

Christianity and black masculinity in James Baldwin's *Blues for Mister Charlie* and August Wilson's *Joe Turner's come and gone*¹

Cristianismo e masculinidade em *Blues for Mister Charlie*, de James Baldwin e *Joe Turner's come and gone*, de August Wilson

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Resumo

A religião opera como um sistema modelador, ou seja, define e orienta uma noção de realidade e de como agir de acordo com suas concepções. Nas peças *Blues for Mister Charlie*, de William Baldwin e *Joe Turner's come and gone*, ambos dramaturgos afro-americanos, seus protagonistas enfrentam uma aguda crise de identidade, acentuada pelo confronto entre premissas cristãs profundamente introjetadas e novas formas de conceber e vivenciar a espiritualidade. A análise de como essa crise se estabelece e é resolvida nas peças permite identificar críticas a uma noção de masculinidade fortemente atrelada a uma perspectiva cristã.

Palavras-chave: *Cristianismo, masculinidade negra, identidade.*

Abstract

Religion works as a modeling system, that is, it rules and orients a notion of reality and how to act according to its truths and assumptions. In William Baldwin's

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Blues for Mister Charlie and August Wilson's *Joe Turner's come and gone*, the main characters undergo a deep identity crisis, emphasized by the confrontation of Christian premises strongly taken for granted with new ways of conceiving and realizing spirituality. By analyzing the way this crisis is established and solved within the plays it is possible to identify a criticism to the notion of black masculinity embedded in a Christian perspective.

Keywords: *Christianity; Black masculinity, Identity.*

To be black and male seems to demand, within the American space, a special effort of performance in order to cope with the strong implications that the alignment of both terms raises. Black masculinity has occupied an important spot of culture when one considers the theoretical issues being discussed in order to approach the subject. Traditional views of masculinity based on sex role, gender differences and sexuality were challenged mainly from the 1970s, usually following the theoretical achievements of women's and gay's movements, which can be considered the precursors of men's movement (Langley, 1993). From those studies new perspectives emerged, trying to encompass a myriad of male experiences that could not be voiced within a hegemonic definition of masculinity that adopts a Eurocentric perspective, which focuses on the experiences of the white males, leaving out any other groups and their views. Regarding African Americans, such a perspective ignores or even erases racial issues, since it is not a "central element in [the white men's] experiences" (Langley, 1993, p. 235). As a result of such neglect, African American males are relegated to a marginal space concerning the definition, role and function of manhood.

Traditional views of masculinity are endorsed by several social institutions, including the Christian church. Biblical passages have been used throughout the times to justify and reinforce models of behavior, masculinity included.³ In his analysis of images of

³ Besides its use to provide definitions of men's and women's roles, many biblical passages were also used in the past to sustain proslavery views. According to Gay L. Byron (2006, p. 103) African Americans learned how to reinterpret and dismiss the authority of such passages and he suggests that they should also learn how to

masculinity that emerge from the Pauline Epistles, G. L. Byron (2006, p. 107) states that in many African American Christian communities, Paul's letters are literally interpreted and used to fuel sexist and homophobic attitudes, while emphasizing heterosexual and patriarchal views of masculinity, "understood through the male-ruled family unity", in which the male exercises control over women, children and who else lives in a subordinate condition under his head.

By accepting the authority of the biblical text concerning definitions of manhood and by supporting and spreading such views, the Black Christian church contributes to institutionalize a normative perspective on masculinity that disregards alternative ways of constructing and experiencing male identities, relegating those who do not partake of its views as "deviant others". It means that the church plays a key role in defining what or who is in or out the pattern, thus its huge importance in the community's life.⁴ The Black Church, in Mary Patillo-McCoy's words (1998, p. 769), "is the anchoring institution in the African American community. The church acts simultaneously as a school, a bank, a benevolent society, a political organization, a party hall, and a spiritual base", that is, it pervades, in fundamental ways, the lives of many African Americans, working as modeling system that regulates social interactions.⁵

"rearticulate and even dismiss the literalist authority of [biblical] texts that support other forms of oppression".

⁴ William H. Becker (1972, p. 316-317) corroborates this view by stating that "the definition and assertion of black manhood has been a conscious motive and dominant theme throughout the history of the black church", which "has played a key role" in the process of defining and authenticating "models of manhood that serve to guide its members in their growth toward mature humanity".

