

IMAGES OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS AND CHRISTIANITY IN *JOE TURNER'S COME AND GONE* AND *THE PIANO LESSON*

AMANDA M. RUDOLPH
University of Arkansas, Fayetteville

Throughout August Wilson's plays, characters are struggling with and wrestling over their ideas of religion and God. Wilson sets up a dichotomy between the role of Christianity and the African traditional religion (ATR) in two of his plays. Acceptance of one religion resolves the conflict, and Wilson illustrates these two polarized religions by creating images that reflect the tenets of ATR and Christianity. *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* includes a story of a Shiny Man, rituals, ghosts, a juba, and a self-inflicted cutting, all of which relate to the tenets of ATR, whereas characters of the Shiny Man and Martha represent Christianity. In *The Piano Lesson*, the ghost of Sutter represents ATR, whereas Avery represents Christianity. In each of these plays, the characters are forced to choose between ATR and Christianity, and Wilson subtly guides his characters to choose ATR and overcome. Wilson's plays are a contemporary commentary on the role of religion in the lives of American Blacks.

Keywords: African traditional religion; Christianity; August Wilson

Throughout August Wilson's plays, characters are struggling with and wrestling over their ideas of religion and God. In *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (Wilson, 1984), Levee says, "If he's a man of God, then where the hell was God when all of this was going on? Why wasn't God looking out for him?" (p. 81). In *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* (Wilson, 1984), Loomis speaks out: "You all sitting up here singing about the Holy Ghost. What's so holy about the Holy Ghost? You singing and singing. You think the Holy Ghost coming? . . . What he gonna do, huh?" (p. 250). In *The Piano Lesson*

JOURNAL OF BLACK STUDIES, Vol. 33 No. 5, May 2003 562-575
DOI: 10.1177/0021934703251106
© 2003 Sage Publications

(Wilson, 1990), Avery tells Berniece about the ways of God: "With the strength of God you can put the past behind you, Berniece. With the strength of God you can do anything!" (p. 71). All these characters question the role of God in their lives or in the lives of the people around them. How does a Christian God help the Black person? Why would God let these terrible things happen to Blacks? Will God help the Black person attain what he or she deserves? Wilson explored these questions in two of his plays.

Wilson sets up a dichotomy between the role of Christianity and the African traditional religion (ATR) (defined by belief in ancestors, belief in spirits, and the practice of magic and ritual) in two of his plays, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* and *The Piano Lesson*. In fact, although these same concepts may be used in other plays by Wilson, they are an integral part of the structure of these two pieces. The plays are structured so that, in the end, one religion must be accepted to resolve the conflict in each play. Wilson illustrated these two polarized religions by creating images that reflect the tenets of ATR and Christianity in *Joe Turner* and *The Piano Lesson*.

To see the dichotomy, we must first look at the tenets of ATR and Christianity and the way Wilson interprets both of them. ATRs encompass many different types of belief systems. One definition of ATR is

the observance of rules of conduct in the way the individual conducts his or her daily life, the practice of rituals, and the recognition of the ever presence of the living-dead (ancestors) to allow the person to coexist in harmony with other members of the community and nature. (Kamara, 2000, p. 503)

This definition is very broad; it does not narrow the scope of the belief system, as does Christianity, by focusing on acceptance of a specific savior, Jesus Christ. Gibreel M. Kamara (2000) stated that ATRs are the religion of Black people, native Africans or not, due to connections in history. He continued by saying that Black people become torn between the ATR and the religion of the U.S. majority, Christianity. We see this same dichotomy in Wilson's plays. Aylwald Shorter (1977) compared ATR to Christianity and stated: "Christianity is a 'Religion of the Book,' a highly literate religion

with a long history of theological expositions, written and oral. . . . African Traditional Religion, on the other hand, is not only historically preliterate, it is by choice not even always orally articulate" (p. 7). ATR is a more symbolic and abstract religion than Christianity. Kamara included five components of ATR based on the delineation in *African Traditional Religion* by E. B. Idowu: "belief in God, belief in the divinities, belief in spirits, belief in the ancestors, and the practice of magic and medicine" (as cited in Kamara, 2000, p. 508). For the scope of this article, belief in God will be assumed for both ATR and Christianity.

