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Assertion of Shamanism in August Wilson's *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*

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By

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This thesis entitled "Assertion of Shamanism in August Wilson's *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*," submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Bhola Prasad Chaudhary has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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Abstract

August Wilson's *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* highlights the African cultural practice, the Shamanic tradition of African-American people, which unites the displaced lots in America in the making of the play. The major characters, Bynum and Loomis endeavor to unite the people and heal them through their special power that they claim to have possessed culturally. So, their effort to bind and heal sick, lost, and separated people physically as well as spiritually through herbs, black songs and rituals, reflects Shamanic tradition of African-American people in the modern American society. This asserts the shamanic practice in modern times.

Contents

I. August Wilson and His Context

The present research work is a study on August Wilson's prize winning play *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*. It highlights the African cultural practice, the Shamanic tradition of African-American people, which unites the displaced lots in America in the making of the play. Almost all the characters in the play are displaced – lost and isolated – people who have migrated to the North from the South in search of a safe and secure place. They are mostly freed slaves who go through severe pangs of sufferings physically, culturally, and spiritually as they find themselves in the new and difficult surroundings. They face the challenge of finding work, living new lives and creating their identities. The major characters, Bynum and Loomis endeavor to unite the people and heal them through their special power that they claim to have possessed culturally. So, their effort to bind and heal sick, lost, and separated people physically as well as spiritually through herbs, black songs and rituals, reflects Shamanic tradition of African-American people in the modern American society. As a result, people are healed and returned to their normal life which reflects the assertion of Shamanism as well as African-American identity.

August Wilson was born in Pittsburgh in 1945. He was a son of a white father who never lived with his family and black mother who had come from North Carolina to Pittsburgh where she worked to keep her family together. Wilson was author of cycle of plays, each set in a different decade of the 20th century about black American life. Having won many prestigious national awards and Pulitzer Prize for his dramas, he has achieved the status of theatrical historiographer. He won Pulitzer Prize twice for *Fences* and *The Piano Lesson.* He was largely self-educated; he grew up in poverty and quit school at the age of

15. In the 1960s and 1970s, Wilson became involved in the Civil Rights Movement and began to describe himself as a black nationalist. He joined the black aesthetic movement in the late 1960s and became the cofounder and director of Black Horizons Theatre in Pittsburgh. Wilson won New York Drama Critics Circle Award for *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom, Fences,* and *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*.

Wilson's writing is rooted to a large extent in music, especially the blues. As a poet, writing over several years, Wilson found himself interested in the speech patterns and rhythms that were familiar to him from black neighborhoods, but the value of those patterns became clearer to him when he grew older and moved from Pittsburgh to Minneapolis. From a distance, he was able to see more clearly what had attracted him to the language and began to use the language more fully in his work. Wilson believes in what African-Americans have wrought what they have learned about life and what they have learned that are always pointed towards moving harbourless parts of our being closer to home. He further believes that to write is to forever circle the maps. So, he chooses Afro-American history as a context in his plays.

He further believes that only people do not realize the value in what they are doing because they have accepted their victimization; they have marked themselves as victims. Once they recognize that they can begin to move through society in a different manner from a stronger position and claim what is theirs.

Wilson is one of the most prolific writers of America, whose plays, like those written by Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams are produced throughout the USA on a regular basis. He has won two Pulitzer Prizes and seven New York Drama Critics Circle Awards for his dramas. Wilson's project to chronicle the

Afro-American experience through each decade of the 20th century that the series, which now includes seven plays -- *Jitney, Ma Rainey's Black Bottom, Fences, Joe Turner's Come and Gone, The Piano Lesson, Two Trains Running* and *Seven Guitars.* Traditionally in Wilson's plays the protagonist's personal past is the lens through which the present situation is seen. His authentic sounding characters have brought a new understanding of the black experience to audiences through a series of plays, each addressing people of color in each decade of the 20th century. Although Wilson's 'decade' plays have not been written in chronological order, the consistent, and key theme in Wilson's drama is the sense of disconnection suffered by the blacks uprooted from their original homeland. Each of the eight plays he has produced to date is set in a different decade of the twentieth century; a device that has enabled Wilson to explore, often in very subtle ways, the myriad and mutating forms of the legacy of slavery.

Ma Rainey's Black Bottom tapped the playwright's interest in the blues and its importance in American black history. The play deals with how black singers were exploited by the whites. *Fences* is about a trash collector whose dreams of playing professional baseball was frustrated by white racism. Protagonist Maxson's bitterness leads him to deny his son the athletic success that was not possible for the blacks in the past.

Seven Guitars that is set during the post-World War II features the story of a blues guitarist, who is murdered, and his circle of friends. The friends gather at the wake and their stories are told in flashback technique. In his play *Two Trains Running,* which opened in New York City in 1992, Wilson probed

the turbulent era of the late 1960s, when racial strife and the Vietnam War convulsed the nation.

His mission in writing ten plays set in the 20th century is to re-write that history to tell the stories of the forgotten, misrepresented, silenced black masses. He concentrates on bringing the past in to the present as a healing measure for all Americans today. His cycles of plays are intended to illuminate the shadowy past of Afro-American by focusing on black issues. Wilson through his dramas encourages people not to forget who they are and where they come from. His plays deal with common people and are created with elements of mysticism, ritual, and story telling. All of these elements, which are often found in African culture, are prominent in his play.

Wilson's plays are about history, his order to present this history on the stage, where his characters could come to life and share their revelations with audiences across the country. His plays interpret periods of history through the stories of ordinary people. For each decade of the 20th century, Wilson has focused on a representative group of characters whose struggles and dreams reflect the events and attitudes of the large society.

By using historical frame, August Wilson gives us something of the past and something of the present. Wilson also shows us individuals engaged in a struggle to gain control of their own lives and to make connections with others that will sustain them. That struggle, of course, continues today and includes all of us. The past and especially the history of slavery is a crucial factor in his plays. The relationship of the present with the past is very much important for African-Americans. His plays are intense, emotionally draining and painfully real in their depiction of people who feel stuck in their given roles due to the

innate racism and classicism of American society. Past shapes the present and in turn the future. According to Wilson, people should not forget their past because it determines who they are and what their condition is.

Wilson's plays are almost classically well-made with strongly individualized characters and realistic settings and actions. His plays depict the experience of black Americans who have migrated from the Southern to the urban centers of the Northern USA. All of his plays present characters who are forced to confront the consequences of a double historical trauma: the brutalities of the Southern heritage and the injustice and inequalities of the North as they struggle to make a home for themselves, to achieve an identity and to lead free and dignified lives in their own way.

Wilson's plays depict black Americans' struggling sometimes successfully and sometimes not to escape from their psychological or spiritual confinement in white dominated society. His plays evoke both the condition that they struggle against and in moments of intensely theoretical action that embrace the mythic and ritualistic and which are always associated with the power of music and song-the forces by which cultural emancipation and empowerment may be achieved. Thus, his drama suggests, black Americans must rediscover to achieve their full emancipation from racial subordination. His drama tells about pain, frustration, anger, anxiety in a white-dominated society. By doing so, Wilson wants to change the society; he wants to break the hierarchy existing between the whites and the blacks in America. Most of his dramas suggest that black people should recreate their identity in a white-dominated society. His plays deal with common people and are created with elements of mysticism, spiritualism and storytelling. All of these elements, which are often found in African culture and

history, are prominently focused on August Wilson's plays. Wilson shows great pride in his culture and believes that African-Americans need not assimilate to the dominant white culture.

Most of August Wilson's dramas are about Afro-American suffering, pain, frustration in a white dominated society. In the same way, his drama, *The Piano Lesson* takes Afro-American history as a means to make all Afro-American people aware about who they are and where they are from. The play begins with the return of Boy Willie to his uncle's home in Pittsburgh in 1930s where he plans to sell his family's piano in order to purchase a few acres of farmland where most of his ancestors were once enslaved. However, his sister Berniece stands firmly against him, contending that their father died trying to snatch the piano from his slave master.

Wilson's recent play *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, the present research work is based upon, is about a freed black man who comes to the North to search for his wife, who disappeared during enslavement. It focuses on the theme of Afro-Americans moving from the agricultural South to a new set of hardships in the industrial cities of the North in the early 20th century.

Many critics and reviewers have studied this play from various perspectives since its publication in 1990. August, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* which won New York Drama Critics Circle Award for Best Play in 1988 represents the 1910s in *The Pittsburgh Cycle*. His dramatic project is comprised of a cycle of plays that explore some of the historical choices that have confronted African-American during the twentieth century.

Joe Turner expresses Wilson's belief that blacks would have been stronger if they had not migrated from country to city, since they came from

agrarian roots in Africa. Although the play failed at the box office, many critics loved it. Rich's review in the *New York Times* in 1986 said that it was "as rich in religious feeling as in historical detail" (Pars 5).

Wilson contends that the community currently floundering because it has failed to turn its history for its history for strength and guidance. Wilson writes:

> . . . blacks in America need to re-examine their time spent here to see the choices that were made as a people. I'm not certain the right choices have always been made. That's part of my interest in history – to say 'Let's look at this again and see where we've come from and how we've gotten where we are now.' I think if you know that, it helps determine how to proceed in the future. (Wilson, 52)

Wilson has dedicated himself to writing a cycle of plays dramatizing black experience during crucial historical periods in order to "play out his individual sense of commitment to the cause of black a America which is to allow black men and women to tell American history, a history that, so far, whites have told" (Freedman 36).