⁵ For a further discussion of the concept of modeling system see Sebeok (1987) and Jeha (1991). Sá (1996, p. 73) summarizes Sebeok's view of modeling system: it is defined "in terms of the phenomenal world cognizable to human beings" and is structured "according to rules of combination". A primary modeling system, according to Sebeok, may be regarded as a language, but it is non-verbal. Verbal language is a secondary modeling system, and culture is a tertiary one, that is, "a superstructure that re-presents language in contrast with extra-linguistic elements" (Sá, 1996, p. 73). He concludes that in Sebeok's sense, "myth is a tertiary system that models the surrounding world or portions of it in the minds of individuals belonging to the group" (Sá, 1996, p. 73). Religion and myth, though one cannot

As a consequence, most performances of black masculine identity are informed by church prescriptions that are consciously or unconsciously assimilated and translated into patterns of behavior and attitudes.

African American drama, as a territory in which playwrights can

explore possibilities for black people to define themselves without assuming the stereotypical portrayals of history, but by transforming that history into meaningful fuel for forward progress” (Harris, 2007, p. xi),

opens space to criticize notions of black masculinity embedded in a Christian perspective. Such a critique can be realized through the characters Meridian Henry, in James Baldwin’s *Blues for Mister Charlie*, and Herald Loomis, in August Wilson’s *Joe Turner’s Come and Gone*. In those plays, these characters experience, somehow, a more fulfilled sense of manhood when they turn away from Christian world views that restrain self-knowledge and agency.

In *Blues for Mister Charlie*, Meridian Henry is a man of God: he is Blacktown’s minister and as such, he plays an important role as the spiritual guide of his congregation. As a Christian man, he is supposed to take for granted several biblical premises. One of them regards the man’s role as provider and protector of the family and another one states that he must exercise his humility towards others, meaning that pride, anger and revengeful thoughts cannot find

be simply reduced to the other, as Chase (1973) and Cassirer (1965) affirm, have a common interface that becomes a strong feature in both: “myth is, since its beginning, potential religion” (Cassirer 1965, p. 168). To Cassirer, there is no radical difference between mythic and religious thought, both derive from the same fundamental concerns of human life. “During all the course of its history”, says Cassirer (1965, p. 67), “religion remains firmly attached to and impregnated with mythic elements”. Eliade (1972, p. 143) seems to agree with this view when in *Myth and Reality* he affirms that Christianity cannot be completely dissociated from mythic thought because even proclaiming that Jesus incarnation as God’s son occurred in a historical and not in a primordial time, Christians make use of the categories of myth by repeating the ritual of Jesus’ death and resurrection, to remind themselves that that is the only way to man’s redemption.

room in the life of someone who has learned that to turn the other cheek is the right thing to do.

In the beginning of the play we get to know that Meridian “preaches, ministers to his folk and attempts to make life better for his community.” (Harris, 2003, p. 161) His attitude as a churchman echoes the one conveyed by the greatest leader of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, Reverend Martin Luther King, from the Baptist Church, who is known for his nonviolent posture in face of the threats and abuse committed against African Americans by white people and for his anti-war activism. King’s discourse was deeply tied to the Gospels’ message, as emphasized in several of his speeches. In his most famous one, *I have a dream* (1963), King evokes an atmosphere of *The Sermon of the Mountain*, in the Gospel of Matthew, in which Jesus spoke to millions of people.⁶

As a representative of the Baptist Church, one of the pillars of the Christian Black Church,⁷ King endorsed a certain view of manhood within the church’s beliefs, and worked as a model for his parishioners and, in a greater extent, to the African Americans who followed his ideas. This view, in spite of its clear call for self-assertion, independence and black identity (Becker, p. 317) is built upon a heterosexual and patriarchal notion of masculinity.⁸ In his study on Martin Luther King’s life, Michael Dyson (2000, p. 52) affirms that the reverend’s activism emerges from his “belief that gospel calls individuals and nations to repent of their sins and to

⁶ In one passage of the speech King says: “I have a dream today . . . I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low. The rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.”