To explore the dichotomy found in these two plays, we must also define what constitutes African Christianity. When the slaves were brought to America from Africa, some of their religious artifacts were lost. As these people began living in America, the religion from Africa was somewhat regained as slaves began worshipping. The White slave owners refused to share Christianity with the slaves at first, as they were afraid it might bring equality. Soon they were convinced that Christianity would make the slaves more docile. The slaves rejected Christianity on the basis that any religion that participated in slavery was not valid. Eventually, the slaves embraced part of Christianity because of the telling of the exodus story (Paris, 1994). Paris (1994) stated that the exodus story is critical to the change in the slaves' beliefs because "it connotes a living and caring God who not only sees, hears, and knows about human suffering but willingly chooses to become actively engaged in a liberating activity" (p. 73). The Black people then used the church as a way to embrace freedom and overcome racism. The history of Christianity for the American Black differs greatly from the history of Christianity for the American majority and even other minorities. ATRs tend to view all people as messengers of religion, whereas Christianity maintains a hierarchy of divine leaders. Christianity is a word-based religion. The power of Christianity would dissipate without the Bible. Therefore, for the comparison in this article, organization and reliance on the words will characterize Christianity.

Finally, before we look to the plays themselves, we must look into August Wilson's background. Wilson was born in Pittsburgh in

1945 to a Black mother and White father (Lyons, 1999). His mother raised him after his father left. He began writing poetry and eventually turned to playwriting. His goal was to write one play for each decade in the 20th century; he has published six (Lyons, 1999). The focus of this article deals with the play for the 1910s, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, and the play for the 1930s, *The Piano Lesson*. These plays deal with the problems facing Black people during those time periods in America. Some of the problems are recurrent, like the role of religions. Wilson said,

Today I would say that the conflict in black America is between the middle class and the so-called underclass, and that conflict goes back to those who deny themselves and those who aren't willing to. America offers blacks a contract that says, "If you leave all that African stuff over there and adopt the values of the dominant culture, you can participate." . . . The ones who accept go on to become part of the growing black middle class and some areas even acquire some power and participation in society, but when they finally arrive where they arrive, they are no longer the same people. . . . They've acculturated and adopted white values. (Lyons, 1999, p. 2)

Wilson's ideas are applicable to the religious struggle going on in America and in his plays. Wilson also talked about Christianity and stated: "The Christianity that black have embraced, they have transformed with aspects of African religion, African style, and certainly African celebration. The church is the only stable organization in the black community, and the community is organized around the church" (Lyons, 1999, p. 5). On the other hand, Wilson contended that churches have been the source of the Ku Klux Klan and still promote inequality today (Lyons, 1999). Wilson seems to have a contradictory nature that is not so pronounced in his plays. Not only is the philosophy behind the religious dichotomy important, but the intended audience of the plays influences the interpretation. According to Wilson,

I don't write for any particular audience, but the idea of audience is built into the craft of playwrighting. In terms of what that audience may specifically look like, it looks like me. I have to satisfy the audi-

ence that is myself. I don't write for a black or white audience beyond that. (Carroll, 1994, p. 249)

As we look to the plays and the images of religion, it is important to keep in mind the author's ideology behind his work.

As the lights come up on the first scene of *Joe Turner*, the audience is immediately introduced to magic, part of ATRs. Wilson included a strong theme of spirituality in *Joe Turner*. Because the play is set in 1911, the environment and society are not far removed from slavery, Africa, and the religions of those times and places. Wilson said *Joe Turner* was his favorite play of the ones he has written (Lyons, 1999). One could argue the favoritism comes with the deep African religious practices in the play. The play is full of examples of ATR. Specifically, the play includes a story of a Shiny Man, rituals, ghosts, a *juba* or rhythmic dance, and a self-inflicted cutting, all of which relate to the tenets of ATR.

As the play begins, the first character the audience hears about is Bynum, the root worker. Roughly, the first three pages of the play are focused on Seth and Bertha (the owner of the boarding house and his wife) discussing Bynum (a resident) and his ritualistic killings of the pigeons. After the discussion, Bynum enters and, within five pages of his entrance, the audience hears the story of Bynum and the Shiny Man. Bynum explains his story to Rutherford Selig, a traveling salesman. Bynum says that he met a Shiny Man in the road. The Shiny Man and Bynum walked down the road around the bend. Bynum says,

I turned around to look at this fellow and he had this light coming out of him. I had to cover up my eyes from being blinded. He shining like new money with that light. He shined until all the light seemed like it seeped out of him and then he was gone. (p. 212)