A black sensibility can be seen in the works of August Wilson. Most of the critics have laid emphasis on authentic black culture and experience. Amadou Bissiri traces aspects of Africanness in his plays. This can be associated with retrieval and re-unification governs the structures of a number of Wole Soyinka's plays, which deal with the themes of the past, present, and future. In the Yoruba mind, these temporal sequences are intimately interdependent realities that confer meaning, harmony, and wholeness to life: "Life, present life, contains within it manifestations of the ancestral, the living and the unborn as in *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*" (Bissiri 9)

Similarly, as in Wilson's most of the plays, the characters are struggling with and wrestling over their ideas of religion or God, Wilson sets up a dichotomy between the role of Christianity and the African traditional religion. In two both the plays, *The Piano Lesson* and *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* acceptance of one religion resolves the conflict and Wilson illustrates these two polarized religions by creating images that reflect tenets of African traditional religion and Christianity. In this regard, Amanda M. Rodolph writes:

> *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* includes a story of a shiny man, rituals, ghosts, a juba, and a self-inflicted cutting religion, whereas characters of shiny man and Martha represent Christianity. In *The Piano Lesson*, the ghost of Sutter represents African traditional religion, whereas a very represents Christianity. (39)

In this way, in each of this play, Wilson forces his characters to choose between African traditional religion and Christianity, and Wilson subtly guides his characters to choose African traditional religion to overcome their conflict. In this way, Wilson's plays are a contemporary commentary on the role of traditional religion in the lives of American blacks.

The sense of past is central among Wilson's concerns in *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*. C. W. E. Bigsby writes:

> *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* dramatizes Wilson's complex notion of the past, which is at once the contemporary South, the slave era, and Africa. Wilson argues that it is only by assuming Africanness that the black Americans attain a sense of plenitude and eventually comes to understand who he or she is. (11)

Although these aforementioned critics have made a study of the past of the Africans, they have not yet explored the shamanic tradition of African-

American people. So, the present researcher seeks to explore this cultural aspect which has played a significant role in the lives of African Americans.

The thesis has been divided into four chapters. The first chapter presents an introductory outline of the work -- a short introduction to August Wilson and a short critical response. Moreover, it gives a bird's eye view of this entire work.

The second chapter tries to explain the theoretical modality briefly that is applied in this research work. It discusses black culture, cultural identity and Shamanism with reference to Wole Soyinka and Leslie Marmon Silko.

On the basis of the theoretical framework established in the second chapter, the third chapter analyzes the text at a considerable length. It analyzes how the blacks' past has played significant role in the lives of blacks in modern times in America. As a result people are healed and returned to their normal life which reflects the assertion of Shamanism. It sorts out some extracts from the text as evidence to prove the hypothesis of the study.

Finally, the fourth or the last chapter will sum up the main points of the present research work and the findings of the research work.

II. Afro-American Cultural and Shamanism

Historical Background

The history of African-Americans in the United States began in 1619 when a Dutch ship brought the first slaves from Africa to the shores of North America. Of all ethnic groups, African Americans were the only ones to arrive on these shores against their will. Like other people of African descent in the Western hemisphere, the ancestors of the overwhelming majority of African Americans were brought to North America as slaves between 1619 and 1807, when the Trans-Atlantic slave trade was supposed to end.

Black Americans, like their white counterparts, are not a homogeneous population. Just as white Americans descend from Dutch, French, English, German, Irish, Italian, Franco-American, Polish, Irish, Scottish, Swedish, Norwegian, and Russian ancestors, Black Americans are composed of multiple ethnic groups. A reliable number of just how many ethnic groups were part of the Atlantic slave trade may never be known. However, there are approximately 40 major ethnic groups Black Americans descend from that can be found in present day African nations: Ghana, Mali, Senegal, Gambia, Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia, Ivory Coast, Benin and Togo, Nigeria, Cameroon, Angola and Congo. These ethnic groups were usually sold to European traders by powerful coastal or interior states in exchange for European goods such as textiles and firearms. Europeans on occasion kidnapped Africans, but this was rare. As coastal and near-coastal nation states in Africa expanded through military conflicts, the captives of these wars were sold. Slavery had been prevalent on a much smaller scale in African society long before the arrival of the Europeans. Another way of becoming a slave was being convicted of a crime.

Since most, if not all of these states did not have a prison system, criminals were usually sold.

Most Africans lived in moderately autonomous villages or densely populated urban centers within tribal kingdoms that checked a king's power via some sort of council. These villages or cities paid tribute to the king and fought for him when called upon.

While most Africans lived within a semi-centralized state or kingdom, others lived in small villages with no state protection. Without such protection, these Africans were at higher risk to be enslaved. Since early Europeans had little success against the African states militarily, the non-urbanized Africans became frequent victims. Stateless areas such as Gambia, Guinea and Southern Angola quickly fell into the hands of Europeans who sold the inhabitants as needed to colonies in the New World. The African states also raided these areas selling the inhabitants to Europeans and each other.

Afro-American culture which emerged from slavery evolved through creolization as it came into close contact with Euro-American culture. There occurred an interaction between African tradition and Euro-American tradition where Afro-Americans tried to maintain and build up their culture through music, song, folklore myth and magic. So, this medley of the elements of African tradition with the Euro-American culture is known as Afro-American culture. For the blacks in the United States, this cultural creolization has involved two complex and dynamic aspects. First, among Africans themselves, a creolization process developed as Africans captured from different places. It was a process of mutual cultural exchange where synthesis took place. Secondly, almost simultaneously, this dynamic mixture of African culture was interacting and

exchanging with Euro-American cultures, which were themselves varied because of the different national identities and cultural patterns of the oppressive slave traders and plantation owners.

For the Afro-Americans, art was an important part of their way of life and was closely associated with everyday activities. They created their art as an instrument by which they contacted the spirit using supernatural forces. They did so to overcome the dangers of their environment and to express their religion. They believed in the universal life force which the almighty pours into the world and gives life to every creation. They even believed that the dead retain their living force through certain rituals performed.

Although Africans were inspired by what they do at the rituals, they also like invisible spirits to be visible. So, they carved sculptures which serve as a medium for the access to the spirit world. The figures of ancestors and spirits, masks and other cult objects are the mediums of links between god and man. The inspiring figures are supposed to bring fertility riches and the blessing upon the successors.

Africans often use masks, which they believe enable the souls of the dead, to make their appearance in a visible form. The designs of the masks depend upon its major purpose. They should be unreal as far as possible. In order to know the full meaning of the mask, one must be able to witness the ceremonies of which the mask is used. Not only the mask but also other carved objects and sculptures are used in the rituals.

Human motifs were first priority of all African tribes. They formed an analogy to particular divine forces and myths. The navel and genitals signified the continuance of mankind. The sculptures seen with a large navel can be

interpreted as a sign that a very powerful spirit would lift the body or womb. A large head could be an indication of great intelligence and will power of the spirit world.

Afro-Americans blended old styles with new when cooking, smiting, wood-carving, story-telling and gospel singing traditions. They sang folk songs reflecting their secular life, as Blaissingame points out:

> The secular songs told of the slave's loves, work, floggings, and expressed his moods and reality of his oppression. On a number of occasions he sang of the proud defiance of the runaway, the courage of the black rebels, the stupidity of the black rebels, and the stupidity of the patrollers, the heartlessness of the slave traders and the kindness and cruelty of masters. (23)

They sang songs that began in the fields of the plantations to pass the themes of salvation and freedom of Christianity with a native style of singing and dancing.

Slave spirituals were among the earliest forms of artistic self-expression available to African Americans; the songs were based on Christian hymn tradition, but often departed radically from the complacent austerity to while hymns. This spiritual tradition provided the birthing ground for what Levine calls "the most highly personalized genre of African-American music: the blues" (221). By the early 20th century, the blues had emerged as a dynamic and powerful addition to the music of black America. In this regard, Schultz remarks, "In the spirituals, black Americans first started to sing of their feelings of homelessness; in the blues, they continued to sing it" (127). In a 1960 interview, blues musician Sidney Bechet identified the source of the essential connection between music and story telling. He says "Me, I want to explain myself so bad. I

want to have myself understood. And the music, it can do that. The music, it's my whole story" (qtd. in Levine 190). Although gospel and blues often differ in focus and style, both genres are musical expressions of the cultural need to the story of people.

Mahalia Jackson once remarked that blue songs "are the songs of despair, but gospel songs are the songs of hope" (qtd. in Levine 174). This comment is not pejorative judgment of blue singers; perhaps the blues developed to fill a need that gospel could not address. A deep despair that fills so many blues songs provides a communal outlet for emotions that would otherwise choke the singer; the blues may provide a way of recognizing and sharing human pain in order to overcome it. According to John Lee Hooker, the blues are "not only what's happened to you, it's what happened to your fore parents and other people. And that's what makes the blues" (qtd. in Levine237). This historical and cultural breadth of the blues illustrates the vitality and strength of the close connection between music and folklore. Similarly, Zora Neale Hurston suggests that "[s]omewhere songs for sound-singing branched off from songs for storytelling until we arrive at prose" (qtd. in Hurtson 877). She asserts that folklore is nothing less than "the boiled-down juice of human living" (875).