⁷ According to the U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, conducted in 2007 by the Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion & Public Life, “40% of all African Americans identify with Baptist denominations within the historically black tradition” (<http://www.pewforum.org/2009/01/30/a-religious-portrait-of-african-americans/>).

⁸ Harris (2003, p. 124-125) states that in “the civil rights era, definitions of black masculinity coalesced around male models such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, Sidney Poitier and Mohammad Ali. In their individual arena, these men set a progressive agenda of fighting racism in American culture, while working toward individual aims.”

serve humanity as best they can”. In Baldwin’s play, Meridian Henry seems to partake of such beliefs and models, until the death of his son, Richard Henry, exposes the fracture of his identity performance and conveys that, although as reverend “he demonstrates a longsuffering strength that benefits survival of the community, [he] does little for his personal agency” (Harris, 2003, p.161). From Richard’s murder on, he will struggle with his faith in order to construct another model of masculinity in which he is able to combine his thoughts and his actions into a more fulfilled and affirmative sense of being.

The play starts with Richard’s death and Meridian’s angry and painful reaction to it. His relationship with his son was a tough one: Richard accused him of doing nothing when his mother died in suspicious circumstances, probably provoked by white people for racist reasons, an accusation that reinforces Meridian’s passive “sheep-like” role. Unable to cope with his father’s inaction, he leaves home towards North, in pursue of a career as a musician. When Richard returns home to recover from drugs abuse, his behavior is so radically different from the one expected from a black man in the south that it costs his life. This second loss becomes the turning point to Meridian. He starts realizing that what he preaches in the pulpit will not stop the cycle of abuse, violence, death and impunity suffered by himself and his community. This realization comes together with a sense of incompleteness, as if Meridian were living a half-life, one in which he could not be a man in his own terms.

Meridian’s change is better emphasized when he talks to Parnell, the white editor of the local newspaper, by the end of Act I. In this dialogue, he delivers a long speech in which he analyses his connections with Christianity, pointing out how it guided his life and how it seems to be so insufficient now that his beloved ones are dead. This monologue is crucial to understand Meridian’s process of consciousness raising concerning the notions of manhood that had been guiding his life and how he questions and rearticulates them.

First, Meridian brings out the issue of Christianity as a tradition in his family life: “I’m, a Christian, I’ve been a Christian all my life, like my Mama and Daddy before me and like their Mama and

Daddy before them”⁹. In fact, what he is telling is the history of the imposition of a religion upon African populations brought to the Americas under the chains of slavery. That is the point Meridian gets in his following statement:

Of course, if you go back far enough, you get to a point *before* Christ, if you see what I mean, *B.C.*—and at that point I’ve been thinking, black people weren’t raised to turn the other cheek, and in the hope of heaven. No, then they didn’t have to take low. Before Christ (original emphasis, BMC, p. 38).

Here, Meridian is fully conscious that the models he was taught were not his own, he has been living by someone else’s premises, premises that, in his understanding, are not fair, since the results are suffering, unhappiness and a pervasive feeling of never being in control, never having power to rule. What Meridian is calling for is its memory past, a primordial time when equality and spiritual bonds spoke louder than notions of humility and the turning of the cheek: “They walked around just as good as anybody else, and when they died, they didn’t go to heaven, they went to join their ancestors” (BMC, p. 38).

It is by this moment that Meridian compares the Christian and African religious views, concluding that the gains African Americans got by converting to Christianity were few, if any:

My son’s dead, but he’s not gone to join his ancestors. He was a sinner, so, he must have gone to hell—if we’re going to believe what the Bible says. Is that such an improvement, such a mighty advance over B.C.?
(BMC, p. 38).