As the Shiny Man disappeared, Bynum saw his father. Bynum's father came to help him find his song that Wilson uses as a metaphor to represent what is in the heart of the person that makes him or her different and special. "I had the Binding Song. I chose that song because that's what I seen most when I was traveling. . . . So I takes the power of my song and binds them together" (p. 213). Later in

the narrative, Bynum asks his father about the Shiny Man, and his father says he is “One Who Goes Before and Shows the Way” (p. 213). Sandra Richards (1999) said, “The story of a ‘shiny man’ [is] suggestive of the Yoruba gods Ogun and Esu—who encourages fellow travelers to claim their predestined ‘song’ in life” (p. 92). She went on to say Ogun is the god who first made a tool, an iron sword, and the shininess the Bynum sees may be the iron of Ogun (Richards, 1999). Whether Wilson is consciously making a comparison of the Shiny Man to Ogun and/or Esu, it is obvious the Shiny Man is god and a higher power influencing Bynum and others.

Wilson also uses ATRs in more subtle ways. Another example in *Joe Turner* is the rituals of Bynum. As stated previously, the play opens with Bertha and Seth talking about Bynum’s (the very epitome of ATR) actions with the pigeons. The text does not actually state the purpose behind Bynum’s actions. Basically, Bynum performs a type of ritual killing of the pigeon that concludes with Bynum pouring the pigeon’s blood over its grave. The blood consecrates and seals the grave. Whatever the purpose of the ritual, the pigeon is laid to rest in clean, protected ground. Bynum’s rituals set him up as the clearest example of ATR.

Through Bynum, he [Wilson] hoped to show the continuing role of African mysticism in the lives of his characters and the potential of what Wilson terms “African retentions,” which, in his view, can serve as both a source of strength and a kind of psychic balm for the twentieth-century African Americans. (Herrington, 1998, p. 81)

Another example that illustrates a tenet of ATR is the appearance of Miss Mabel, a ghost. Reuben, who lives next door to the boarding house, lost his best friend Eugene when he died. Eugene asked Reuben to release his pigeons after he died. Reuben kept the pigeons, breaking the promise to the dead boy. Miss Mabel returns from the afterworld to tell Reuben he must release the pigeons or Eugene will not be able to travel on to where he should be. Wilson uses the pigeons as a metaphor for Loomis’s struggle. Loomis must let go of his rage to find his way just as Reuben must let go of his grief to free Eugene. The appearance of Miss Mabel exemplifies two tenets of

ATR. First, Reuben immediately believes he has seen a ghost. Although Zonia is skeptical, he maintains he encountered a ghost. ATR asserts a belief in spirits, and Reuben automatically accepts the spirit in his world. Second, the ghost gives advice, which is one of the roles of ancestors. Sandra Shannon (1995), a Wilson scholar, states that Loomis must acknowledge “that in order to go forward, they must revisit those pasts” (p. 125). The path that Reuben is on is a reflection of where Loomis is headed. Reuben opens up to the ancestors and accepts the past, the death of Eugene. Loomis will follow eventually. Again, the symbol is deeply entrenched in the ideas of ATR.

In *Joe Turner*, his most spiritual play, Wilson also incorporates the juba. According to the stage directions of *Joe Turner*, the juba

is reminiscent of the ring shout of the African slaves. It is a call-and-response dance. Bynum sits at the table and drums. He calls the dance as others clap hands, shuffle, and stomp around the table. It should be as African as possible, with the performers working themselves up into a near frenzy. The words can be improvised but should include some mention of the Holy Ghost. (p. 249)

Richards (1999) referred to historian Sterling Stuckey’s belief that the jubas were directed to gods and ancestors. Wilson uses the juba as a synthesis of Christianity and ATR. The tradition of the juba is in African practices, but the characters in *Joe Turner* shout about the Holy Ghost. This meshing of tradition forces Loomis into remembrance of ancestors and past places (Richards, 1999). This remembrance leads to the vision of Africa and builds to the end of act 1. Wilson sets up the battle between Christianity and ATR by the end of act 1. In act 2, only one religion will lead to salvation.

The play also includes images and tenets of Christianity. Basically, there are two instances that incorporate Christianity. The first, interestingly enough, is the appearance of the Shiny Man. The second strong proponent of Christianity is Martha. She is part of the church, and even her name, Martha Pentecost, reflects the dominant religion. These elements create the opposing force to ATR.