In addition to music, the African-Americans relied on the oral traditions, much as their African ancestors did. Orature and storytelling is a way of bridging gaps between the Black community's folk roots and the Black American tradition. Blaissingame outlines the value of the folk tales which emerged out of slave environment:

> The [folk] tales also represented the distillation of folk wisdom and were used as an instructional device to teach young slaves to

> survive. A projection of the slave's personal experience, dreams, and hopes, the folk tales allowed him to express hostility to his master, to poke fun at himself, and to delineate the workings of the system. At the same time, by viewing himself as an object, verbalizing his dreams and hostilities, the slave was able to preserve one more area which whites could not control. (36)

So, elements of African culture synthesizing with the slave culture, slave experience and Euro-American culture ultimately became the components of the Afro-American culture.

This Afro-American culture – myth, black art, folk tales and rituals – has been richly reflected in the writings of Afro-American writers. Lately, the experimental flourish of the Counterculture and Civil Rights Movement eras have brought tremendous developments in American writing especially in drama. According to William Herman, by the mid-'70s, new conditions in the nation – political, social, cultural, and technological – combined to “displace drama as a major vehicle of cultural expression” (9). The move of drama from the center of the cultural stage has not meant its death, however. With Broadway's loss of primacy, regional activities have come to the fore, and this has meant unparalleled growth for minority – black, Chicano, women, gay productions. In style and subject matter new patterns and concerns have arisen. Reverting to what Gerald M. Berkowitz defines as the mainstay of twentieth-century American drama, domestic realism, dramatists have started to express their concerns "through the everyday, personal experiences of ordinary characters" (167). In black drama, the traditional emphasis on cultural identity has continued. Instead of Amiri Baraka's once-dominant revolutionary style, characterized by images of

revolt at work now is the claim to possess an authentic black culture expressed through a recognizably black sensibility. This emphasis can be seen in the work of August Wilson, whose plays deal with the common folk, "those who were continuing to live their lives," rather than "what you could get from the history book" (qtd. in Bigsby, 297). Wilson has little interest in those black figures and experiences that have been at the center of political and social activism.

August Wilson has dedicated himself to writing a cycle of plays dramatizing black experience during crucial historical periods in order to play out his individual sense of commitment to the cause of black America – which is to allow black men and women to tell American history, “a history that, so far, whites have mostly told” (Goldman 40). To him, blacks can best write and stage their experiences and cultural identity. This vision frames the significance of his project, which involves a concern for the survival struggle of black cultural values in the midst of a hostile white culture. Wilson writes: "The message of America is 'Leave your Africanness outside the door.' My message is 'Claim what is yours'" (qtd. in Freedman, 39-40). Wilson's sense of identity looks emphatically toward Africa, and carries a large part of his ideological program. He seeks the recognition of African American identity - acceptance of the fact that Afro-American mythology is not "strange," but "a common, natural part of life"; he seeks acknowledgment of African Americans' link "to Africa, to who we are" (qtd. in Freedman, 240). Wilson obviously denies the assumption that slavery exterminated African culture. He believes with Lawrence Levine:

> From the first African captives, through the years of slavery, and into the present century black Americans kept alive important strands of African consciousness and verbal art in their humor,

> songs, dance, speech, tales, folk beliefs and aphorisms (Levine 444).

Despite the long and painful historical separation, there remains an African sensibility among African Americans. Wilson consciously seeks to integrate this sensibility and all else that stems from African culture into his plays.

Many a times, Wilson tries to trace the aspects of Africanness in his writing by reading it through Wole Soyinka's drama. Conceptually and practically, Soyinka draws on Yoruba ritual drama and mythology. In his *Myth, Literature and the African World,* he explores African world views and rituals and how these can help to build a true modern African drama. Grounded in his reinterpretation of Yoruba culture, the book provides the foundation of his ritual dramatic theory, within which rituals function on both the literal and metaphorical levels. Ritual scenes, structures, moods, ideologies, and moralities pervade Soyinka's dramatic texts. The world view that dominates his plays recognizes the reality of the invisible world (gods, spirits, the unborn, and the dead - the ancestors) whose forces determine the lives of humans. Morality, the driving force governing the social and cosmic orders, lies in a harmonious relationship with the past (hence the ancestors), the invisible forces, and among humans themselves. To varying degrees, Soyinka's characters live out this essentially religious world view. Scenes and values that belong to the secular life do exist in his plays, but Soyinka believes that, if only because of its collective status, dramatic performance necessarily has something ritual about it. Hence he prefers the term participant to audience to name those who attend his dramas. More than one critic has asserted that "elements of mysticism, ritual, spiritualism and storytelling" (Dworkin 2) pervade Wilson's plays, and Wilson himself makes

the point that "I try to give [these elements] to both my characters and the audiences because they are part of what we are" (Goldman 6). The sense of the past and cultural practice is central among Wilson's concerns in his writings. The past subsumes a number of the cultural aspects that the researcher shall be considering and introduce the two main strains of twentieth-century black American cultural thought represented by Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois. As Wilson asserts, "You have to make a decision about where you're going to go, whether you are going to assimilate or separate. I offer my plays as part of that debate" (qtd. in Bigsby, 298).

So, his writing dramatizes Wilson's complex notion of the past, which is at once the contemporary South, the slave era, and Africa (Freedman, 36). Wilson argues that it is only by assuming Africanness that the black American attains a sense of plenitude and eventually comes to understand who he or she is. Here he reveals philosophical affinities with Soyinka in that Wilson's attitude, like Soyinka's, exemplifies what we may term mythical thinking, since it assumes original oneness as the essence of being, of life. Soyinka writes:

> When we left [the South] we left people back there. . . . [the] connection is broken, that sense of standing in your father's shoes. . . . what I'm trying to do with my plays [is] make the connection. Because I think it's vital. Having shared a common past we have a common past and a common future. (qtd. in Bigsby, Modern 298).

Here, Wholeness and life stand out, and are unequivocally and inextricably linked with each other.

Soyinka observes that the sense of tragedy for the Yoruba involves "the anguish of an original severance, the fragmentation of essence from self" (145).

Ritual ceremonies are an attempt to retrieve the original oneness; they are re-enactments of the gods' dramas in their first attempts to re-unite with humans (144). Retrieval and re-unification govern the structures of a number of Soyinka's plays, including *Death and the King's Horseman* and *A Dance of the Forests*, which deal with the themes of the past, present, and future. In the Yoruba mind, these temporal sequences are intimately interdependent realities that confer meaning, harmony, and wholeness to life. Soyinka further says: "Life, present life, contains within it manifestations of the ancestral, the living and the unborn" (146). For the Yoruba, "the past is the ancestors, the present belongs to the living and the future to the unborn" (148). In ritual moments, the occasions par excellence when these three essential instances unite in a single locus, these three instances realize the state of original oneness. The past, the present, and the future are faces of the same reality, of life, of being. To deny or to search for the past engages and determines one's ontological self, one's identity.

Evincing the essential desire, as Soyinka views, "to penetrate even deeper into that area of man's cosmogonic hunger, one which leads him to the profounder forms of art as retrieval vehicles for, or assertive links with, a lost sense of origin" (54), Wilson displays, with his concern for the past, a true sense of Africanness.

The importance of past, culture and history has been highlighted in Silko’s writing. In *Ceremony*, the rituals of healing ceremony are significant. In this work the Laguna Pueblos cannot remain healthy when they are forced to live in zoo-like reservations. In Paula Gunn Allen’s Observation, Illness in Tayo is a condition of division and separation from the harmony of the cultural whole and past:

> Tayo's illness is a result of separation from the ancient unity of person, ceremony, and land . . . . The land is dry because earth is suffering from the alienation of part of herself, her children have been torn from her in their minds; their possession of unified awareness of and with her has been destroyed , partially or totally; that destruction characterizes the lives of Tayo and his mother, Auntie and Rocky, Pinky and Harley, and all those who are tricked into believing that the land is beyond and separate from themselves. (380)

Christianity imposed on Indians by the white world is also responsible for Tayo's illness. This alien religion attempts to separate an Indian from his/her tribe. Above all, it attempts to make a white man of the Indian. The white world undermines the Native religion as mere superstition and heathenish, and compels the Indians to repudiate their own traditional belief system. Once they are separated from their tribes and their Indianness crushed, the Native Americans become vulnerable. Simon Ortiz, in his article "The Language We know," expresses a harrowing experience he had to undergo as a member of the culturally repressed Indian community. Ortiz writes, "We were not to speak our languages, practices our spiritual beliefs, or accept the values of our past generations, and we were discouraged from pressing for our natural rights as Indian human beings" (194). Silko writes in *Ceremony* how Christianity renders an Indian vulnerable, "Christianity separated the people from themselves; it tried to crush the single clan name, encouraging each person to stand alone, because Jesus Christ would save only the individual soul; Jesus Christ was not like the Mother who loved and cared for them as her children, as her family" (68).