Meridian’s words represent a harsh attack on Christian beliefs. Richard, his son, is dead, and cannot partake of the realm of the ancestors, because Christianity overtook his primeval beliefs and now they are lost. From the Christian perspective, Richard died as

⁹ BALDWIN, James. *Blues for Mister Charlie*. New York: Vintage Books, 1995. p. 38. Further references are to this edition and will be included parenthetically in the text. The title will be abbreviated BMC, followed by page number.

an unrepentant sinner and as such, deserves hell after his death, a fate that Meridian clearly does not accept, thus his remark that only if one believes the Bible, one is able to support this view. At this point we can feel that Meridian is openly challenging Christianity and what to be a Christian has meant to African Americans:

I've been thinking, I've had to think—would I have *been* such a Christian if I hadn't been born black? Maybe I *had* to become a Christian in order to have any dignity at all. Since I wasn't a man in men's eyes, then I could be a man in the eyes of God. (original emphasis; BMC, p. 38)

Meridian's speech characterizes a kind of epiphany in which he realizes how Christianity, although operating as a system through which he could acquire some sense of identity and dignity, at least in face of God's eyes, has never provided him with a sense of being a man in face of the white men. This gap, to Meridian, accounts for his personal losses and tragedies, since being a man in God's eyes didn't protect both his wife and son from dying in a way they all “know how too well” (BMC, p. 38), that is, as victims of a racist system that turned African Americans into second class citizens in relation to white people. Meridian finally utters what was unthinkable for him before: that the “eyes of God—maybe those eyes are blind” (BMC, p. 38). Thus, he was a man for nobody's eyes: he was, in fact, a non-man, an invisible one. Christianity has turned him “weak”, as remarked by Addison Gayle (1970, p. 132) when he addresses a charge to Jesus Christ: “You are the greatest slave master of them all. You taught us to be good to our enemies, to love them, to forgive them. Holding out promises of heaven, you tied our hands and made us weak.”¹⁰

¹⁰ Both, Meridian and Gayle endorse a criticism already elaborated by Nietzsche in the nineteenth century, when, in a vitriolic attack to Christianity in *The Antichrist* (1888), Nietzsche states it as a religion of decadence, meaning that it undermines men's will to power. “The divinity of this *decadence*,” concludes Nietzsche, “shorn of its masculine virtues and passions, is converted perforce into a god of the physiologically degraded, of the weak. Of course, they do not *call* themselves the weak; they call themselves ‘the good’ (Nietzsche, 2004, p. 11). That is exactly what Meridian finds out about himself: he was not a good man, he was a weak man.

The full consciousness of his real position within a racist and segregated society makes Meridian take a stand. During Lyle's trial, the white man accused of murdering Richard, Meridian brings the issue of manhood again, articulating it with racial politics and how they regulate the social stances:

I am a man. A *man!* I tried to help my son become a man. But manhood is a dangerous pursuit, here. And that pursuit undid him because of *your* guns, *your* hoses, *your* dogs, *your* judges, *your* law-makers, *your* folly, *your* pride, *your* cruelty, *your* cowardice, *your* money, *your* chain gangs, and *your* churches! (original emphasis; BMC, p. 103)

By being able to verbalize how racism works within the structures of society and how it undermines any attempt of black males to pursue and achieve a fulfilled notion of manhood, Meridian redefines to himself the very idea of masculinity, an idea that in Meredith Malburne's analysis, "turns his faith away from acceptance and toward anger" (2007, p. 55). If, before Richard's death, Meridian was known by his pacific protests and nonviolence posture in his struggle to make the civil rights a dream to come true, he has turned the table. He is not giving up Christianity, but, as he has had his vision, it is clear for him now that if Christianity is to become significant in the lives of black people, it has to account for injustice and be radically opposed to it. It is not by chance that by the end of the play, after Lyle is found not guilty of killing Richard, Meridian makes his final comment by evoking the Bible and the gun, both of them in the pulpit, as symbols of Meridian's new world view. In order to overcome the paralysis which prevented him from exercising a more assertive masculine performance, Meridian needed to deal with an internal fight concerning his faith and his concept of manhood—not one that restrains and acquiesces, but one that fully provides choices and agency, whatever they are. By redefining those fundamental concepts, he is able to head towards changes that, although small, as noted by Malburne, "are the beginnings of a strong sense of self-awareness and race pride. They are the seeds for a later, strong revolution" (2007, p. 55). Meridian's effort, in

Baldwin's play, can be read as a metaphor for the process that black males undergo in their search for black masculine identities and the spaces they have to conquer in order to perform them. Meridian had to change his religious views in order to do that. Only by re-evaluating Christian assumptions he could be ready for change. A similar process occurs to Herald Loomis, the protagonist in *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, Wilson's play settled in the Pittsburgh of the early decade of last century.