The Shiny Man can be interpreted as a direct connection to ATR, but he can also be interpreted as a link to Christianity. Kim Pereira

(1995), scholar of Wilson's work, interprets the One Who Goes Before and Shows the Way as an allusion to John the Baptist, who went before Jesus. Pereira said the ultimate baptism was the blood of Christ the Lamb, and the blood appearing on Bynum's hands relates to those baptisms. The reference to the Shiny Man can be related to the Christian tradition because there are many paintings and passages that refer to Jesus as illuminating and the Light. Although Pereira made a good argument for the Christian interpretation of the Shiny Man, the character of Martha is a stronger Christian figure in the play.

Martha is the wife of Herald Loomis. In the play, Loomis is searching for his wife. He was taken by Joe Turner and forced to work for the man for 7 years. On his release, he begins to look for his wife. It is a long, hard search. Martha moves in with her mother after the landowner kicks her off the sharecropping property: "I stayed and waited there for five years before I woke up one morning and decided that you were dead. Even if you weren't, you was dead to me" (p. 285). She tells how she followed the church: "Reverend Tolliver wanted to move the church up North cause of all the trouble the colored folks was having down there" (p. 285). She stopped waiting for the return of Loomis and embraced the church. She even changed her name to Martha Pentecost. When she finds Loomis at the boarding house, she is the symbol of Christianity. As Loomis begins to struggle with his identity and ancestry, Martha begins to recite the 23rd Psalm. She relies on the words of Christianity to resolve the struggle within Loomis. In the end of the play, Martha is the total embodiment of Christianity.

Overall, *Joe Turner* depicts the very real struggle between Christianity and ATR. The final scene determines the winner of the battle. Loomis reaches a crisis; he must choose. Martha speaks the words of Christianity, and Loomis still struggles. As he begins to understand his song, he denies everyone who tried to bind him. Finally, he understands that he bound himself, and only he can set himself free. While Martha continues to speak the 23rd Psalm, Loomis saves himself from a life of misplaced binding and slashes his chest. In this final scene, blood is the ultimate cleanser. Loomis is made clean as well as whole again. "You want blood? Blood

make you clean? You clean with blood? [Slashes himself] I'm standing! I'm standing! My legs stood up! I'm standing now!" (p. 288). Pereira (1995) agreed with Paul Carter Harrison's interpretation that the cutting is a "reenactment of the Osirian mythos, which invites the death of the body in order to allow for the resurrection of the spirit/body" (p. 80). If so, the bloodletting is firmly entrenched in ATR. Even if this interpretation is incorrect, it cannot be denied that ATR is the means to salvation for Loomis in *Joe Turner*. "Moreover, Loomis's sacrilegious gesture undermines the Christian belief in Jesus Christ's crucifixion as the ultimate sacrifice undertaken for all humanity" (Shannon, 1995, p. 131). Jesus has betrayed Loomis. And Loomis takes the responsibility of his life on himself. He needs no one else to bleed for him; he can do it himself. Wilson said, "Loomis is not only illustrating his willingness to bleed but saying that if salvation requires bloodshed, he doesn't need Christ to bleed for him on the cross. He's saying something like, 'Christ can do some stuff I can't, but if it is about bleeding, yeah, I can bleed for myself'" (Lyons, 1999, p. 5). Loomis will take the African way—take responsibility for his soul through his own ritual and magic. Throughout *Joe Turner*, Wilson used images related to ATRs. The rituals, the juba, the ghosts, and the Shiny Man all helped to define the African path. The Shiny Man and Martha also represented Christianity. As this dichotomy became clear, the triumph of one over the other was the only alternative for resolution. In *Joe Turner*, ATR won.