Tayo's mother, Laura, is one of the victims of the white world for it is the white Christian world that incites her to abandon tribal allegiances and to adopt white ways. Silko makes it evident as she writes in *Ceremony*, "Holy missionary white people who wanted only good for the Indians, white people who dedicated their lives to helping the interdependent. Thought Woman is attributed to the creation of the universe, and one version of the creation of myth is as follows:

Ts' its' tsi'nako, Thought-Woman,
Is sitting in her room
And what ever she thinks about
appears.
She thought of her sisters,
Nau' ts' ity' i and I' tcs' i,
and together they created the Universe
this world
and the four worlds below. (4)

This myth is important in two respects. First, it explains the Pueblo belief that the universe consists of our world, which is the earth, and the "four worlds below," where the spirits of the dead go. Second, it reveals the crucial function that storytelling serves in the Pueblo culture.

The three most important figures in Pueblo mythology are Thought Woman, Corn Mother, and Sun |Father. While all three beings are extremely powerful, they are also Indians, these people urged her to break away form her home" (68), once separated from her tribe, can Laura secure her identity in either of the two worlds Certainly not.

The same white world that separated Laura from her tribe now blames her for what she has become. So, she finds no room for her in the mainstream white culture. On the other hands, she doesn't find her way back to her tribal identity for she has gone too far away from her people to aggravate her predicament, the Christianized Indian world doesn't accept her is. It is obvious what tragic fate awaits Laura as she is now out of place she ends her life in drunkenness and prostitution, paradoxically the twin-gifts of whites to Indians. To quote Paula Gunn Allen, Laura's doom is inevitable because she is an Indian assimilated to non-Indian white society, "His [Tayo's] mother, a lost Laguna woman who had tried to fit into the white world as a result of her experiences at white schools, turned to alcohol and a bitter form of prostitution when her attempts to be accepted in the white man's world failed. She died of exposure or alcohol" (*Sacred Hoop* 140).

Tayo's illness is the result of his identity crisis who is Tayo is an illegitimate child of Laura. The pre-Columbian Indians never faced a problem like the illegitimacy of a birth. The question of legitimacy is solely a phenomenon brought in to the Indian universe by the white Christian colonizers for "No child is ever considered illegitimate among the Indians . . ." (Allen 216). That a child is born to a mother is itself an identity, as Allen observes, "At Laguna Pueblo in New Mexico, 'Who is your mother? is an important question. At Laguna, your mother's identity is the key to your own identity" (209). Tayo's identity, however, is in crisis because the Indian universe he now inhabits is a Christianized world that labels his birth as sinful.

Aunt Thelma, an Indian convert to Christianity, takes care of Tayo but disapprovingly because she is under the influence of Christianity and, therefore,

is afraid of shame and gossip. She does not treat Tayo as she would her sister's son and often reminds him of his shameful birth, as an indication of her prejudice against half-breed. She adopts Christianity as a step toward assimilation into the mainstream culture and learns to despise the tribal ways. She goes to church by herself to show the people that "she was a devout Christian and not immoral pagan like the rest of the family" (Ceremony 77).

As a result of several centuries of contact with Christian religious concepts, Indians lose faith in their traditional ceremonies and rituals. Because they already abandoned their tradition and adapted to white ways, they have no choice but to rely on Christ as their healer. The question now – can Christianity help Indians overcome the troubles caused by drought and diseases? Silko, in Ceremony, doubts the the efficacy of Christian prayers in healing people and their land:

> There would be only a few cobs on each plant, and the kernels would be small and deformed . . . . Their cattle were thin too. What did they do? Drop down on their knees in the chapel, sweaty straw hats in their hands, to smell the candle wax and watch the flickering red and blue votive lights? Pray up to the plaster Jesus in rose-coloured robes, his arms reaching out? "Help us, forgive us." (155)

The imposition of Christianity and the banning of tribal ways have rendered Indians vulnerable, Silko implies. Indians have forsaken traditional healing ceremonies and rituals, which could heal the war wounded people and drought-stricken land. They are now fated to rely on Christianity, which is not efficacious to get rid of the troubles.

Shamanism

Rituals and ceremonies are central to different cultures under which comes shamanism. Shamanism refers to a range of traditional beliefs and practices connected with communication with the spirit world. It is a religious phenomenon centered on the shaman, an ecstatic figure believed to have power to heal the sick and to communicate with the world beyond. In this regard, Mircea Elliade says: "These myths refer to a time when communication between heaven and earth was possible; in consequence of a certain event or a ritual fault, the communication was broken off, but heroes and medicine men are nevertheless able to reestablish it" (19). This refers to man's spiritual power that links to the spirit world.

The source of Shamanism is in independent invention and human psychobiology. Uniformities in different shamanic cultures reflect, according to Charles Laughlin, a biological foundation involving "neurognostic structures – neural networks that provide basic forms of perception and knowledge and the universal aspects of mind" (qtd.in Winkelman 195). So, Shamanism involves social adaptations that use biological potentials to facilitate community integration, personal development, and healing. These biological potentials are provided by unusual, changed and high-spirited states of consciousness which Michael Winkelman calls "integrative altered states of consciousness (ASC)" (194). The biological processes that a Shaman utilizes promotes connections between the limbic system and lower brain structures and project these synchronous integrative slow wave discharges into the frontal brain. These integrative dynamics enhance attention, self-awareness, learning, and memory and elicit mechanisms that mediate self, attachment, motives, and feeling of

conviction. A Shaman is considered to be a healer as Shamanic ritual provides therapeutic effects through mechanisms derived from psychobiological dynamics of (ASC), the relaxation response, effects upon serotonergic action and endogenous opioid release, and activation of the palemammalian brain. (Winkelman 194). This shows a shaman accomplishes his objectives of healing by engaging the patient into different physical activities. So, Shamanism manipulates emotions, attachments, social bonding, sense of self, and identity, creating a primordial development of consciousness that constituted the earliest manifestations of culturally modern humans.

Shamanic structures of consciousness are manifest in the universal use of (ASC) in religious healing too. The psychobiological consciousness explains its widespread presence in ancient and contemporary societies. This makes shamanism a natural paradigm for theories of religious experience and illustrates the value of a neurophenomenological approach to religious experience.

The term “shamanism” comes to English from the Tungus language via Russia. Among the Tungus of Siberia it is both a noun and a verb. While the Tungus have no word for shamanism, it has come into usage by anthropologists, historians of religion and others in contemporary society to designate the experience and the practices of shaman. Its usage has grown to include similar experience and practices in cultures outside the original Ural-Altaic cultures from which the term “shaman” originated. In this sense, shamanism is not the name of religion or group of religions.

Some claim that the concept of Shaman should be used to refer only to practices from cultures in Siberia, where the term was derived. This reflects a limited perspective on Shamanism, which is not an arbitrary or culturally

specific concept but a specific complex of characteristics found in the magic-religious practioner of hunter-gatherer and simple pastoral and agricultural societies around the world.

The biological potential allow a Shaman to travel to and encounter entities from the spiritual or supernatural world. His soul-fight or journey involves manifestation of this self-referential capacity within the visual modality, using a non-verbal symbolic system. He goes into new form of self-awareness that permits transience of ordinary awareness and identity. Soul flight also symbolically represents "the Shaman's transcendence - a transformation of consciousness reflected in the meaning of ecstasy, meaning to stand outside of oneself? (Winkelman 201). This process helps a Shaman to contact with spirit world through the medium of ecstasy.

Shamanism is classified by anthropologists as “a magico-religious phenomenon in which the shaman is the great master of ecstasy” (Townsend 433). Another anthropologist Mircea Eliade defines shamanism as “a technique of ecstasy” (12). He further says:

> He commands the techniques of ecstasy - that is, because his soul can safely abandon his body and roam at vast distances, can penetrate the underworld and rise to the sky. Through his own ecstatic experience he knows the roads of the extraterrestrial regions. He can go below and above because he has already been there. The danger of losing his way in these forbidden regions is still great; but sanctified by his initiation and furnished with his guardian spirit, a shaman is the only human being able to challenge the danger and venture into a mystical geography. (89)

Thus, a shaman may exhibit a particular magical specialty such as control over fire, wind or magical flight. When a specialization is present the most common is as a healer. The distinguishing characteristic of shamanism is its focus on an ecstatic trance state in which the soul of the shaman is believed to leave the body and ascend to the sky (heaven) or descend into the earth (underworld). The shaman makes use of spirit helpers, which he or she communicates with, all the while retaining control over his or her consciousness.

Shamanic ASC induction utilizes the innate capacity for music and innate brain modules associated with call and vocalization systems manifested in singing and chanting. These expressive systems based in rhythm and affective dynamics, W. Freeman et al say “predate language and evolved for communication of internal states and enhancing group cohesion, synchronization, and cooperation” (qtd in Winkelman 119). Calls, hoots, group enactments, and chanting involve an ancient audio-vocal communication system predating speech, an expressive system that communicates emotional states, motivates others' responses, and plays a role in managing social contact, interpersonal spacing, mate attraction, pair bonding, and group cohesion. This elicitation of a human expressive capability with deep evolutionary roots provides information about visceral states to members of the group. Chanting and music produce theta and alpha wave patterns, reflecting information processing in the right hemisphere and sub-cortical areas of the brain, accessing expressive capabilities that existed prior to spoken language. Bjorn Merker reviews evidence that humans' ancient hominid ancestors engaged in synchronous group singing, as is found in chimpanzee groups, where it provides

an emotional communication system that promotes social well-being, empathy, and social and cognitive integration (qtd. in Winkelman 200).