The setting is crucial to the play because it translates a moment in which the industrial period in the North of the United States was blooming. Multitudes of men headed to northern spaces in pursue of jobs and new better lives. This movement northward meant more than physical bodies changing geographical spaces; it also involved deep and problematic negotiations of new identities and how to perform them. For black males, it also meant to learn new codes of masculinity and how to adjust to them. August Wilson created Seth Holly's boardinghouse in order to convey how that process occurs and what happens to the people undergoing it.

After emancipation, African Americans in the South experienced great hardship under the Jim Crow laws¹¹, a fact that enhanced migration in order to escape from racist and segregationist oppression. Jeremy, for instance, the twenty-five year old guitar player seems to fit into this pattern: he comes from North Carolina to take his chances in the frenzy of Pittsburgh economic growth. Nevertheless, Jeremy has no project for himself, "his spirit has yet to be molded into song"¹², as stressed by the author's presentation of Jeremy. He is an identity in transit, for him the boarding house is exactly a place to stay between the next one. Jeremy's mobility is representative of his yet unconscious search for identity. What the

¹¹ When the Civil War ended, Northern politicians and anti-slavery activists sought to transform the South through a process called Reconstruction, which ended in 1877. After Reconstruction emerged the Jim Crow, a system of laws, customs, and ideas by which the white South kept black Southerners oppressed.

¹² WILSON, August. *Joe Turner's come and gone*. New York: Plume, 1994, p. 12. Further references are to this edition and will be included parenthetically in the text. The title will be abbreviated JTCG followed by page number.

play makes clear, though, is that moving from the South does not mean improvement in racial terms. Jeremy is equally discriminated up there too, as when he is put in jail by the police for foolish reasons and is charged fifty cents by “the white fellow” to keep his job. As he refuses to accept the deal, he is fired, a fact that means nothing to the system, since Jeremy can be easily and quickly replaced. Jeremy and thousands of others are just ciphers, they do not represent anything, they are disembodied no ones that come and go. It is not by chance that he leaves the boardinghouse with Molly Cunningham some days later, restarting the cycle of endless search.

It is the arrival of Herald Loomis, though, that is going to shake the apparently calm order of things settled by Seth and Bertha, the boardinghouse owners. Loomis arrives with his eleven-year old girl Zonia looking for a room to stay. Unlike Jeremy, who is light head and cool, Loomis has a history and is described as

[a] man driven not by the hellhounds that seemingly bay at his heels, but by his search for a world that speaks to something about himself. He is unable to harmonize the forces that swirl around him and seeks to recreate the world into one that contains his image. He wears a hat and a long wool coat. (JTCCG, p. 14).

For John Hannah, Loomis represents “a self fragmented by slavery and its aftermath” (2007, p. 136). After being imprisoned by Joe Turner's chain gang and serving seven years of forced work, Loomis becomes a shadow of himself, “lost without a sense of self, family, or community” (Hannah, 2007, p. 136). Loomis needs healing, a spiritual one that he will be able to get with Bynum's help and by reassessing his world views, including the religious —and Christian— ones.

At a certain moment Bynum, the boardinghouse permanent resident, informs Seth and Bertha that Loomis is, or used to be, a deacon. A deacon is, in general terms, a church official, either male or female, who is below a priest in rank and who performs some of the duties of a priest. Loomis, thus, had a connection to the Christian Church, he partook of its beliefs and assumptions

in a previous time. As a Christian, Loomis shared the belief that God's justice was for all His children, that God was the protective Father who would never allow his children to be lost and enslaved by others again. His Joe Turner's experience blew these beliefs up, but Loomis was unable to rearticulate the pieces of his former faith and his former self. He is even unable to get into a church, as Seth notices in his conversation with Berta: "I ain't talking about him going to church, I'm talking about him hanging around *outside* the church" (JTCCG, p. 33). Loomis's behavior seems to emphasize that the Christian Church is no longer a meaningful place for him, although he tries hard in order to keep a bond with Martha, his lost wife to whom he is desperately seeking. Loomis knows he can no longer keep his faith on Christianity after Joe Turner has come for him, but at this point he does not know yet how to unbind himself from it. That makes of Bynum a key element in Loomis standing up from his loss and tragedy.

