge Atlas of African-American History,* Routledge, 2000.

This book chronicles the four centuries of African American history and culture in the United States, from the arrival of the first African slaves in the early 1600s to the present day. The book contains short essays on everything from politics to sports, and each topic is depicted with photographs, charts, graphs, maps, and other illustrations. The book also features a chronology of African history from 3200 B.C.E. through the late 1990s.

Elkins, Marilyn, *August Wilson: A Casebook,* Garland Publishing, Inc., 2000.

Originally published in 1994, this revised collection of essays explores several aspects of Wilson's life and career, including the playwright's creative process, his famous collaboration with theater director Lloyd Richards, and the various contexts of Wilson's plays. The book also includes a 1993 interview with the playwright.

Handy, W. C., *Father of the Blues: An Autobiography,* Da Capo Press, 1991.

Through songs like "Joe Turner's Come and Gone," W. C. Handy chronicled the African-American experience through his blues music. In this autobiography, Handy explores the roots of jazz and blues and discusses the background of some of his most famous songs.

Herrington, Joan, *"I Ain't Sorry for Nothin' I Done": August Wilson's Process of Playwrighting,* Limelight Editions, 1998.

In this book, Herrington discusses the development of three of Wilson's plays, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone, Fences,* and *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom.* Through her analysis, Herrington explores the various experiences in Wilson's life that influenced his drama.

Schwartzman, Myron, *Romare Bearden: His Life and Art,* Harry N. Abrams, 1990.

Although Wilson and Bearden came from distinctly different backgrounds, they captured the African-American experience in similar ways. Bearden captured it with art, and Wilson through plays—which were sometimes inspired by Bearden's art. This book

offers a look at Bearden's life, and features both black-and-white and color reproductions of many of Bearden's works. It also includes several interviews with Bearden.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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