Dancing, enactment, and play have their origins in mimetic modules that provide rhythm, affective semantics, and melody. Mimesis is a uniquely human ability to entrain the body to external rhythms and includes imitation, clapping, stomping, and dancing. Early human mimetic activities involved ritual dances and imitation of animals, employing bodily movement, gesture, and facial expressions for symbolic communication. So, Shamanic practices of drumming, dancing, and ritual imitation "establish group coordination through rhythmo-affective semantics that express fundamental emotions" (Molino 200). The shaman's use of dance, imitation, and drumming reflects these expressive mechanisms that emerged early in hominid evolution, providing mechanisms for expression and group coordination. These mimetic expressive capacities still provide mechanisms for social learning, manual skills, expressing interpersonal dynamics, and nonverbal communication.

Horacio Fabrega has discussed the evolutionary basis of sickness and healing responses and their adaptive consequences. Shamanic therapies involve several biological mechanisms for the transformation of the patient's health, enhancing placebo and other psychosomatic effects. The general physiological aspects of the integrative mode of consciousness--parasympathetic dominance, interhemispheric synchronization, and limbic-frontal integration--have inherent therapeutic effects. This basic relaxation response of the organism counteracts excessive activity of the sympathetic nervous system and has preventive and therapeutic value in diseases characterized by increased sympathetic nervous system activity and a range of stress-induced and exacerbated maladies.

Therapeutic effects also can be achieved through the stress-induced parasympathetic dominant state, leading to erasure of memories and previously conditioned responses, changes in beliefs, increased suggestibility, and reversal of conditioned behavior.

Shamanistic healers address emotional distress and provide assurance, counteracting anxiety and its physiological effects. Their symbolic manipulations can intervene in stress mechanisms, altering the balance in the autonomic nervous system by changing emotional responses. Symbolic manipulations elicit emotions and community support that meets needs for belonging, comfort, and bonding with others. Shamanistic healing elicits

> repressed memories and restructures them, providing processes for expression of unconscious concerns and resolving intrapsychic and social conflicts. Emotional dynamics are typically manipulated by attributing these processes to external forces (spirits). The special role of spirits in healing reflects their exceptional role as coping mechanisms, utilizing universal aspects of symbolic healing (Dow 1986).

This involves placing the patient's circumstances within the broader context of cultural mythology and ritually manipulating these relationships to emotionally transform the patients self and emotions. Ritual manipulations of unconscious psychological and physiological structures enable shamanistic healers to evoke cognitive and emotional responses that cause physiological changes.

James Mc-Clenon argues that a central factor contributing to humans' evolved psychology and their biological propensity for religious ritual and belief is an inheritable quality manifested in hypnosis. McClenon addresses the

question of religious origins in the context of how ritual healing contributes to a biological capacity for religious belief. He contends that "the tendency to suggestibility, which is based in hypnotic capacities, provides enhanced recovery from disease and promotes survival and reproduction" (qtd in Winkelman 210). The hypnotic capacity provides advantages in enhanced innovation derived from access to the unconscious mind and its creative visions. The association of hypnotizability with anomalous experiences—spirits and apparitions, souls, life after death, out-of-body experiences, precognitive dreams, extrasensory perception—has provided foundations for shamanism and human religious traditions.

The inherited quality of hypnotizability produces specific physiological and psychophysiological responses that facilitate shamanic healing. Hypnotizability involves focused attention with reduced peripheral awareness and critical mentation that facilitates a focus on internal imagetic representations. Such hypnotic induction enhances belief and expectation, producing placebo effects that have physiological consequences for healing. The presence of the hypnotic capacities in other primates suggests that it was an ancient primate adaptation to their physical and social environments. Hypnotic and ritual behaviors among other animals identify their biological and adaptive aspects as providing mechanisms for reducing stress and engaging the relaxation response. Rituals are found among a variety of animals because the repetitive movements facilitate hypnotic induction through producing relaxation and fixation of attention; they also facilitate reconciliation and reduce aggression. Rituals' repetitive and stereotyped behaviors produce motor, perceptual, and cognitive integration within individuals and among participants. This promotes intragroup

cohesion that is experienced as "union" or "oneness," classic aspects of religious experience. This hypnotic basis for shamanic potentials suggests why they have their greatest success in treating the same kinds of conditions for which hypnosis has been shown to have significant clinical effects: somatization, mild psychiatric disorders, simple gynecological conditions, gastrointestinal and respiratory disorders, self-limiting diseases, chronic pain, neurotic and hysterical conditions, and interpersonal, psychosocial, and cultural problems. The major mechanisms involve the effects on emotions, and consequently the psychoneuroimmunological system, where rituals elicit feelings and shape behaviors in ways that directly affect health.

McClenon views ASC as part of a general tendency towards hypnotizability, resulting from the brain's shift toward cholinergic neurotransmitter systems and their associated dreamlike mutation. Hypnosis interrupts the normal cycles of change between aminergic and cholinergic pathways. Shamanism exploits the co-occurrence of hypnotizability, dissociation, fantasy proneness, temporal-lobe lability, and thin cognitive boundaries. These share a common underlying dimension in a "transliminality factor" (Winkelman 211) involving enhanced connections between the unconscious and conscious aspects of the mind. Highly hypnotizable people have thin cognitive boundaries that enable greater access to the unconscious and the flow of information from the unconscious to the conscious via anomalous perceptions. The thin cognitive boundaries reflected in hypnotizability provided survival advantages by provoking the development of creative strategies. These forms of experience, found cross-culturally, provide a basis for a physiologically and genetically based theory of religious experience. Shamanistic rituals stimulate therapeutic

states of consciousness, derived from the hominid capacity for hypnotizability that facilitates psychosomatic change and healing.

Commenting on the value of Shamanism in healing and binding people, Dean Edwards writes:

> A common experience of the call to shamanism is a psychic or spiritual crisis, which often accompanies a physical or even a medical crisis, and is cured by the shaman him or herself. The shaman is often marked by eccentric behavior such as periods of melancholy, solitude, visions, singing in his or her sleep, etc. The inability of the traditional remedies to cure the condition of the shamanic candidate and the eventual self cure by the new shaman is a significant episode in development of the shaman. The underlying significant aspect of this experience, when it is present, is the ability of the shaman to manage and resolve periods of distress. (63)

This shows shamanism rests for its basis on the animistic view of nature. Animism teaches that primitive and savage man views the world as pervaded by spiritual forces. Fairies, goblins, ghosts and demons hover about him waking or sleeping; they are the cause of his mishaps, losses, pains. Mountains, woods, forests, rivers, lakes are conceived to possess spirits, and to be living, thinking, willing, passionful beings like himself. In respect to these, man is in a state of helplessness. The shaman by appropriate words and arts uses his power to shield man and envelope him in a kind of protective armor so that evil spirits and of guardian to ordinary man.

In this way, to sum up, in the practice of his art shaman is regarded as i) a healer, hence the term “medicine man” and the secret medicine societies of the

Seneca, and of other American tribes; ii) an educator, i.e., the keeper of myth and tradition, of the arts of writing and divination; he is the repository of tribal wisdom; iii) a civil magistrate; as seers possessing secret knowledge with power at times of assuming other shapes and of employing the souls of the dead, they are credited with ability to detect and punish crimes; iv) a war-chief as a medicine man. Hence the shaman possesses great influence and in many cases is the magic ruler (*The Encyclopedia Britannica* 430).

In achieving his goal, a shaman uses various means which are as follows: i) herbs, plants and roots; ii) symbolic magic, on the principle that association in thought must involve similar connection in reality; iii) fasting with solitude and very generally bodily cleanness and incantations usually in some ancient or unmeaning language and at times obscene; iv) dances and contortions with use of rattle and drum and distinctive dress decked with snakes, stripes of fur, little bells. The frenzy and contortions lead to an ecstatic state which is considered of the greatest importance. In South America drugs are used to induce stupor; v) possession; thus in Korea the *pan-su* is supposed to have power over the spirits (*The Encyclopedia Britannica* 431).

In this present study of August Wilson's *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, the context is of Afro-American people who still believe in their cultural practice of healing sick people and connecting displaced people. Hence the shamanism can be applied here to analyze the text.

III. Assertion of Shamanism in the Play *Joe Turner . . .*

The events of *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* dramatize the shamanic practices of a shaman, as the power to heal and to manipulate the spirit world as it is is passed from one generation to the next one. The action of Wilson's play takes place in a Pittsburgh boarding house in 1911. The setting is appropriate to the subject matter since most of the characters are displaced people, whether uprooted by the desire to find economic opportunities in the industrial North or compelled to flee tyrannical treatment in the South. However, their search is not motivated entirely by practical considerations--sustenance and safety; they are also driven by the desire for spiritual renewal. The names of many of the characters reveal their longings for cultural edification.

As a shaman, Bynum is a "conjure man" whose craft is devoted to the reunion of lost and separated persons whom he "binds" physically and spiritually (2041). Having attained spiritual illumination, he is capable of facilitating the same in others. Yet the racial ideology of the play suggests that, in spite of his knowledge of the African folk and spiritual customs, he is nevertheless torn between two worlds. Bynum does not bind people exclusively; he also unifies cultures. His visionary sequence reveals the conjunction of African and Christian motifs. His quest for the "shiny man" is the search for an individual whose own spiritual awakening exceeds his own, the uncompromising African man (2042).

This paradigm of cultural resurgence is, of course, Loomis, who recognizes Bynum's negotiation with the ideology that enthralls and exploits people of African descent and who lashes out at the 'conjure man's' effort to bind him as he was bound to a white oppressor, Joe Turner's chain gang for seven years: ". . . Harold Loomis ain't for no binding" (2085). Loomis lost his

religion when Turner captured him, depriving him of his family and his freedom. Loomis now recognizes the collusion between religion and the racist state and cannot bring himself to celebrate the white man's God, who has demanded such sacrifices from him. Thus he wanders, physically and spiritually, in search of his wife and his beginning. The "illumination" that is implicit in Loomis's name is not the divine madness of the Christian saints; it is derived from a more ancient source--the ecstasy of the shaman.

Loomis's refusal to remain in the company of his newly recovered wife, Martha Pentecost, reveals his aversion to Christianity and particularly to Western ecstatic traditions. The name Pentecost, of course, suggests the visitation of the Holy Ghost upon the Disciples of Christ. Martha has maintained her faith in spite of the forced dissolution of her family. Loomis has sought her out only to deposit their child in her care and to make contact once again with the period of contentment and confidence that characterized their lives together. However, Loomis's journey into the past stretches beyond the gratifications of those happier times. He seeks a spiritual healing that can only be achieved by an older ecstatic tradition. Martha recognizes that he is lost to Christianity and erroneously associates his new allegiances with evil: "You done gone over to the devil" (2085).

When the play opens, Bynum is described as practicing shamanism, which the boarding-house owner finds nonsensical. The play opens with Bynum's Shamanic practices which Seth finds nonsensical. Bynum hires Seth's apartment where he performs his rituals. The whole place seems under the spell of Shamanism. Seth describes the place as "[sprinkled] with salt all over the place . . . got pennies

lined up across the threshold . . . all that heebie-jeeble stuff" (2040). Seth has no regard for any cultural values. What he cares is about material comforts. He says:

> I don't care how much he [Bynum] be dancing around . . . just don't be stepping in my vegetables. Man got my garden all messed up now . . . planting them weeds out there . . . burying them pigeons and what not. He done drew a big circle with that stick and how he's dancing around. I know he'd better not . . . (2040)

Wilson describes Bynum as a "conjure man, or root worker who enters from the yard carrying some plants, and fives the impression of always being in control of everything. Nothing bothers him. He seems to be lost in a world of his own making and to swallow any adversity or interference with his grand design" (2041).

As an expert in healing sick people, he asks people whenever he senses something wrong with people. When he asks Seth what the matter is with Seth, Bertha, Seth retorts immediately saying "What If I was sick? You ain't getting near me with none of that stuff" (2041).

Moreover, Bynum claims that he can make people come back to their lovers by using his special powers. When one of the residents, Mattie asks Bynum to make her stray husband come back to her, he says confidently and proudly:

> It ain't nothing to make somebody come back. I can fix it so he can't stand to be away from you. I got my roots and powders, I can fix it so wherever he's at this thing will come up on him and he won't be able to sleep for seeing your face. He won't be able to eat anything for thinking of you. (2050)

This proves that Bynum is a shaman, who has the power to heal and bind the people.

Bynum and Loomis are foiled by those characters who have been more fully assimilated into white culture. The most stark contrast is with Seth, who is determined to achieve material success and who has very little patience for those African Americans migrating north, looking for the same prosperity that Seth desires:

> These niggers coming up here with that old backward country style of living. It's hard enough now without all that ignorant kind of acting. Ever since slavery got over with there ain't been nothing but foolish-acting niggers. (2042)

Seth is very demanding of his boarders, insisting on advanced payment in full, and is preoccupied with maintaining a respectable house. His callousness is antithetical to Bynum's selflessness. While Bynum counsels and guides Loomis through his visionary trance, demonstrating charity and grace, Seth is only concerned with ejecting Loomis from the premises for creating a disturbance. He haggles with all of the characters over their boarding fees and threatens to throw most of them out at one time or another.

The most revealing aspect of Seth's character is his scorn for Bynum's religious practices. The play opens with Seth's derisive account of Bynum's magical rituals, which he refers to as "all that old mumbo jumbo nonsense" (2040). The expression reveals Seth's refusal to acknowledge any affinity with his African past. He is a capitulationist who wants to blend into the white man's world. His ongoing negotiation with Rutherford Selig over the manufacture and sale of dustpans manifests his longing for the white man's success and for opportunities to exploit African Americans' labor potential. He fantasizes about hiring Jeremy to toil in his new dustpan business. However, he does not seem to

realize the extent to which he is a victim of the white economy with which he longs to merge: The bank will not give him a loan to start a new business unless he offers his house as collateral, a request which within the context of the drama is unreasonable. The representation of white material success and independence that Seth longs to imitate is Rutherford Selig, the "people finder" (2043). This shows some afro-American people are lost in materiality.

Selig, the only Caucasian character, possesses a name that, in German, means 'blessed' or 'ecstatic.' Selig signifies the attainment of salvation--'to become saved.' It is something of a curiosity that the playwright would include the single white character in his visionary motif, particularly since Rutherford Selig is identified with those forces that have brought the African American characters to their current state of upheaval and degradation. Although Selig offers his services in the search for lost people, he is, by his own admission, associated with those who made it their business to separate Black families. Bertha remarks cynically that Selig "ain't never found nobody he ain't took away" (2061). The association of his name with 'blessed' may suggest the opportunities that are inherent exclusively to whites in a racist culture. Selig obviates white cultural domination; his blessing is financial and entrepreneurial success, a condition that most of the characters wish to share, particularly Seth.

The play itself dramatizes the effort to introduce African Americans into the American industrial economy of the twentieth century, and Selig's role in the drama suggests that the most enduring link between the characters is the acquisition of material goods. The only Caucasian admits that his progenitors have always made their living pursuing African Americans: His great grandfather transported slaves from Africa; his father captured runaway slaves

for their owners; and Selig himself locates displaced people for a fee. These practices reduce African Americans to commodities and are precursors to the assumption of Blacks into industry-the same process that characterizes the setting, both spatial arid temporal, of the play. Selig's salvation is his own exclusion from racial oppression and his financial independence. Thus, his name is ironic. He attains his ecstasy through consumer capitalism, through the "selling" of material products. For him, African Americans are objects for exploitation and exchange in the new economy, as in the old. His efforts are thus another manifestation of Joe Turner's chain gang. He finds African Americans and binds them to the economic system, demanding payment for his services and products which, in turn, necessitates subsistence labor.

The mercantile obsessions of Seth and Selig, as well as the sensual preoccupations of Jeremy, Mattie, and Molly, are antithetical to the spiritual yearnings of the shamanic characters. Both Bynum and Loomis do no work within the play, and this refusal to labor is a truly revolutionary practice within a modern economy. While Bynum's motivations are not stated, Loomis specifically rejects the ideology that insists he labor on behalf of white men and their ideology:

> 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. And he counting what's the matter, you ain't picked but two hundred pounds of cotton today. (2086)

Bynum's refusal to participate in the economy is a refusal to accept one of the most fundamental social structures of the modem state. His rejection of familial ties and obligations is yet another means of rejecting the same order. The obligation to the family necessitates labor in order to provide for the material needs of dependents. The shaman's path is solitary and antimaterialistic.

Eliade characterizes the shaman as a "specialist in the human soul" (8), the individual who is responsible for the spiritual and physical health of the tribe and who, in a visionary trance, journeys into spiritual realms to seek out and remove the sources of illness (5). Both Bynum and Loomis possess qualities associated with this shamanic legacy. However, Bynum's power is that of a fully realized medicine man, while Loomis is experiencing the agonizing transformations that will lead to his own shamanic vocation.

The initiation of a shaman can come about either through "hereditary transmission" or "spontaneous vocation" (Eliade 13). He does not choose his work, but is chosen by the spirits to pursue a life as a healer. The medicine men in *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* seem to be the unwitting proselytes of the spirits.

Bynum tells of his own election, which occurs on the road near Johnstown where he encounters a hungry man to whom he offers food and who, subsequently, promises to teach him the "meaning of life." The traveler rubs blood on Bynum's hands and encourages him to cleanse himself by smearing it on his face. Following this ritual, Bynum's companion begins to glow, and all of the objects in the vicinity grow to twice their normal size: "sparrows big as eagles!" Next Bynum encounters the distorted image of his dead father, who tells him that there are many "shiny men," and if Bynum ever sees another, his work

will be complete; he can "die a happy man." Finally, the father urges Bynum to learn a curative song--the binding song (2043-44).

The above narrative constitutes a clever mixture of pagan and Christian imagery. Bynum's shamanic powers are a negotiation between the religious heritage of Western culture and the practices of his African and Carribean ancestors. Bynum's experience is reminiscent of St. Paul's ecstasy on the road to Damascus, where he would encounter the crucified Christ and be converted to the new religion. The location itself near Johnstown may be a very subtle allusion to the Revelation of St. John (another scriptural ecstasy) as well as a reference to John the Baptist, who is cited specifically in the characterization of the "shiny man" as the "One Who Goes Before and Shows the Way" (2042). The shiny man's blood that cleanses Bynum is, of course, an allusion to the redemptive qualities of Christ's blood, and the shiny man's glow may be an allusion to the transfiguration of Christ, still another ecstatic moment in the gospels.