The second play to explore the religious dichotomy is *The Piano Lesson*. The action of the play centers on an old family piano. Berniece lives in Pittsburgh with her uncle and daughter, and the piano. Her brother, Boy Willy, comes up from the South to sell the piano to gather enough money to buy a piece of land. As Berniece and Boy Willy fight and argue, the ghost of Sutter, slave owner of the family's ancestors, begins to haunt the home. In the end, Berniece turns to her friend Avery, a self-proclaimed Christian minister, to exorcise the house. Avery begins the ceremony, but only Boy Willy and Berniece can finish it. Wilson focused on the same conflict in *The Piano Lesson* as he did in *Joe Turner*. The characters struggle to accept or deny the African heritage and religion

and embrace Christianity. In *The Piano Lesson*, the conflict is not so obvious. Unlike the many examples of ATR in *Joe Turner*, *The Piano Lesson* contains one major symbol for ATR and one for Christianity. The ghost of a dead White slave owner, Sutter, oddly enough, represents ATR. Avery, the newly sanctioned Christian minister, represents Christianity. The piano is not tied to either religion; it is the vehicle for the conflict. Berniece could easily play the piano in Avery's church, and all ATR would be denied. Or she could play at home and celebrate her ancestors. The piano only creates a mean to develop the larger conflict. These two symbols, the ghost and Avery, meet in a violent death match at the end of the play where only one religion, ATR or Christianity, will prove worthy.

The image of ATR in *The Piano Lesson* is the appearance of the ghost of Sutter. One of the tenets of ATR is the belief in spirits. Sutter's ghost appears in the first scene of the play. Berniece immediately accepts the apparition as a ghost: "Sutter . . . Sutter's standing at the top of the steps. . . . He was standing there . . . had his hand on top of his head. . . . I told him to go away and he just stood there looking at me" (p. 13). There is no question as to what Berniece saw, and eventually, all members of the family will witness the ghost of Sutter. The support of ATR comes not from the fact that the ghost is the dead White slave owner, but that the characters of the play can openly accept the presence of a spirit. Shannon (1995) posited that Wilson intentionally included examples of Black culture into his work, and the ghost is one of those examples. Eventually, it is the ghost that brings the characters to a place where a decision must be made. The African heritage, represented by the White man, forces a battle.

The Christian image in *The Piano Lesson* is much clearer. Avery represents the force of Christianity in the Black world: Thirty-eight years old, honest and ambitious, he has taken to the city like a fish to water, finding in it opportunities for growth and advancement that did not exist for him in the South. He is dressed in a suit and tie with a gold cross around his neck. He carries a small Bible. At Avery's first entrance, he epitomizes Christianity. As stated earlier, one of the main tenets of Christianity is the reliance on the written word. Avery carries the written word with him, which serves as the White

man's god. "Avery faces the dilemma of deciding how much of himself he can compromise without 'selling out' to the white man" (Pereira, 1995, p. 92). Avery accepted the White man's god and became a preacher. He works as an elevator operator in the White man's business world. Pereira (1995) also described him as "honest, intelligent and compliant" (p. 92). How much of himself did he sacrifice for success in the city?

Avery represents the Christian way in the play. He is a minister and feels he has been "called." Avery has a dream in which the Lord speaks to him. He relates how he felt after awakening to the other characters:

I had a peace about myself that was hard to explain. I knew right then that I had been filled with the Holy Ghost and called to be a servant of the Lord. It took me a while before I could accept that. But then a lot of little ways God showed me it was true. So I became a preacher. (p. 25)

Shannon (1995) supposed that the other men in the play reject the story of Avery's call and consider him a con man like themselves. In this sense, Avery is just making a living and getting by like the rest of them. This attitude of the other characters undermines the power of Christianity and sets up Avery and Christianity for defeat at the end of the play.

The conflict between ATR and Christianity reaches climax at the end of the play, not unlike *Joe Turner*. Berniece asks Avery to bless the house so that the ghost of Sutter will disappear. After reading his Bible the previous night, Avery comes to the house and begins the ceremony.

O Holy Father we gather here this evening in the Holy Name to cast out the spirit of one James Sutter. May this vial of water be empowered with thy spirit. May each drop of it be a weapon and a shield against the presence of all evil and may it be a cleansing and blessing of this humble abode. Just as Our Father taught us how to pray so He say, "I will prepare a table for you in the midst of mine enemies," and in His hands we place ourselves to come unto his presence. (p. 105)

The entire act of exorcism is reliant on the words in the Bible. Avery's blessing and exorcism do not work; Christian words are not enough for the demons of the past (Pereira, 1995). "Wilson believes that an all-out confrontation with this ghost is the essential point of the play" (Shannon, 1995, p. 161). Boy Willie has no investment in Christianity. He sees that the religion is useless against the ghost, and he takes on the ghost physically. Berniece realizes she cannot win by herself. She knows the power lies with the ancestors within the piano. She begins her own exorcism; she plays the piano and sings:

I want you to help me
 Mama Berniece
 I want you to help me
 Mama Esther. (p. 107)

She helps Boy Willie and they begin to win. Wilson said,

So it's when Berniece breaks her self-imposed taboo against touching the piano, when she calls on her ancestors, that something radical changes. The ghost Boy Willie was wrestling with upstairs gets off of Boy Willie, and Boy Willie knows something important has happened. (Lyons, 1999, p. 8)

Berniece accepted the past and her ancestors and drove away the ghost of Sutter. Berniece, by accepting tenets of ATR, was able to accomplish something Avery could not do with all his words and bibles. Wilson chose the African way to overcome in *The Piano Lesson* just as he did in *Joe Turner*.

In conclusion, Wilson used many different symbols and characters to represent Christianity and ATR in his plays. Wilson pulls from the very basic tenets of ATR to depict religion in his plays. He uses ritual, magic, spirits, and the ancestors. Wilson also incorpo-

rated Christianity. The basis of Christianity is in the Bible and the words contained therein. Many of the characters symbolizing Christianity recite the Scripture, and some, like Avery, actually carry the book around. These symbols set up a dichotomy in Wilson's work, especially *Joe Turner* and *The Piano Lesson*. In both plays, the two religions are set up to be in conflict, and only one of the religions can resolve this conflict. Wilson's characters choose ATR over Christianity repeatedly to overcome.

Interestingly, Wilson's doubt in the usefulness of White America's Christianity for Black people is not a new movement in literature. In 1968, Benjamin E. Mays included a chapter titled "Ideas of God Involving Frustration, Doubt, God's Impotence, and His Non-Existence" in his book, *The Negro's God as Reflected in His Literature* (1968, p. 218). He listed three ideas that recur in Black literature regarding God:

1. There is a strong tendency to doubt God's value to the Negro in his struggle to gain a stable economic, social and political foothold in America.
2. God is described as having outlived his usefulness. Historically, when gods have outlived their usefulness, either they have been abandoned or a new conception of God has been developed to meet the new experiences. The younger Negro writers seem to be inclined to abandon the idea rather than develop new concepts.
3. There is a denial of the existence of God.

Wilson's work reflects all these ideas. Character after character questions the role of God in his or her life. Will God help the Black person get ahead? Characters talk of God being obsolete. Will a Christian God help me? they ask. And characters deny the existence of a Christian God. If there is a God, why does He let bad things happen to the Black people? Wilson expanded on these ideas. He is beginning to develop a useful God and religion for Black Americans. His plays promote an acceptance of ATR, but he includes the Christian God as well.

As African people were brought to America, their religious ideas meshed with those of the multiple cultures they encountered

to create a spirituality unique to them. Wilson wants to remind the African American audience of the spiritual roots of their ancestors. Not only did Wilson expertly weave the ideas into metaphors in the play, he used the ideas of African mysticism to provoke the African American audience to reconnect with spirituality from slavery and Africa. And from there, a new religion with old roots may begin.

REFERENCES

- Carroll, R. (1994). *Swing low*. New York: Carol Southern Books.
- Herrington, J. (1998). *I ain't sorry for nothin' I done*. New York: Limelight Editions.
- Kamara, G. M. (2000). Regaining our African aesthetics and essence through our African traditional religion. *Journal of Black Studies*, 30(4), 502-514.
- Lyons, B. (1999). An interview with August Wilson. *Contemporary Literature*, 40(1), 1-21.
- Mays, B. E. (1968). *The Negro's God as reflected in his literature*. New York: Russell and Russell.
- Paris, P. J. (1994). The religious world of African Americans. In Jacob Neusner (Ed.), *World Religions in America* (pp. 69-91). Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Know Press.
- Pereira, K. (1995). *August Wilson and the African-American odyssey*. Urbana: University of Illinois.
- Richards, S. L. (1999). Yoruba gods on the American stage: August Wilson's *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*. *Research in African Literatures*, 30(4), 92-105.
- Shannon, S. G. (1995). *The dramatic vision of August Wilson*. Washington, DC: Howard University Press.
- Shorter, A. (1977). *African Christian theology-adaptation of incarnation?* New York: Orbis Books.
- Wilson, A. (1984). *Three plays*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh.
- Wilson, A. (1990). *The piano lesson*. New York: Penguin.

Amanda M. Rudolph is an adjunct faculty in curriculum and instruction at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville.