

The Emergent Properties of ‘Song’ as a Metaphor in August Wilson’s *Joe Turner’s Come and Gone*

Felix Nwabeze Ogoanah
University of Benin, Nigeria
felix.ogonah@uniben.edu

ABSTRACT

Most works on August Wilson's *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* have emphasized its enigmatic African elements that have stunned white audiences since the play was first produced in 1984. Such elements are manifested in characters such as Bynum and Loomis, or in rituals such as the Juba and blood sacrifice (Shannon, 1995; Wolfe, 1999; Elam Jr., 2006; Harrison, 1991; Richards, 1999; Pereira, 1995). These images confront the reader at first glance and produce that feeling of strangeness characteristic of the African world. However, underneath these images is the most subtle element or trope on which the events of the play are anchored – the 'song', which has been described as “that all important quest for self-affirmation in black life” (Harrison, 1991: 309). Applying the Relevance-theoretic framework of inferential pragmatics, this study explores the concept 'song' by examining its salient properties based on reader's inferences or contextual assumptions. The study claims that through an inferential analysis, the metaphor, 'song,' in *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* can be realised as an ontological construct which signifies the individual's quest for spiritual transcendence and personal development and that through this metaphor Wilson privileges the need for the African American to take responsibility for what becomes of his life rather than seeing himself as a victim of the white hegemony.

Keywords: relevance, metaphor, personal song, inference, self-affirmation, personal development

1. Introduction

This study is an inferential account of August Wilson's use of 'song' as metaphor in his *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* (Cited as JT in reference), to encode that ontological construct which signifies the individual's quest for spiritual transcendence¹ and personal development. The aim of the study is to consider how the emergence of the properties of this concept constitutes or creates necessary cognitive effects for readers, and also to show the relevance of Wilson's overriding ideological thrust that privileges personal and cultural affirmation in the pursuit of the American Dream. The approach is interdisciplinary in nature, because it combines insights from literary critical discourse with pragmatic/interpretive analytical procedures. Thus, the paper is situated within literary pragmatics which accounts for literary phenomena as "a specific and socially codified use of language" (Garcia 1996: 38). Pragmatic enquiry in this area focuses on the inferential processes of readers in exploring meaning. The study claims that through an inferential analysis, the metaphor, 'song,' in *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* can be realised as an ontological construct which signifies the individual's quest for spiritual transcendence and personal development and that through this metaphor Wilson privileges the need for the African American to take responsibility for what becomes of his life rather than seeing himself as a victim of the white hegemony. As Billy Clark (2009b: 8) has argued, "studying the inferences we make when interpreting written or other texts sheds light on the process of interpretation, on the nature of texts, and on the way texts give rise to effects."

Wilson believes that the African consciousness together with individual's recognition of his personal worth is imperative for the cultural health and total emancipation of African Americans. His strategy for this perspective is defamiliarisation, that is, a deliberate use of metaphors. One of such metaphors is 'song'. The character's passion to "sing one's own song" is omnipresent in the plays of Wilson. This philosophical thrust seems to signify as Paul Carter Harrison (1991: 309) puts it, "that all important quest for self-affirmation in black life." To fully appreciate the mechanism by which Wilson imbues this ordinary word with pragmatic significance, we need to draw from Robyn Carston's (2002) notion of enrichment, which according to her, picks up a specific lexical item and strengthens the concept it encodes. In what follows, we examine briefly the relevance approach to figurative meaning, especially, metaphor (section 1.1); the relationship between the author and the reader and the kind of inferences they make (section 1.2); and the play, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* (section 1.3).

1.1. Relevance and Figurative Meaning

The study is based on the relevance-theoretic framework of inferential pragmatics which claims that the decoded sentence meaning is capable of being interpreted in a number of different ways in the same context; that these interpretations are graded in terms of accessibility; and that hearers rely on a powerful criterion when selecting the

most appropriate interpretation, which ultimately cancels out interpretations that are less relevant in the context (Wilson and Sperber, 2002: 250; Yus, 2009: 854). In the relevance account of communication, *every* utterance involves a search for relevance based on mutual adjustments of context, explicit content and implicatures “in the effort to satisfy the hearer’s overall expectations of relevance” (Wilson and Sperber, 2002: 268). Metaphors are not regarded differently. Whereas the Gricean account of figurative meaning, for example, sees metaphor and other figures of speech as cases of maxim violation, Relevance sees them merely as alternative routes to achieving optimal relevance; in fact, as simply “creative exploitations of a perfectly general dimension of language use” (Sperber and Wilson, 1986/95: 237).

Relevance theory locates the account of metaphor within “a general account of lexical pragmatic processes of concept modification or adjustment, which include both narrowing and several varieties of broadening that would not standardly be treated as metaphorical” (Wilson and Carston, 2008: 14). This is a fully inferential view of metaphor also supported by Moreno Vega (2004). In narrowing, a word is used in a more specific sense than the encoded one, so that the concept communicated is narrower than the concept encoded, whereas in broadening, a “word is used to convey a more general sense with consequent widening of the linguistically-specified denotation” (Wilson, 2004: 356). Both types of language use are complementary in the construction of meaning (Sperber and Wilson, 2006: 182). This broadening enables the hearer or reader “to go beyond just exploring the immediate context and the entries for concepts involved in the input, thereby accessing a wide area of knowledge” (Sperber and Wilson, 1986/95: 236). In a metaphor, the relationship between the lexical concept, say “bulldozer” (in JOHN IS A BULLDOZER) and the non-lexicalized concept that figures in the speaker’s thought about John, is that of “non-identical resemblance” (Carston, 2002: 66). In other words, metaphor has an interpretive relation between the propositional form of an utterance and the thought that initiated the utterance. As Sperber and Wilson (2006: 172) have argued “specific uses of metaphor by individual authors or in any given literary genres are indeed worthy of study, and so is the very idea of metaphor as a culturally salient notion with long rich history.” Indeed, the various notions of metaphor since Aristotle provide an interesting reading, but such debates are clearly outside the scope of this study. Works such as Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Black, 1979; Steen, 1994; Moreno, 2004, Gibbs and Colston, 2012; Wilson and Carston, 2008; and Sperber and Wilson, 2006) provide excellent readings on theoretical issues and debates about metaphor.

1.2. Reader's and Authorial Inferences

In a number of studies based on the relevance-theoretic tradition, (Clark, 2009a; 2009b; Clark and Owtram, 2012), Clark explains the roles of inferential processes of readers in textual interpretation. This study draws heavily on his notion of ‘sophisticated inferentialism’ or ‘practical inferentialism’ as a methodology for analysis (2009a: 182). The basic idea here is that in principle it is always worth exploring all the inferential

processes involved in understanding a text, but it is not practicable to do so. According to Clark, “where analysts notice something marked or unusual about an interpretation, this calls for an analysis of inferential processes... it will be up to the analyst to decide in each case whether and where to develop an account of inferential processes” (2009a: 184). In the production and consumption of texts, there is partnership between the author and the reader.

Mey (1994: 162; 2000: 109) suggests that although the author is the main authority in the world of his art, the role of the reader is also crucial. It is the writer’s duty to consciously “alert the reader to the signposts and other indexes placed in the fictional space to enable the navigation process” (Mey, 2009: 552). This whole process is both inferential and also reflexive since both author and reader are involved in the process (Clark and Owtram, 2012). This reflexive nature of the inferential process enables the hearer to make assumptions about what the speaker knows or thinks or better, infers about the inferences the hearer is likely to produce. According to Clark and Owtram, in the Gricean approach to communication, it is generally assumed that addressees make assumptions about what communicators have assumed and in the same way, communicators make assumptions about what addressees will assume.

The same reflexive inferential principle is found in relevance theory in what Sperber and Wilson (1986/95) call “mutual manifestness” and “mutual cognitive environment.” They argue that an assumption is manifest to an individual at a particular time “if and only if he is capable at that time of representing it mentally and accepting its representation as true or probably true.” All the assumptions which are manifest to an individual or individuals at a given time constitute their ‘mutual cognitive environment.’ Sperber and Wilson say, “a communicator who produces an ostensive stimulus is trying to fulfill two intentions... the informative intention, to make manifest to her audience a set of assumptions...and the communicative intention, to make her informative intention mutually manifest” (Sperber and Wilson, 1986/95: 163). Communicative interaction is then a matter of adjusting mutual cognitive environments. Fig I below shows this inferential cycle between the writer and the reader and how both depend on the socio-cultural context in which the text is situated.

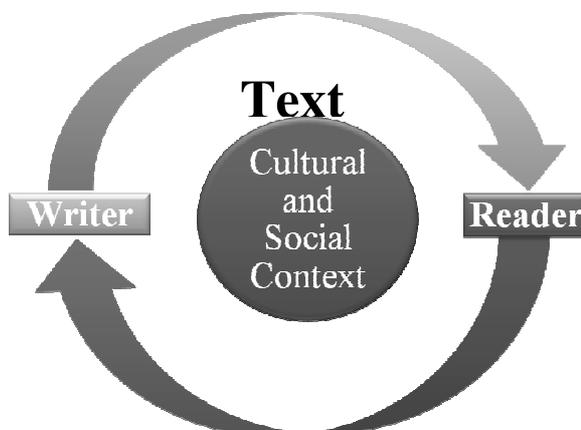


Fig. I: The Inferential Cycle

Clark (2009a: 174) argues that “an account of inferential processes is in principle a vital part of any adequate account of how texts are interpreted...” Such inferences, as he points out, do not begin ‘from bottom up’ by focusing on linguistic forms and structures, but could be described as ‘top down’ by considering inferences readers might make in the process of textual interpretation (1996: 163). This cognitive account of textual production and reception is supported by several authors (Torrance, 2006; Aguilar 2008; Owtram, 2010). The next section highlights the play, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, aspects of it that have mostly captured critical interests, and the need for an inferential approach to the interpretation of the notion of 'song' in the play.

1.3. *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*

In terms of its chronological setting, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* is the second in a cycle of ten plays, written by the foremost and award-winning African-American playwright, August Wilson. Wilson's dramatic project spans ten decades of the African American experience – that is, one play per decade and the plays are collectively often referred to as the Pittsburgh Cycle or Century Cycle. Set in 1911, *Joe Turner* tells the story of the wanderings of blacks from the rural South to the North in search of life, following Emancipation. Their temporary meeting place is the boarding house owned by Seth, an ex-slave's son in Pittsburgh. In this temporary shelter, they “share fragmented memories of family members before seemingly being propelled by the desire for adventure, love...to journey further” (Richards, 1999: 92). The poetic focus of the play is Herald Loomis, whose search for his own identity (or song) “symbolizes the quest of an entire race” (DeVries, 1998: 25). In his search for his past, he is guided by his spiritual adviser, Walker Bynum, the conjurer, who takes him through a series of rituals that help him to connect with his ancestors and break from the fetters that have held him in perpetual bondage. At the end of the play, Loomis performs blood sacrifice which leads him and others to self-discovery and self-sufficiency.

Most works on *Joe Turner* have emphasized its enigmatic African elements that have stunned white audiences for many years. Such elements are manifested in characters such as Bynum and Loomis, or in rituals such as the Juba and blood sacrifice (Shannon, 1995; Wolfe, 1999; Elam Jr., 2006; Harrison, 1991; Richards, 1999; Pereira, 1995). These images or what Shannon (2001) describes as 'Africanisms' confront the reader at first glance and produce that feeling of strangeness characteristic of the African world (Soyinka, 1976). Also, these elements have been described either as magical realism or as spiritual realism (Young, 2011:134-135). Reggie Young explains that “spiritual realism often functions as an opportunity for characters to renew or redeem themselves through a process of rituals that allow them to reconnect their values and beliefs with sacred elements of the culture” (2011:135). Also, while Sandra L. Richards (1999) traces the protagonist and Bynum to Yoruba mythology, Samuel Hay traces them to Igbo mythology. According to him, “viewed from Igbo perspective, Bynum would symbolize the collective African ancestors, called Ndi Ndushi, who made sure that people obeyed ancestral traditions of good and evil, and cleansed themselves

of all abominations” (2007: 95). As for Harold Bloom (2009: 2) *Joe Turner* is the best of Wilson’s plays because it possesses the qualities of permanence as a result of its profound depiction of African American roots. However, underneath these images or Africanisms is the most subtle element or trope on which the events of the play are anchored – the 'song', which has been described as “that all important quest for self-affirmation in black life” (Harrison, 1991: 309). This metaphor has not been fully explored, at least, linguistically in the literature. This study, therefore, explores this concept by examining its salient properties based on reader's inferences or contextual assumptions aimed at identifying the meaning intended by the author. Such inferences also include intertextual patterns of the concept as it resonates across Wilson's plays. Section 2 provides a detailed analysis of the various aspects of this metaphor, and points out how the author's and reader's inferences coalesce in arriving at the meaning of the concept according to the principle of relevance.

2. The Song Metaphor

In *Joe Turner*, the 'song' metaphor is strongly felt and implicated in the lives of the characters. Wilson, for instance, introduces young Jeremy Furlow by saying “...*he is a proficient guitar player, although his spirit has yet to be molded into a song*” (JT 12). So, what is Wilson communicating by the word, 'song'? What are the properties of the concept and how do the properties emerge? How does Wilson intend his audience to understand the concept? And what contributions can relevance theory make to our understanding of the concept in a way that provides new insight into the meaning intended by August Wilson? To answer these questions, we must make inferences – inferences that are based on the principle of relevance. The inferences we can make from the above quote are:

- that 'song' has to do with the human spirit.
- that 'song' is the highest point in a continuum of personal development/achievement.
- that when one finds his song or achieves song, one has reached a stage of self-sufficiency and complete independence.

One starting point is to identify the salient features of this metaphor in specific terms. Doing that involves making a number of contextual assumptions which should eventually result in some cognitive effects. Thus, the relevance-theoretic account of metaphor adopted here integrates utterance, salience, and contextual assumptions to yield appropriate cognitive effects. The diagram below illustrates this approach.

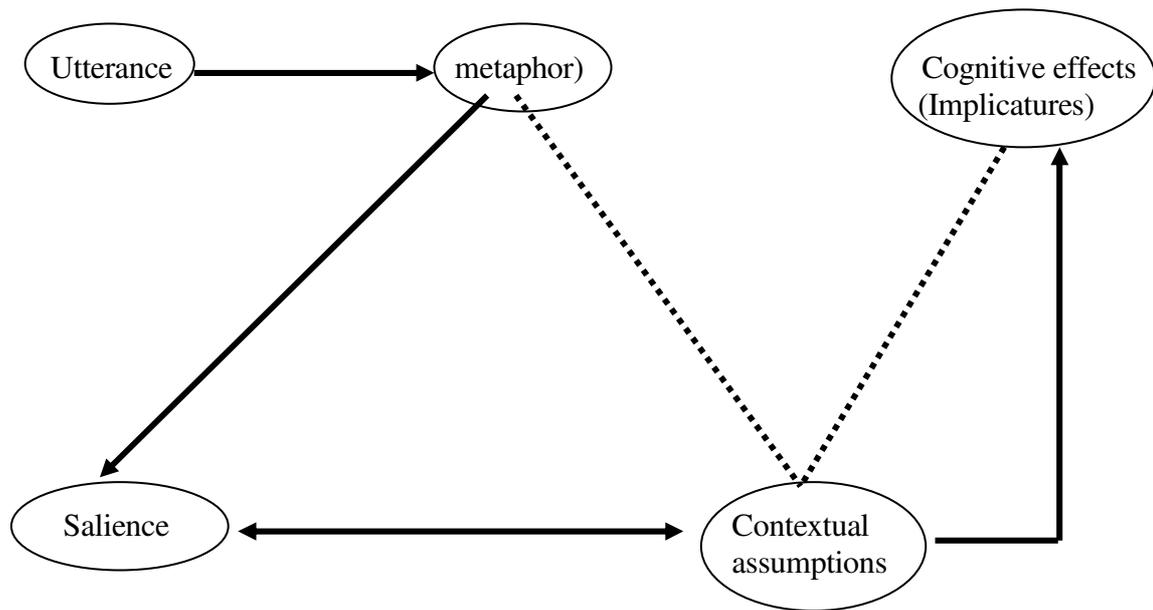


Fig II: A Relevance-Theoretic Account of Metaphor

As the diagram shows, the basic characteristic of metaphor is *saliency*. The salient characteristic of a thing is that which identifies it, the distinctive feature of that thing (Bergmann, 1991: 487). For example, the sentence, “John is an Einstein”, as a metaphor, (in an appropriate context) means “John is a brilliant scientist.” The proposition asserted here is the function of the literal meaning of “John” and of the salient characteristic associated with Einstein. This intrinsic, immanent quality of the concept communicated must interact with the contextual assumptions or the cognitive environment of the hearer. This is indicated by the two-sided arrow. The relationship between the concept communicated (metaphor) and the cognitive effects derivable from it in the comprehension process is indirect – via contextual assumptions, as the broken lines indicate (Ogoanah, 2008: 10-11).

The idea of 'song' resonates in Wilson's drama in various forms. According to Peter Wolfe (1999: 178) it can take the form of a strong passion to control or a vocation (e.g., Ma Rainey in *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*); a special skill (e.g., Jeremy in *Joe Turner*); an insight into things beyond the view of the ordinary man (e.g., Bynum and Loomis in *Joe Turner*); a stable and purposeful relationship (e.g., Mattie in *Joe Turner* and Rose in *Fences*). It can also take the form of a strong desire to be accepted (e.g., *Risa* in *Two Trains*); or a pursuit of economic independence (e.g., Boy Willie in *The Piano Lesson*); a strong desire to live in truth (e.g., Brown in *Gem of the Ocean*, and Booster in *Jitney*). The “song”, in its purest form as Wolfe (1999: 78) puts it, is “a person’s ultimate synthesis, bonding with its singer in a crescendo of both self-discovery and self-acceptance.” By inference, we can identify three types of song in Wilson's *Joe Turner*.

- the binding song
- the forgotten song

- the song of personal redemption.

2.1. The Binding Song

As we noted earlier, the dominant trope on which Wilson anchors the events of *Joe Turner* is the “song.” Kim Pereira (1995: 36) explains it as the music of each person’s essential nature and destiny. The poetic focus of the play is Herald Loomis. We are also introduced to Bynum Walker, a conjure man who boasts of a father whose ‘Healing Song’ cured the weak and troubled. Bynum himself claims to possess a Binding Song used to bind together dislocated lives of displaced families.

1. SELIG: Wait a minute, Seth. Bynum’s telling me about the secret of life. Go ahead, Bynum. I wanna hear this.
2. BYNUM: We got near this bend in the road and he told me to hold out my hands... I wandered around there looking for that road...My daddy called me to him. Said he had been thinking about me and it grieved him to see me in the world *carrying other people’s songs* and not having one of my own. Told me he was gonna show me *how to find my song... I had the binding Song*. I chose that song because that’s what I seen most when I was traveling... People walking away and leaving one another. *So I takes the power of my song and binds them together*. Been binding people ever since. That’s why they call me Bynum. Just like glue I sticks people together. (JT 9, 10 Emphasis added)

Bynum encounters his dead father in a trance-like experience and here, Wilson takes us away from the realm of the physical to the metaphysical, demonstrating the impact of the spirit world upon the concrete aspects of black life. Nearly every statement in the exchange between Bynum and his dead father is metaphorical. In 2, we could recover at least three explicit propositions:

1. You are carrying other people’s song in the world
2. I had the Binding Song
3. Just like glue I sticks people together

In relevance-theoretic framework, the speaker is expected, within the limits of her abilities and preferences, to make his utterances as relevant as possible (Sperber and Wilson, 2002: 14) and it is this assumption of relevance that activates in the hearer’s memory the new concept of “SONG” encoded in the metaphorical utterances. A few contextual assumptions of the concept of SONG may be activated here.

- (1) ‘song’ as a piece of music with words (folk song, pop song)
- (2) ‘song’ as music for the voice
- (3) ‘song’ as a special inner quality

To arrive at an appropriate hypothesis about the speaker’s meaning here, the hearer must in addition to his encyclopedic representation of the concept ‘SONG’ examine the

situational context – what Joan Cutting (2002: 4) calls the “immediate physical co-presence” of the utterance. . In the situational context, we understand that

- (a) everybody has a song
- (b) people have to find their song
- (c) people can make a choice of songs
- (d) Bynum has a song that can bring people together.

This process of enrichment from the context could lead the hearer to the notion of ‘song’ in (3) above as a special quality inherent in every man.

Moreover, the hearer here can relate with the contextual idea of separation among the Blacks, which made Bynum to choose the “Binding Song” by which he binds the ‘broken lives’ of Black Americans who experience forced separation as they struggle for survival. In the end of the exchange, Bynum’s listener, Selig becomes more confused as to how this experience with his dead father translates to the secret of life.

SELIG: Well, how is that the secret of life? I thought you said he was gonna show you the secret of life. That’s what I’m waiting to find out.

BYNUM: Oh, he showed me alright. But you still got to figure it out. Can’t nobody figure it out for you. You got to come to it on your own.

To “figure out” is to make inferences based on some determinate evidence. Whoever wants to understand the 'secret of life' or find his 'song' the way Bynum did must “come to it on [his] own” by making inferences based on the evidence provided. To understand how Bynum's experience explains the secret of a fulfilling life, the hearer needs to look closely at the metaphorical context. While Bynum was alone on a road in a place he calls Johnstown, he had been led to a mystical reunion with his dead father by an elusive figure he calls the Shiny Man, a godlike being whose body emitted light. He had been led into an environment where every object was larger-than-life. Here he encountered his dead father who gave him the “Binding Song.” Now if we assume this “song” to be his ultimate life-goal or destiny, then “carrying other people’s song” implies walking in paths destined for others or simply imitating others. For him to achieve full self-authenticity, he must find his own “song.” Every character in Wilson’s plays strives for his personal song, for self-affirmation. For example, in *Fences*, Cory tells his mother, “I don’t want to be Troy Maxson, I want to be *me* (*Fences* 189). The “Binding Song” and “sticking people together” as metaphors have the same propositional content: *Re-uniting people*. As part of a fractured race of wandering people, Bynum knew he had to spend his life healing the wounds caused to the spiritually dislocated-leading them gently toward self-discovery. This is the motivation for his binding song which enables him to play the role of a mender of relationships and broken lives in his community.

2.2. The Forgotten Song

The “song” metaphor continues here. In *Joe Turner* Herald Loomis, the tormented protagonist embodies the pain and disillusionment of the entire black race. Speaking about the name of this enigmatic character, Wilson says, “‘Herald’ because he’s a herald and ‘Loomis’ because he is luminous” (Hill, 1991: 93). His name thus has a strong Biblical allusion to John the Baptist who heralded the coming of Jesus Christ (Mal 3.1; Mtt 11:10). Moreover, Jesus Christ spoke of John the Baptist as “a burning and shining light” (John 5:35) which also explains the second name, ‘Loomis.’ But there is some paradox here. While John the Baptist heralded the coming of Christ, Loomis heralds his own arrival and as we shall see shortly, he is both the victim and the saviour. He arrives the boarding house formless; as Harrison (1991: 312) explains, “his identity shrouded in the liminal zone between bondage and liberation.” He meets Bynum:

1. BYNUM: Mr. Loomis done picked some cotton. Ain’t you, Herald Loomis? You done picked a bunch of cotton.
2. LOOMIS: How you know so much about me? How you know what I done? How much cotton I picked?
3. BYNUM: I can tell from looking at you. My daddy thought me how to do that. Say when you look at a fellow, if you taught yourself to look for it, *you can see his song written on him*. Tell you what kind of man he is in the world. Now, I can look at you, Mr. Loomis, and see *you a man who done forgot his song*. A fellow forgot that and he forgot who he is... See, Mr. Loomis, when a man forgets his song, he goes off in search of it... till he finds out he’s got it with him all the time. That’s why I can tell you one of Joe Turner’s niggers. *Cause you forgot how to sing your song* (JT 267, 268, Emphasis added).
4. LOOMIS: You lie! How you see that? I got a mark on me? Joe Turner done marked me to where you can see it? You telling me I’m a marked man. What kind of mark you got on?

In the last section Bynum explains his mission in life, how he got the Binding Song, and what he does with the song. But in this section, he meets Herald Loomis and begins to apply that special knowledge in order to help Loomis discover himself. In a manner reminiscent of West African juju priests, Bynum reveals Loomis’ past in a way that startles the wanderer as he exclaims “You lie! How you see that? I got a mark on me?” Loomis’ spontaneous denials here even reinforce the veracity of Bynum’s utterances. We can derive two propositions that are important to Loomis.

- (1) Loomis is a man that has forgotten his song
- (2) Loomis is one of Joe Turner’s captives.

Wilson and Sperber (2002: 254) argue that “our perceptual mechanisms tend automatically to pick out potentially relevant stimuli, our memory retrieval mechanisms tend automatically to activate potentially relevant assumptions, and our inferential mechanisms tend spontaneously to process them in the most productive way”. Bynum declares that Loomis has forgotten his song and to help Loomis understand the consequence of that, Bynum adds in the same breath, “a fellow forgot that and he forgot

who he is..." This should trigger off in Loomis memory, his own existential nature. When he arrived the boarding house, he was as strange as a ghost. Wilson describes him as a man who "*is unable to harmonize the forces that swirl around him, and [who] seeks to recreate the world into one that contains his image*" (JT 14). The boarding house operator, Seth Holly, looks at him with some suspicion. He tells Jeremy (of Loomis) "something ain't setting right with that fellow" (JT 20). And when Bynum asks him where he is coming from, he says, "come from all over. Whichever way the road take us, that's the way we go."

Loomis, therefore, could arrive at the conclusion that his vagrancy and existential living are the results of the fact that he has forgotten his song, that he has lost that internal rhythm which makes life purposeful and worth living. Moreover, the idea of Joe Turner raised in the second proposition activates in Loomis the memory of bondage and suffering that tore his world apart. In his immediate past experience which is also part of the contextual assumptions activated automatically by his memory retrieval mechanism, Loomis sees Joe Turner not just as a name of a person, but as a concept of oppression, captivity and brutality. If we provide that contextual background here, we will be able to fully appreciate the impact of Bynum's utterances on Loomis. Loomis has been a victim of the legendary, Joe Turner, the brother of the governor of Tennessee. Joe Turner blatantly ignores the law and tricks freed black men into extended period of forced labour. In the middle of a roadside sermon in Tennessee, Loomis was captured by Joe Turner and for seven years was in a chain gang working in the farms. Recounting the harrowing experience to Bynum he says:

Had a whole mess of men he catched. Just go out hunting regular like you go out hunting possum. He catch you and go home to his wife and family. Ain't thought about you going home to yours. Joe Turner catched me when my little girl was born... kept everybody seven years. My wife Martha gone from me after Joe Turner catched me. (JT 72)

After his manumission, like others, Loomis was out on the road, looking for his wife. He says, "I been wandering a long time in somebody else's world. When I find my wife that be making of my own" (JT 72).

At the height of his crisis, Bynum provides him a therapy. "All you got to do is stand up and *sing it*... It's right there kicking at your throat. All you got to do is *sing it*. Then, you'll be free" (JT 91). If the song is every man's essential nature or special inner quality as we suggested earlier, then we can infer that forgetting that song means forgetting one's self. Bynum tells Loomis, "a fellow forgot that and he forgot who he is..." This then is the problem of Loomis: as a result of his encounter with Joe Turner, and his subsequent two years of wandering, he has lost every sense of self and personal identity. He has forgotten his song.

2.3. Song of Personal Redemption

Wilson continues the song metaphor until the last scene when Loomis finally meets his wife, Martha, who left to join the service of the church after waiting for him for five years. She urges Loomis to return to Christianity:

1. MARTHA: You got to open up your heart and have faith, Herald. This world is just a trial for the next. Jesus Christ offers you salvation.
2. LOOMIS: I been wading in the water. I been walking all over the River Jordan. But what it get me, huh? I done been baptized with blood of the lamb and the fire of the Holy Ghost. But what I got, huh? I got salvation? My enemies all around me picking the flesh from my bones. I'm choking on my own blood and all you got to give me is salvation?
3. MARTHA: You got to be clean, Herald. You got to be washed with the blood of the lamb.
4. LOOMIS: Blood make you clean? You clean with blood?
5. MARTHA: Jesus bled for you. He's the lamb of God who takest away the sins of the world.
6. LOOMIS: I don't need nobody to bleed for me. I can bleed for myself.
7. MARTHA: You got to be something, Herald. You just can't be alive. Life don't mean nothing unless it got a meaning.
8. LOOMIS: What kind of meaning you got? What kind of clean you got, woman? You want blood? Blood make you clean? You clean with blood?
(LOOMIS *slashes himself across the chest. He rubs the blood over his face and comes to a realization.*) I'm standing! I'm standing. My legs stood up! I'm standing now! (JT 93).

From the above text, we can identify certain inferential paths which the author has made salient and which represent his intended meaning.

1. Loomis has lost faith in religion.
2. Loomis has not profited in religion.
3. Loomis' salvation resides within himself.

2.3.1. Loomis has lost faith in religion.

As a background to this context we understand that before he was captured by Joe Turner into forced labour, Loomis was a Deacon in his church. In fact, his capture took place while he was preaching a sermon to gamblers by a road side. But seven years of captivity has eventually led him to apostasy, resulting in unprecedented blasphemies (JT 91-93). In 1 above, his wife Martha tries to bring him back to faith by urging him to believe: "You got to open up your heart and have faith." She also attempts to re-establish some intimacy with him by addressing him with his first name, 'Herald' as we find in turns 1, 3, and 7. But Loomis is too far gone to come back to faith. He was not only breaking up with the religion under whose guise the slave owners exploited their victims, he was also breaking from his wife to chart a new course for himself. While Martha addresses him as 'Herald,' he addresses her as 'woman'— a rather neutral term that does not show any close relationship with her, a term that might even be considered

derogatory in this context. This reveals his state of mind; he does not only reject Christianity but also his wife.

2.3.2. Loomis has not profited in religion.

Loomis cannot reconcile his harrowing experiences in the hands of Joe Turner, and his consequence loss of identity with the offer of salvation promised by the religion. He represents his ordeal as *wading in water, walking all over River Jordan, baptized with blood of the lamb, choking in his own blood*, and so on. These metaphors express the tribulations of saints in the religion he once embraced, but now he does not see any reason for the sufferings if he had to wait until he is dead to profit from the religion. The implication of this is that Loomis is disenchanted with the religion and is determined to break free from it. For Martha, the meaning of life is located in the salvation which her religion offers: “Life don't mean anything unless it got a meaning.” Loomis' predicament is reiterated in a series of questions that reveal his doubts and disappointment: “but what it got me, huh?” “But what I got, huh?” “Blood make you clean?” “You clean with blood?”

2.3.3. Loomis's salvation resides within himself

This is Wilson's ultimate goal, to show that salvation does not reside outside of oneself. He once said that “when you look in the mirror, you should see your God. If you don't, you have somebody else's God...” (Qtd in Shannon, 1995: 137). This is the reason he created a character like Loomis whose search for personal identity culminated in himself, who is both a forerunner and a saviour. In 3, Martha suggests that Loomis is unclean and that he needs to be washed in the blood of the lamb. Loomis does not argue the efficacy of blood sacrifice for personal cleansing. But he does object to a substitutionary sacrifice. So, he says “I don’t need nobody to bleed for me! I can bleed for myself!” We can schematise the inferential process here as follows:

Reader’s Interpretive Assumptions	The Basis for the Assumption
(a) LOOMIS has said to Martha: “I don't need anybody to bleed for me.” [anybody = uninterpreted pronoun] [anybody = scalar expression] [bleed for = substitutional sacrifice]	<i>Embedding of the decoded (incomplete) logical form of Loomis’ utterance</i>
(b) Loomis' utterance is optimally relevant to the reader.	<i>Expectation raised by the recognition of Loomis' utterance as a communicative act.</i>

Reader's Interpretive Assumptions	The Basis for the Assumption
(c) Loomis' utterance will achieve relevance by explaining why he does not need a substitute. (d) To bleed for someone is to take their place in death in order to save them.	<i>Expectation raised by (b) given that Loomis is actually responding to Martha's concerns.</i> <i>The first assumption to occur to the reader by the use of the words "bleed for", and by the reader's concern about the speaker's need for a substitute. This is tentatively accepted as the implicit premise of Loomis' utterance.</i>
(e) The idea of a substitutionary death is related to Christ and 'anybody' in Loomis' utterance refers to Christ.	<i>Assumption activated by the use of the word, 'bleed for' and the encyclopedic knowledge shared by participants that Christ shed his blood for the world. This is also accepted as an implicit premise of Loomis' utterance</i>
(f) Loomis rejects salvation through the shed blood of Christ.	<i>First enriched interpretation of Loomis' utterance as encoded in (a) to occur to the reader which might combine with (d) to lead to the satisfaction of (f). This is accepted as an explication of Loomis' utterance.</i>
(g) Loomis does not need any saviour outside of himself.	<i>Inferred from (e) and (f) and accepted as implicit conclusion of Memphis' utterance.</i>
(h) Loomis believes that his salvation lies within himself/ Author discourages blacks from seeking freedom/advancement, their song, etc. from outside of themselves.	<i>From (g) and the background knowledge. Some of the several weak implicatures of Loomis' utterance.</i>

Fig. III A schematic outline of hypothesis formed in interpreting 'I don't need nobody to bleed for me' (based on Wilson and Sperber, 2012).

The comprehension process here may not be necessarily sequential; that is, proceeding step by step from a-h. As Wilson and Sperber (2002) have observed, interpretation is carried out 'online' and even begins while the utterance is still in progress. In this particular case, the reader, in the process of interpretation, continues to encounter assumptions, filters them, as it were, and adjusts them where necessary until he arrives at the meaning which the communicator had manifestly foreseen, and which

meets the reader's expectation of relevance. For example, the reader assumes in (b) that the statement decoded in (a) is optimally relevant to him. He is interested in knowing why Loomis thinks he didn't need anybody to bleed for him and as such he assumes in (c) that Loomis' response will be relevant to him in resolving the questions in his mind in (d) that the speaker is rejecting a substitutionary sacrifice meant for his own salvation. By combining the implicit premises in (d) and (e) with the explicit premise in (f), the reader arrives at the implicit conclusion in (g) from which other weak implicatures such as (h) may be derived. This overall interpretation should satisfy the reader's search for relevance.

Wilson's idea of self-redemption is heavily implicated in this text as his protagonist, Loomis, slashes his own chest with the knife he has been brandishing and rubs his own blood all over his body as a means of cleansing and atonement. At that moment, Loomis achieves epiphany. Epiphany is usually manifested to the observer or reader, not the object. The reader notices a dramatic change in Loomis' circumstances. His journey to self-discovery comes to an end as he shouts "I am standing... I'm standing now!" And indeed, he stands there, resplendent like a new coin. Through a backward inference, we can recall that at the end of his fit in ACT 1, Loomis was spiritually crippled. There he complained to Bynum after collapsing to the floor: "My legs won't stand up! My legs won't stand up!" as he tries to get up from the floor (JT 56). But at the end of this blood ritual he stands, thus achieving his 'personal song' even as his body begins to emit light. On the other hand, Bynum identifies Loomis as the Shiny Man he has been searching for (JT 9, 11) thus achieving his own life goal as well.

The relationship between Bynum and Loomis is reciprocal. Although Bynum is Loomis' spiritual adviser, and has successfully led him through the dark labyrinths of his spiritual odyssey, "by helping Loomis regain the song of his personhood Bynum receives confirmation of his ministry as a binder" (Young 2011: 139). Most importantly, by helping Loomis achieve his personal song, Bynum identifies Loomis as his "Shiny Man" – the "Man" he has seen only once in his entire life and whom he has so passionately desired to find some day. At the end of the play, Bynum's spirit is illuminated as he declares "Herald Loomis, you shining! You shining like new money!" (JT 94), and as he transcends the limits of material reality which other participants in the play do not comprehend. In fact, it is Bynum who witnessed the epiphanic manifestation of Loomis.

Explaining this experience, Wilson says of Loomis in the stage direction:

Having found his song, the song of self-sufficiency, fully resurrected, cleansed and given breathe, free from any encumbrance other than the workings of his own heart and the bond of the flesh, having accepted the responsibility for his presence in the world, he is free to soar above the environs that weighed and pushed his spirit into terrifying contradictions. (JT 93-94)

Thus in the above text, Wilson, himself, provides, in relevance-theoretic terms, additional cognitive effects for the metaphoric concept of personal song. Here, the properties of this song include:

- | | |
|----------------------|--------------------|
| (1) Self-sufficiency | (3) Resurrection |
| (2) Freedom | (4) Responsibility |

All through the years of slavery, the Negroes were dependent on their masters for survival. There is need to achieve self-sufficiency. They also need true resurrection from the residues of slave life that cling to them. They need total freedom and assertion of their rights, and there is need for them to take responsibility for the choices they make now in their pursuit of the American Dream. These amount to the “personal song” realised as a means of cultural and personal affirmation. This is the path designed by Wilson for his audience. We can put this inferential computation in a table thus:

Hearer's Interpretative Assumptions	The Basis for the Assumption
a. Bynum has said, 'I can look at you, Mr. Loomis, and see you a man who done forgot his song.'	<i>Decoding of utterance by hearer/reader.</i>
b. Bynum's utterance is optimally relevant to hearer/reader	<i>Expectation is raised as hearer/hearer recognizes the utterance as a communicative act.</i>
c. Bynum's utterance will achieve relevance by addressing the concern of the reader/ hearer about the forgotten song	<i>Expectations raised by (b) given that the utterance addresses the concern of hearer/reader</i>
d. Since Loomis has been in deep trouble, forgetting his song implies something essential is missing in his life.	<i>Assumption activated by the use of the words 'you a man', 'forgot', 'song' and by hearer's/ reader's awareness of the plight of Loomis as a troubled soul. This is tentatively accepted as an implicit premise of Bynum's utterance.</i>
e. Song (in one lexicalised sense of the term, SONG*) generally can bring the singer happiness and fulfilment. Or can depict that internal rhythm in one's life.	<i>Implicit conclusion derivable from (d) together with an appropriate interpretation based on the real world knowledge shared by parties in the conversation.</i>
f. Loomis has forgotten his SONG*, and therefore his sense of self, identity, fulfilment, personal achievement.	<i>Interpretation of the explicit content of Bynum's utterance as decoded in (a) which along with (d) would imply (e). This interpretation is to be taken as Bynum's explicit meaning.</i>

Hearer's Interpretative Assumptions	The Basis for the Assumption
g. Loomis has forgotten who he is, and therefore his is unable to overcome his limitations.	<i>First overall interpretation of the utterance (that is the explicit content plus implicatures) which would satisfy the expectation of relevance in (b). This is accepted as the meaning intended by Bynum or even the author.</i>

Fig. IV A schematic outline of hypothesis formed in interpreting 'I can look at you, Mr. Loomis, and see you a man who done forgot his song' (based on Wilson and Sperber, 2012).

We can provide a summary of this process as follows:

- 1. **Explicit content** = Loomis has forgotten his song.
- 2. **Contextual assumption** = SONG* is essential for his freedom, identity, and progress.
= SONG** is a way of life, personhood, fulfilment.
- 3. **Contextual implication** = Loomis cannot overcome his limitations, and make progress until he finds his song.

As we can see, the contextual assumptions in (2) above is unlikely to be stored ready-made in the encyclopedic entry for 'song' and to that extent the interpretation of (1) involves the derivation of the emergent features of being true freedom, personhood, identity, fulfilment, and advancement based on pragmatic inference guided by the line of interpretation which the author has made manifest to the reader. This line of interpretation is justified because it is the most accessible in the context and also relevant in the expected way. (3) above can therefore be accepted not only as a contextual implication, but also as an implicature of the utterance in (1).

3. Concluding Remarks

This study has adopted an inferential approach to textual interpretation based on Relevance Theory. The inferences are mutual between the author and the reader. The author makes inferences about what he thinks the reader already knows about the lexical item 'song', and then from that take off point he guides the reader through some inferential paths in which the new meaning of 'song' is derived. On the other hand, the reader, following the path of least effort in deriving cognitive effects, makes assumptions based on contextual factors and the background knowledge he shares with the author about the African American experience and the author's critical engagement, which privileges the need for the African American to take responsibility for what becomes of his life rather than seeing himself as a victim of the white hegemony.

The result of this is the emergence of specific properties of 'song' not previously conceived. Thus, 'song' in *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* becomes an ontological

construct which specifies the individual's quest for spiritual transcendence and personal development. We arrive at this conclusion through several inferences based on the Principle of Relevance. For example, when Bynum obtained his 'Binding Song', he discovered his mission in life – that of mending broken lives. It was through this medium he helped Loomis to regain his identity. To Bynum, therefore, 'song' is that special knowledge which enabled him to fulfil his mission in life. In addition, Bynum says everybody has a 'song' and that people can make choices about 'song.' So, 'song' is a way of life; it is ontological. Again, 'song' is a pursuit in life and it can be forgotten; “a fellow forgot that and he forgot who he is.” But “when a man forgets his song, he goes off in search of it... till he finds out he’s got it with him all the time” (JT 71). The implication here is that 'song' is an indispensable element in life; it is essential to one's being, because by it the individual comes to terms with his greater self as a human being with definite worth.

Finally we come to the climax of Wilson's 'song' metaphor as Loomis rejects salvation from a substitutionary death, opting rather to bleed for himself. As he performs this ritual, he comes to self-realisation, a new awareness of his personhood and identity, thus achieving his life goal – finding his 'song.' In this regard 'song' becomes total freedom, self-sufficiency, self-affirmation, personal advancement, and responsibility. At the end of the play when Loomis finds his song, normalcy is restored as each character including Bynum and Mattie finds their song. From the foregoing, therefore, we assume that understanding Wilson's 'song' metaphor is key to the interpretation of *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*.

Notes

1. The idea of spiritual transcendence here was first mooted by Pereira (1998:66). Our main concern, however, is how to arrive at that construct through pragmatic inference.

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