However, the imagery of Bynum's ecstasy has a dual signification, one that yokes together historically antithetical religious traditions. Many of the same attributes associated with Christianity are decidedly shamanic. The "shiny man" suggests the shamanic gods and spirits who are also associated with light. Fire is believed to be the easiest way to transform body into spirit (Townsend 440). Moreover, blood is integral to many ancient rituals, since it was believed to open the portal between worlds and nourish the spirits (Freidel, Schele, and Parker 201-02), and it is only after Bynum rubs himself in his companion's blood that his environment changes: His father's spirit appears; objects become larger than life; and his traveling companion begins to glow. The subsequent encounter with

his father's spirit suggests the "hereditary transmission" of the shaman's vocation. Many shamanic (most notably Native American) ritual practices involve ancestor worship; the medicine man encountering the spirits of dead loved ones who inaugurate and direct his spiritual vocation. It is his father's ghost who urges Bynum to find his song. Bynum reveals that his dead father was a "conjure man" whose song had the capacity to heal, a vocation consistent with the shaman's principal objective--to alleviate spiritual and physical suffering through interaction with the spiritual world (Eliade 28). In his effort to discover his own song, Bynum intentionally selects one that differs from his father's, but one that, nevertheless, possesses a philanthropic objective. He will bind those who have been separated, and he is likely to be very busy, since every character in the play is searching for a lost lover or family member.

In Bynum's ecstasy, the father reminds his son that if he (Bynum) ever sees another shiny man, he will know that his work has been successful. There is an element of finality to the father's promise, suggesting that Bynum's life and work will be finished (2042). Thus the appearance of a "shiny man" at the conclusion of Joe Turner implies the consumation of Bynum's work and the passing on of has powers to the next generation, the obvious recipient being Loomis, who has been chosen to carry on the profession since shamanism is an oral tradition, it is necessary for the practitioner to initiate and train the next generation--those subsequent medicine men becoming the new repositories of the cultural wisdom. However, just as Bynum altered his father's craft, Loomis will also find a unique song, the "song of self-sufficiency...free from any encumbrances other than the workings of his own heart and the bonds of his flesh" (2086-87). While Bynum's labors sought to reunite the fragmented and

alienated African A merican population at both the individual and the cultural levels, Loomis's edification signifies the severing of the African from the American. His awakening is a refusal of the most basic tenets of the Western religious tradition. Unlike the other residents of the boarding house, Loomis no longer needs companionship to experience contentment, and he no longer needs the white man's religion to define his place within a culture. The binding of cultures that was a portion of Bynum's song is transcended by Loomis, who emerges as the new African subject. His "shinning represents a new valuation--"a new money" (2087). As indicated above, economics, the exchange of consumer goods and services for cash, is what unites all members of the modern state, but Loomis is a new currency, one that will not and cannot circulate within the white American economy. He is the resurrected African man, emerging from the degradation of abduction and bondage. Indeed, the unique goals of the play's three shamans signify the evolution o f African Americans following emancipation: a movement from healing, to binding and reunion, and finally to cultural and spiritual self-sufficiency.

Loomis's edification as a shaman is a lengthy process, only the most crucial and auspicious moments of which are depicted in Wilson's play. The medicine man's craft frequently emerges from his efforts to heal his own suffering, and "the initiation of the candidate is equivalent to a cure." Indeed, his infirmity manifests his election (Eliade 27). Loomis is spiritually sick, wandering in search of his wife, who disappeared while he was in bondage to Joe Turner. He does not know how to renew his life in the wake of debilitating disillusionment and suffering, and his experiences with Bynum are pivotal. By reuniting Loomis's daughter Zonia with her mother, Bynum frees Loomis to

pursue spiritual renewal: "...he is free to soar above the environs that weighed and pushed his spirit into terrifying contractions" (2087). It is after this apotheosis that Loomis is finally able to say goodbye to his wife and to the memory of their lost happiness.

The playwright uses an image of flying to reveal Loomis's liberation from his mundane obligations. Loomis soars "above" his "environs." Soul flight is, of course, central to the shamanic experience. In the midst of his ecstasy, the holy man often possesses the spirit of a bird and describes his visionary flight above the earth.

The Dyak shaman, who escorts the souls of the deceased to the other world, also takes the form of a bird. We have seen that the Vedic sacrificer, when he reaches the top of the ladder, spreads his arms as a bird does its wings and cries: "We have come to heaven" . . . . The same rite is found in Melkula: at the culminating point of the sacrifice the sacrificer spreads his arms to imitate the falcon and sings a chant in honor of the stars. (Eliade 478)

The image of Loomis's soul flight is an unmistakable sign of his spiritual rejuvenation as well as his election to the shaman's vocation. Only now does he begin to shine. Eliade's association of the flight with sacrifice is also pivotal to understanding Loomis's apotheosis.

At the moment of his consecration, Loomis proclaims, "I'm standing! I'm standing! My legs stood up! I'm standing now!" (2085). His elation over this simple task is the culmination of an image motif that began with Loomis's vision of the "bones people" at the end of Act I. The vision of skeletal people drifting in ships, drowning in the ocean, and landing on the shore has proven a fruitful metaphor, signifying not only the slave trade and the displacement of African

abductees to America, but also the disorientation experienced by the former slaves upon their emancipation and, by extension, the confusion and bewilderment experienced by Loomis following his release from seven years on a chain gang. However, Loomis's ecstasy is also related to the shaman's initiation. The dismemberment and evisceration of the neophyte body is a commonplace thematic in various accounts of the medicine man's genesis (Eliade 34). At his investiture, the novitiate describes being reduced to a skeleton by spirits who devour and then res tore his flesh (Townsend 446). Among the Siberian Yakut shamans, the initiate dreams of being ripped apart by a giant "hook": "The bones are cleaned, the flesh scraped, the body fluids thrown away, and the eyes torn out of their sockets" (Eliade 36). In the genesis of the Tungus shaman, the novitiate is dismembered and consumed by spirits. Finally, they "throw his head into a cauldron where it is melted with certain metal pieces that will later form part of his ritual costume (43). The Malekula ritual is recounted in more detail:

> The Bwili made himself a bamboo knife and, cutting off one of the young man's arms, placed it on two of the leaves. And he laughed at his nephew and the youth laughed back. Then he cut off the other arm and placed it on the leaves beside the first. And he came back and they both laughed again. Then he cut off his leg from the thigh and laid it alongside the arms. And he came and laughed and the youth laughed too. Then he cut off the other leg and laid it beside the first . . . Lastly he cut off the head, held it out before him. And he laughed and the head laughed, too. Then he put the

> head back in its place and took the arms and legs that he had taken off and put them all back in their places. (Layard 65-66)

Loomis's vision of the "bones people" is instigated by the invocation to the Holy Ghost in the midst of the African Juba dance. Denouncing the characters' continued reverence for Christianity, Loomis "is thrown back and collapses, terror-stricken by his vision" (2066). He sees himself reduced to bones and is particularly troubled by his inability to stand up and walk along the road. Thus the triumphant proclamation that he is standing at the conclusion of the drama suggests his restoration and his investiture as a shaman. He describes himself surrounded by "enemies picking" his "flesh." Yet despite his symbolic evisceration, Loomis is restored and is a "new" and better person. Asking incredulously if "blood make you clean," he slashes himself, rubs his blood on his face, and realizes that he is finally walking upright (2086). Loomis's enlightenment involves a rejection of Christian salvation: He realizes that he can save himself, and this ability allows him to heal others as well.

Loomis's edification is managed and manipulated by Bynum, who questions the neophyte in the midst of his initial ecstasy and guides Loomis through a detailed account of the bones people. The play suggests that Bynum may have had a similar experience when he saw the shiny man: “Then he carried me further into this big place until we come to this ocean. Then he showed me something I ain't got words to tell you. But if you stand to witness it, you done seen something there” (2042).

The lack of details in Bynum's account leaves the interpretation of the passage open, but Bynum's prior knowledge of the content of Loomis's vision argues strongly that the events for which Bynum has no words include skeletons

on the sea shore. Loomis recognizes Bynum as a kindred spirit: "You one of them bones people" (2067). And just as his father introduced Bynum to the ocean of bodies, Bynum guides his own apprentice through this initiatory vision.

The conditions that instigate Loomis's ecstatic trance in the midst of the Juba dance are reminiscent of the shaman's possession that is an initial sign of election by the spirits. Drumming, dancing, and chanting are traditional means of invoking a mystical trance. When Loomis hears the Juba chanting, he dances speaking in tongues. Just as the shamans of the Sudan become possessed by spirits, begin to tremble, and lapse into unconsciousness as a prelude to their visionary trance (Eliade 55), Loomis, at the conclusion of his dance, falls to the floor and begins to prophesy. He sees the “bones rise up out the water, rise up and walk across the water” (2066). And he prophesizes about some destruction saying, “The ground is starting to shake. There’s a great shaking. The world is busting half in two. The sky is splitting open. I got to stand up” (2067).

Bynum's preoccupation with helping others finds their songs may also have its origin in the medicine man's ritual, where the song is frequently equivalent to the magic that the shaman practices. One account of the role that song plays in the shamanic initiation is derived from the indigenous people of the Carribean:

> . . . the first shaman was a man who, hearing a song rise from the stream, dived boldly in and did not come out again until he had memorized the song of the spirit women and received the implement of his profession from them. Each shaman has his particular song that he intones to invoke spirits. (Eliade 97)

It is not difficult to perceive the application of these ideas to Wilson's *Joe Turner Come and Gone*. Bynum's efforts to help the other boarders, particularly Loomis, find their songs are a definitively shamanic process. The song that Bynum chants is as follows:

> They tell me Joe Turner's come and gone
>
> Ohhh Lordy
>
> They tell me Joe Turner's come and gone
>
> Got my man and gone
>
> Come with forty links of chain
>
> Ohhh Lordy
>
> Come with forty links of chain
>
> Ohhh Lordy
>
> Got my man and gone. (2073)

The "conjure man" has received his own song from the spirit of his father, a song that has a magical quality--the capacity to bind people together. His father's healing song was magical in a more traditional sense, and the song that Loomis learns at the conclusion of the play will teach others self-sufficiency. Bynum stipulates that he is not teaching new tunes, but helping others to rediscover the music that they have forgotten. In each case, he suggests that it is the domination of white European culture that has caused the African American characters to forget their songs. Thus the discovery of this music is a recovery of the past, the ante/anti-bondage consciousness. Loomis's reclamation and rehabilitation of his song is a call to evangelize once again, not advocating the Holy Spirit, but promoting self-sufficiency and a rediscovery of African cultural traditions. Loomis's current isolation was not always characteristic of him. He had once

been a deacon in his church, and on the day he was captured by Joe Turner, he had stopped to preach to a group of men. Bynum tells Loomis that Joe Turner stole his song. Its recovery implies a renewal of his desire to guide and heal others.

A customary attribute of many shamanic rituals is the blood sacrifice of animals--pigs, goats, cows, etc. The blood served to nourish the gods or to transfer affliction and offense onto the sacrificial subject. Although the practice was uncommon, even human sacrifice might be conducted in a period of social crisis. Initially, the blood imagery in Wilson's *Joe Turner* has a decidedly Christian quality. While both of the play's shamans experience a blood baptism as an introduction to their vocation, Bynum's clearly alludes to Christ's blood. The blood-covered hands of the "shiny man" suggest the stigmata, and he invites the neophyte to cleanse himself with that blood (2042). The action results in an initiatory vision that launches his shamanic profession. In contrast, Loomis's blood ritual is a clear refusal of Christ as the sacrificial subject. While his wife prays for his soul, Loomis declaims against Christianity's false pledge to alleviate the suffering of African Americans. He identifies Christ as an instrument of domination, encouraging African Americans to abide their maltreatment patiently and offering little more than abstract promises of happiness after death. Dismissing the idea that Christ can atone for his sins, Loomis explains that he has done enough bleeding to warrant salvation on his own terms, and it is at this moment that the play declares Loomis's "self-sufficiency," his liberation from Western cultural and theological traditions. Loomis's transfiguration into the African medicine man is complete; he has gone beyond the negotiated shamanism of Bynum, who still allows Western culture to

define his spirituality. Just as Bynum's "shiny man" "Goes Before and Shows the Way" (2042), Bynum himself was merely a precursor to and facilitator of the newly enlightened African subject, and Loomis will light the way to the spiritual renewal of still others.

The passage of the shaman's vocation encompasses four generations in the play, revealing the means whereby African culture has been transmitted despite the cultural imperialism of white America. The embassy moves from Bynum's father, to Bynum, to Loomis, and, by implication, to the neighbor boy Reuben, who also has a vision. He reveals his experience to Loomis's daughter Zonia. Reuben sees the spirit of Seth's dead mother near the pigeon coops; she is wearing a white dress and radiating light. She beats him with her cane and encourages him to release the caged birds. The spirit's visitation suggests spontaneous election: The beating implies the shaman's suffering and the pleasurable pain of the traditional ecstasy, and the charge that Reuben release the pigeons implies the liberation thematic that is closely related to the shamanic task within the drama. It looks forward to Loomis's liberation and subsequent flight following his final consecration.

The multiplying holy men within the text are set off in sharp contrast to the more mundane characters, who are preoccupied with material wealth, companionship, and sex. These individuals, who are more easily assimilated into white culture, are the very same subjects who must be enlightened and converted to an African consciousness by the play's wise men. Jay Plum describes the "black rite of passage" that is so common in African-American literature:

> The initiand first rejects the socially fixed position of African Americans as a cultural "other" and withdraws from white society.

> He or she then moves through a timeless and statusless liminality in which he or she receives instruction, often in the form of ancestral wisdom. Finally, the initiand achieves a sense of self-sufficiency and is reincorporated into society. (564)

The neophyte recognizes that there is no place for him in white culture, so his reintroduction to society involves an embracing of his distinct differences as a man of African descent. It is easy to perceive the application of the above paradigm to the character Loomis in Wilson's play. However, the character's reawakening after his encounter with "cultural wisdom" is not the self-discovery of the average African American subject, but the creation of a new source of cultural wisdom, a new African holy man.

Wilson's play *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* participates in the same process that it depicts. We can experiences the transformation of the characters vicariously through the agonies and ecstasies of Harold Loomis. Wilson recognizes the antithetical influences that define African Americans--the impulse to assimilate into white culture and the impetus to extricate and maintain a distinct black culture, which helps them to return to their normal life. In his interview with Sandra Shannon, Wilson expresses his confidence in the viability of a distinctly African American spirituality and culture (546). In the play, even those characters most fully assimilated into white culture are familiar with and participate in the Juba dance and are sufficiently conversant with non-Western religious traditions to appreciate and fear Bynum's conjuring. However, the play stages an apotheosis which, by example, urges the audience to move toward an uncompromised African spirituality and consciousness.

Thus the playwright himself becomes the shaman, manipulating the ghosts of our imaginations, healing the wounds created by four hundred years of racial oppression and cultural imperialism physically, emotionally and spiritually. So, the play asserts the shamanic practice of African-American people through the activities of Bynum and Loomis in the midst of economic and material development in America.

IV. Conclusion

The events and the activities of the major characters, Bynum and Loomis reflect the Shamanic practice of Afro-American people, thereby asserting the Shamanism. Bynum, as a "conjure man", exploits different means and methods which symbolize shamanism. When he is first described in the play, he is seen carrying different roots and plants in his hired boarding house where he performs his rituals. His act of sprinkling salt and other roots all around the house and yard is a testimony to the Shamanic practice. Moreover, he dances around the place performing rituals, which the boarding-house owner finds nonsensical. He tries to bind and heal lost and risk people through such activities.

As a Shaman, Bynum is not only confined to African culture, he also unifies cultures. His visionary quality reveals the conjunction of African and Christian motifs. His frequent quest for the "Shiny man", which implies Christian illumination, reflects the negotiation between African practice and Christian belief. This makes his Shamanic power more powerful and universal. His claim to make come back stray people through his special power of roots and powder also proves his ability as a shaman. As a Shaman he makes use of traditional song as part of his shamanic practice, but he does not select his father's song which is typical of his father. He, nevertheless, selects one that has philanthropic objective to bind those who have been separated.

However, another Shaman, Loomis is against any Christian beliefs for the salvation of Afro-American people who are displaced physically, economically and spiritually, culturally. He refuses to remain in the company of his newly recovered wife, Martha Pentecost, who fully believes in Christian way of salvation. He seeks a spiritual healing that can only be achieved by an older

ecstatic tradition of African Legacy. He strongly believes that the "illumination" that is implicit in Loomis' name is not the divine madness of the Christian saints; rather it is derived from more ancient source of the ecstasy of the shaman. So, he rejects the rituals of Christianity as false.

Bynum does his on election regarding shamanic practices. He recalls an event when he had rubbed blood on a traveler's hand and face for cleansing purpose that is for salvation. Following this rituals the traveler had begun to glow and illuminate. At the time, Bynum's father had instructed him learn a curative binding song out of many. This also inspires Bynum to embrace a holistic shamanic practice. In this way both Bynum and Loomis possess qualities associated with this shamanic legacy. However, Bynum's power is that of a fully realized medicine man, while Loomis is experience the agonizing transformation that will lead to his own shamanic vocation.

As soul flight is central to the shamanic experience. The playwright uses an image of flying to reveal Loomis's liberation from his mundane obligations. Loomis soars high above his environment. The image of his soul flight is an unmistakable sign of his spiritual rejuvenation as well as his election to the shaman's vocation.

The multiplying holy men -- Seth, Selig and the like within the text are set off in sharp contrast to the more mundane characters, who are preoccupied with material health, companionship and sex. These individuals, who are more easily assimilated into white culture, are the very same subjects. Thus the playwright shows shamanism, manipulating the ghosts of our imaginations, healing the wounds created by four hundred years of racial oppression and cultural imperialism physically, emotionally and spiritually. So, the play asserts the shamanic practice of African-American people through the activities of Bynum and Loomis in the midst of economic and material development in America.

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