It is during the Juba dance incident¹³ that Bynum manages to make Loomis to verbalize his vision, the walking bones on water, a metaphor for African Americans within the social fabric of racism and exploitation: the skeletons walk without purpose, then sunk down the water, then have flesh upon the bones, then are unable to move. It is a vision that ends in paralysis, and utterly terrifies Loomis, to the point that himself is also unable to stand up and walk. Loomis' vision reinforces the idea that his spiritual bonds are not connected to Christianity, but to his racial memory and ancestry. In order to overcome Joe Turner and the personal destruction of his self, Loomis will have to find the way to be reconnected with his racial past. That is the only perspective towards the reconstruction of his masculinity in all senses: as a father, as a husband, as a man who

¹³ Wilson describes the ritual of the Juba in stage directions as: "reminiscent of the ring shouts 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" (JTCCG, p. 52). In the play, the Juba performance establishes a bond among the characters and makes them conscious of a shared cultural heritage and history.

is able to rule his own fate and to long for new bonds. The scene in which Loomis desperately tries to create a connection with Mattie, even a sexual one, conveys how much he is stripped of any model of masculinity at all:

LOOMIS: Herald Loomis got a mind seem like you a part of it since I first seen you. It's been a long time since I seen a full woman. I can smell you from here. I know you got Herald Loomis in your mind, can't keep him apart from it. Come on and be with Herald Loomis. (LOOMIS *has crossed to MATTIE. He touches her awkwardly, gently, tenderly. Inside he howls like a lost wolf pup whose hunger is deep. He goes to touch her but finds he cannot.*)
I done forgot how to touch. (JTTCG, p. 77)

This passage tells a lot about what is understood as masculinity. Loomis is able to feel desire —, but he is not able to exercise it. If traditional notions of manhood define it in terms of sexual power, Loomis is definitely emasculated: he forgot how to touch, he forgot how to love. He is not even a half-man, he is a torn subject who cannot make sense of his pieces. It is only through Bynum's support that he will undergo the process of reassembling his fragmented self. The confrontation with Martha, the wife he has been seeking for a long time, is the seminal episode that points out the healing path to Loomis. At a certain point of their conversation, Martha tells him that he needs to look for Jesus, if he has fallen, the church can save him again. Then, Martha starts to quote the Bible, in an attempt to "resurrect" Loomis' dead faith. The dialogue proceeds as Martha goes on reciting Psalm 23 and Loomis provides answers that question the very meaning of the Psalm. From Loomis' elaboration, Jesus emerges as the white man's God, the Joe Turner's God, "standing there (...) grinning" at Black people, mocking their fates and their sufferings. (JTTCG, p. 92). Martha argues that Jesus offers salvation and Loomis, again, questions what kind of salvation that could be:

LOOMIS: I been wading 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? My

enemies all around me picking the flesh from my bones. I'm choking on my own blood and all you got to give is salvation? (JTTCG, p. 93)

What Loomis tries to explain Martha is that he, like Jesus, lived his personal *via crucis*, but his atonement did not worth. The Christian model is not enough to make him a “full man”, and, in a last gesture of refusal of such a model, he does not allow himself to be cleansed through the blood of the lamb, that is, to accept the imposition of a model from outside. When Loomis says “I can bleed for myself” (JTTCG, p. 93) he is ready, like Meridian, to come to his own realization. Loomis can finally understand what Bynum meant from finding one’s own song, from within. After performing his ritual of revelation and self-discovery, Loomis, “having accepted the responsibility for his own presence in the world, (...) is free to soar above the environs that weighed and pushed his spirit into terrifying contractions” (JTTCG, p. 94). Loomis leaves the boardinghouse, followed by Mattie, suggesting that both can now be together as a full man and a full woman. The boarding house, a place of transition, where unstable and fragmented identities pass through—as emphasized by Jeremy and Molly—, is not their place anymore. Like Meridian in *Blues for Mister Charles*, Loomis managed to redefine to himself what a man is and how to have control over this definition. For both, this achievement demanded a burning process that meant to break away from religious assumptions deeply assimilated and taken for granted. Overcoming them is only a step further, not the final one, since ontological issues—being a man, a woman, a human being, a black person, a white person— always call for new evaluations and redefinitions.

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