AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Title: Conflicting Perspectives, Conflicting Realities: Violent Ramifications in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*

Abstract approved: 

Toni Morrison's Paradise employs a narrative perspective that moves between characters, demonstrating their disparate experiencings of reality resulting from differing perspectives. To achieve the effect of a limited narrative perspective, Morrison employs (communal) free indirect discourse as a narrative mode in which the voice of a character or group is fused with the voice of the narrator, often times so subtly that the exact point of these voices' convergence and/or divergence is difficult to determine. (Communal) free indirect discourse allows Morrison's narrator to utilize a narrative mode that places her/him in the experiential field of the character or group while still preserving the authorial mode, thereby limiting the narrator's perceptions to those of the character.

To illustrate that limited perspective and limited understanding result in mis-directed violence as ultimately manifested in the Convent raid, Morrison delineates the differing ways in which the Ruby fathers and sons understand the words on the Oven lip, the Ruby community's shared and inaccurate perception of Billie Delia as a sexually promiscuous youth, the level of crisis for each of the Convent women, and the Convent women's ceremony of unification and salvation, about which the Ruby men know nothing.

Through the use of a shifting narrative perspective mostly absent of omniscient commentary, and frequent employment of (communal) free indirect discourse that reinforces the understanding that the fragmented narratives are positioned within the perspective of a particular character or group, Morrison forces her reader to develop her or his own understanding of events as the novel begins, to constantly revise this understanding as the novel progresses, and to finally adopt the privileged position of a non-limited, fully informed narrator with panoramic comprehension of all perspectives. Consequently, Morrison's reader must explain, comment upon, and interpret the events of the novel, thereby participating in the construction of its meaning.

CONFLICTING PERSPECTIVES, CONFLICTING REALITIES: VIOLENT RAMIFICATIONS IN TONI MORRISON'S PARADISE

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> They shoot the white girl first. With the rest they can take their time. No need to hurry out here. (3)

With the first sentence of Toni Morrison's Paradise, "They shoot the white girl first," readers have been presented with a climactic event of stunning immediacy (3). Morrison does not write this line casually. In her essay, "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature," Morrison eloquently explains "some of the ways in which [she] activate[s] language and ways in which that language activates" her in return (385). To explain, she addresses only the first sentence of each of her novels written to date. Morrison's The Bluest Eye begins, "Quiet as it's kept, there were no marigolds in the fall of 1941" (qtd. in "Unspeakable" 385). Regarding this first sentence of her first novel, Morrison writes:

> Nothing fancy here. No words need looking up; they are ordinary, everyday words. Yet I hoped the simplicity was not simple-minded, but devious, even loaded. And that the process of selecting each word, for itself and its relationship to the others in the sentence, along with the rejection of others for their echoes, for what is determined and what is not determined, what is almost there and what must be gleaned, would not theatricalize itself, would not erect a proscenium--at least not a noticeable one. (385)

Morrison articulately continues to illuminate her intentions with this first sentence for three full pages, and she is equally expressive with her explanations regarding the first sentences of Sula, Song of Solomon, Tar Baby and Beloved. One cannot mistake how fundamentally important the first sentences of her novels are to Toni Morrison, nor can one misunderstand how hard she works to make these few words do so much, carry such significance, articulate such meaning.

Yet Paradise begins with Morrison's arguably most simple, most straight-forward, declarative sentence among all of her novels. However, recalling Morrison's hope that this "simplicity [is] not simple-minded, but devious, even loaded," looking closely at the first sentence of Paradise can yield substantial meaning. After a careful analysis of each word and its interrelating significance in this simple syntactic structure, one might rephrase the novel's first sentence as such: A group of at least two people, who can be characterized as a mob because their action of shooting is attributed to the group, to "They," consciously and purposely commit an extreme act of violence that, although the result of being shot cannot yet be determined, was intended at least to harm and at most to kill a young person, whom the mob consciously identifies as Caucasian and female, before moving on to visit violence on someone or something else. Perhaps I am being ambitious regarding what a first-time reader might be able to glean from this initial sentence, but my explication, although clumsy, is accurate. Certainly, all that Morrison intends is not contained within my sentence; but all that my rephrasing says is contained within Morrison's.

But this conclusion may in fact help the reader very little. A writer of Morrison's intellect and purpose may intend that we analyze the opening in this way, however,

because doing so keeps us from asking a more important question. This type of analysis may be just the misdirection that allows Morrison's novelistic sleight of hand, for after all of this analysis, we may not think to consider who is telling us that "They shoot the white girl first" (3).[1]

Narrative perspective is of paramount importance, yet the immediacy and climactic tension of this sentence serve to dodge the issue. On an initial reading, we might be too concerned with who "They" are, and with who "the white girl" is, and with why she is being "shot first," to stop and consider the narrator's point of view in this brief and explosive sentence. We readers are too anxious to get to the next word, the next sentence, the next page, to stop and consider that which we so often take for granted--the narrator. Perhaps not until we have seemingly jumped inside Mavis Albright's head at the beginning of the second section of Paradise and begun experiencing her horrible reality do we take pause and notice a sort of "malelessness," to borrow a word from the Convent women much later in the novel; a sensation drastically different from the utterly male perspective permeating the novel's initial chapter, "Ruby" (177). But there are earlier instances which demonstrate that Morrison's narrator in Paradise has a "fluid, constantly shifting perspective with [. . .] free and easy movement among the worlds of all of the characters," as Jeanne Rosier Smith claims about the narrator of Tar Baby (145).

In Louis Menand's review for The New Yorker, he writes that Paradise is Morrison's most Faulknerian novel because in large part "[i]ts analogues are 'The Sound and the Fury' (1929) and 'As I Lay Dying' (1930), books organized as sequences of distinct narration, each narration having the point of view of a particular

character, each challengingly indirect" (80). Indeed, it becomes clear very early in Paradise that the narrator is presenting the Convent raid from the perspective of the men who are there to do the shooting. The first paragraph alerts the reader to this masculine perspective immediately: "They shoot the white girl first. With the rest they can take their time. No need to hurry out here. They are seventeen miles from a town which has ninety miles between it and any other. Hiding places will be plentiful in the Convent, but there is time and the day has just begun" (my emphasis, 3). They, of course, are the men. And three of these first five sentences refer directly to them as the subjects of the sentences, thereby clarifying this male perspective. But it is the third sentence, brief and easy to blast through in our eagerness to know what is happening in this highly charged scene, that should make the reader take pause: "No need to hurry out here." Here? Shouldn't it be "there"? Even in the present tense of this first chapter, shouldn't a third-person omniscient narrator, "who is allowed the right of access to all secret places," in describing the men--the "They"--say, "No need to hurry out there" (Pascal 3, Morrison 3)? By saying "out here" the narrator seems to be part of the group, has placed her/himself within the group, is in fact narrating from the perspective of the group, which is "out here," looking for "the rest" of the women.[2] Well hidden behind the force and immediacy of this opening sentence, Morrison has tucked away her initial employment of free indirect discourse, which first appears in the novel's third sentence, "No need to hurry out here." Devious and loaded, indeed.

Scholars in some respects disagree about what free indirect discourse is, and how it functions in literature. Roy Pascal, in his seminal book on the subject published in

1977, The Dual Voice: Free Indirect Speech and its Functioning in the Nineteenth-Century Novel, traces the history of free indirect discourse.[3] In the preface, Pascal comments, "I found that to most people it was little and vaguely known, but with the help of a few published studies I was able to track down the first identification and analysis of the device, its first name 'le style indirect libre' [first named and identified by the Swiss linguist Charles Bally in 1912], and the arguments that led the Germans to invent their substitute for this term, 'erlebte Rede'" (vii).[4] Pascal identifies Henry James as one of the first novelists to embrace this new narrative style in which

> a moral evaluation, if it is to be genuine and valid can emerge only from the possibilities of their [referring to characters'] world, their personality, their mode of experience. The objectives can be achieved only if the reader can get 'within the skin' of the characters, can see and understand in their terms, from their perspective, without of course sacrificing his [or her] own objective position. (5-6)

Working toward a definition of style indirect libre, Pascal explains that the "simplest description [. . .] would be that the narrator, though preserving the authorial mode throughout and evading the 'dramatic' form of speech or dialogue, yet places himself, when reporting the words or thoughts of a character, directly into the experiential field of the character and adopts the latter's perspective in regard to both time and place" (9). In style indirect libre, "we hear [. . .] a dual voice, which, through vocabulary, sentence structure, and intonation subtly fuses the two voices of the character and the narrator" (Pascal 26). Louis Menand also clarifies the concept of free indirect discourse when, in a review of The Time of Our Time, he explains that, in The

Executioner's Song, Norman Mailer "render[ed] the language of his . . . characters in the novelistic style known as free indirect discourse--that is, to paraphrase them in language drawn from their own way of talking. He essentially created a voice between speech and narration" (30). Vaheed K. Ramazani's comments further illuminate the concept of free indirect discourse:

> The depiction of a character's perspective often entails an interpretation thereof. Intellectual, artistic, or valuational, this exegetic texture, however covert or implicit, is perforce the expression of the narrator's optic. Thus, while the separation of narrator and reflector is conceptually sound, we cannot expect that it always be clear-cut, since narratorial discourse, as the exclusive purveyor of both perspectives, may obfuscate to varying degrees the exact point of their divergence. The concept of free indirect discourse automatically includes the reported vocalizations of the reflector-character. (36-37)

With these explanations in mind, we recognize Morrison's third sentence, "No need to hurry out here," to be an instance of free indirect discourse. This is in fact an intonation in which the narrator is placing her/himself in the experiential field of the group of men. As the third person narration of the first two sentences is modified, we identify the subtle fusing of the voice of the narrator with the voice of the men. This sentence, though an expression of the narrator's optic, is a reported vocalization of the Convent raiders.

What differs between these explanations of the technique of free indirect discourse and Morrison's third sentence is that at this moment in the novel, we understand this

sentence to be a moment of free indirect discourse in which the narratorial perspective is fused not with one clearly identified character but rather with the valuation of the entire group. Here, then, is an instance of what Henry Louis Gates, Jr. calls "communal free indirect discourse" (212). In communal free indirect discourse, a single character's perspective cannot (necessarily) be identified; rather, the narrator adopts the characteristic idiom of a particular group. Gates describes this technique as it appears in Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God: "This idiomatic voice narrates almost completely the dramatic scene of the hurricane, where 'six eyes were questioning God.' One such passage serves as an excellent example of a communal free indirect discourse, of a narrative voice that is not fused with Janie's but which describes events in the idiom of Janie's free indirect discourse" (212).[5] In Morrison's opening scene, the idiomatic narrative voice is likewise fused with not any one of the men, but instead with any/all of them.

Morrison does not employ only the communal type of free indirect discourse, of course. As the men enter the Convent, we are told, "The leading man turns and gestures the separations: you two over there to the kitchen; two more upstairs; two others into the chapel. He saves himself, his brother and the one who thinks he is dreaming for the cellar" (my emphasis, 4). The "leading man," we realize, is Deacon Morgan, and the emphasized section of the above sentence shows the narratorial movement from the indirect discourse of the first part of the first sentence to the free indirect discourse of the second part, and then back into indirect discourse again with the second sentence.[6] When differentiating between direct discourse, indirect discourse, and free indirect discourse, Gates, referring again to a section from Their

Eyes, identifies moments of free indirect discourse for the following reasons: "Although when read aloud it sounds as if entire sections are in, or should be in, direct quotation, none of the sentences in this paragraph is direct discourse. There are no quotation marks here. The character's idiom, interspersed and contrasted colorfully with the narrator's voice, indicates nevertheless that this is an account of the words that Joe spoke to Janie" (210).[7] Likewise, Morrison's narrator presents us with a part of a sentence that evokes the idiomatic, commanding tone of Deacon Morgan. So clearly is Deek "talking" here that we might internalize this phrase as if it were, in fact, a quotation. It is not, however; it is the narrator, not Deek, that commands, "you two over there to the kitchen; two more upstairs; two others into the chapel" (4).[8]

Two men, Arnold and Jeff Fleetwood, follow this command, and as they look around the kitchen, we again recognize the narrator's subtle movement from third person, indirect discourse narration into a moment of communal free indirect discourse: "Together they scan dusty mason jars and what is left of last year's canning: tomatoes, green beans, peaches. Slack, they think. August just around the corner and these women have not even sorted, let alone washed, the jars" (my emphasis, 5). These Ruby men, who so value domesticity in women, scan the unkempt kitchen and opine that the women are slack. We are told this and we understand this to be the thoughts of the men. But who intimates the last line? The narrator? Arnold Fleetwood? Jeff Fleetwood? Both? Neither? Yes. All and none of them simultaneously.[9] The reader recognizes that the opinion being voiced is that of the Ruby men, and in this case, the Fleetwood men in particular. But it is the narrator, adopting the idiom, the opinion, and the perspective of these men who articulates the

message: These are lazy, ill-prepared, worthless women. In this moment of communal free indirect discourse, the reader begins to understand that the narrator is within "the experiential field" of Ruby men, and has adopted their "perspective in regard to both time and place" (Pascal 9). This narratorial observation is an attempt to represent a sense of the Ruby men's communal "consciousness without the apparent intrusion of a narrative voice," as Gates points out in his discussion of Their Eyes (209). These moments of (communal) free indirect discourse--and there are many more like instances in this first chapter--cause the reader to understand that the world being observed is the reality being experienced from the perspective of these men.[10] We know only what they know; we "see" only what they see; and no more. In "Ruby," the novel's first chapter, we are experiencing reality from the perspective of the Ruby men.

These moments of (communal) free indirect discourse are by no means limited only to this first chapter, however. An important instance of communal free indirect discourse occurs during the meeting between the Morgan men and the Fleetwood men, a consequential scene which I discuss at length later in this thesis. By simply mentioning Billie Delia's relationship with Arnette, K.D. is attributed with having performed a "genius stroke": "The Morgan uncles held in their smiles, while the Fleetwoods, father and son, bristled. Billie Delia was the fastest girl in town and speeding up by the second" (my emphasis, 59). Again, this statement cannot be ascribed to any of the men particularly. Instead, the "effect of the genius stroke was immediate" precisely because this statement is, in essence, "authored" by the Ruby community itself, in which everyone--or very nearly everyone, to be precise--in Ruby

regards the statement as true. It is the very functioning of this statement as an instance of communal free indirect discourse that allows, if not demands, that K.D.'s association of Arnette with Billie Delia is a "genius stroke." The inherent and communal recognition of this statement's "accuracy" is brilliantly demonstrated by Morrison via communal free indirect discourse.

Morrison's most striking, and perhaps most innovative, use of free indirect discourse occurs during Patricia Best-Cato's narrative. Pat is working on her project --"a collection of family trees; the genealogies of each of the fifteen families"--during which time a massive amalgam of Haven/Ruby history and stories floods her memory (187). Surely, this section serves the very practical function of informing the reader of the importance of certain events that form (and inform) the consciousness of the Ruby community, such as the profound and enduring effect of the "Disallowing": "Everything anybody wanted to know about the citizens of Haven or Ruby lay in the ramifications of that one rebuff out of many" (189). The reader begins to trust Patricia's analysis. We recognize the accuracy and disinterest with which she analyzes her surroundings. As Patricia begins to recall the deeply embedded blood law of racial purity instituted by the Original Fathers after having been disallowed by the light-skinned blacks of Fairly, Oklahoma, the reader's confidence in Patricia's nearly scientific method of investigation continues to grow:

> So the rule was set and lived a quietly throbbing life because it was never spoken of, except for the hint in words Zechariah forged for the Oven. More than a rule. A conundrum: "Beware the Furrow of His Brow," in which the "You" (understood), vocative case, was not a command to the

believers but a threat to those who had disallowed them. (195)

In this quotation, again we recognize that the narrator is employing free indirect discourse. This is a very clear instance where the "intellectual" and "valuational" text is necessarily "the expression of the narrator's optic" (Ramazani 36). Although this passage is structurally narration, we understand implicitly that this is Patricia's analysis of the words on the Oven lip that has been fused with the voice of the narrator. We feel that it is Patricia who recognizes the understood, vocative case "You" that precedes the message. We feel that it is Patricia who recognize that the message is more than a rule, that it is in fact a conundrum. These are the words, the style, that we know Patricia would use. We feel this way because the narrator's technique of free indirect discourse intentionally evokes these feelings, and thus, we realize that although the narrator is reporting the information, the narrator has done so from Patricia Best-Cato's perspective.

Having employed free indirect discourse, Morrison then moves into a large section of direct discourse in which Patricia is writing her thoughts down, recording them into her "project." The narrator signals this mode of narration markedly:

> she wrote: "Daddy, they don't hate us because Mama was your first customer [. . .] . But two others of those thirteen children Billie Delia is in love with, and there is something wrong with that but other than number and the blood rules I can't figure out what."
>
> Pat underscored the last five words then wrote down her mother's name, drew a line under it, enclosed it in a heart and continued:
>
> "The women really tried, Mama [. . .] . But when you made love he

must have said I love you and you understood that and it was true, too, because I have seen the desperation in his eyes ever since--no matter what business venture he thinks up."

Pat stopped and rubbed the callus on her middle finger. (196-201)

At this point, the narration has returned to indirect discourse: "her elbow and shoulder ached from gripping the pen so hard. Across the hall, through the bedroom door, she could hear her father snoring. She always wished him pleasant dreams [. . .]" (201). Then, Morrison does something problematic with the mode of narration. In two brief sentences, as Ramazani claims occurs in instances of free indirect discourse, the "narratorial discourse, as the exclusive purveyor of both perspectives [. . .] obfuscate[s] [. . .] the exact point of their divergence" (37).[11] Consider the following movement from indirect discourse to free indirect discourse:

He had describe to her once what Haven looked like when he got out of the army. He said he sat on his father's porch coughing, so nobody would know he was weeping for us. (my emphasis, 201)

In the first sentence, "her" refers to Patricia. In the second sentence, one of "us" literally is Patricia, not a reference to her. She would seem to be speaking/writing again, although the lack of any direct discourse punctuation (i.e. quotation marks) dictates otherwise. I refer again to Gates's description of a passage describing free indirect discourse in Their Eyes, which is directly applicable to what Morrison is doing here with Patricia and the narrator: "when read aloud it sounds as if entire sections are in, or should be in, direct quotation. [. . .] There are no quotation marks here. The character's idiom [. . .] indicates [. . .] that this is an account of the words that Joe

spoke to Janie" (my emphasis, 210). If we were to revise this quotation so that it would conclude with, "the words that Patricia wrote to Delia," Gates's comments could astutely be referring to the above passage from Paradise.

The fact that this section employs free indirect discourse is not exceptional. Indeed, moments of free indirect discourse appear on virtually every page in this novel. What is exceptional, however, is that although the above passage is not, in fact cannot be, direct discourse because of the conspicuous absence of the necessary quotation marks indicative of direct discourse, the narrator seems to assume that Pat is indeed still writing. For example:

> He said he sat on his father's porch coughing, so nobody would know he was weeping for us. His father, Fulton Best, and his mother, Olive, were inside, reading with great sorrow the applications he had filled out for the G.I. Bill funding. [. . .] Maybe he knew they would, which is why he just sent for us. [. . .] Their jaws must have dropped when *we* arrived, but other than Steward, nobody said anything directly. [. . .] But Fairy DuPres cursed him, saying, "God don't love ugly ways. Watch out He don't deny you what you love too."[12] [. . .]
>
> Pat sucked her teeth and pushed aside the Best file. She selected a composition notebook and without label or introduction continued to write.
>
> "She won't listen to me. Not one word. [. . .] Plus I am the one who washes sheets around here." (my emphasis, 201-02)

Although it is necessary for me to quote these sentences in order to properly

reproduce the punctuation (or the lack of it, rather) within its context, what is actually being said above is not of great importance. More than just demonstrating free indirect discourse, the narrator, by informing us in the middle paragraph that Pat "continued to write," subtly intimates that Patricia had in fact been writing in the previous paragraph even though the punctuation demands that this cannot be possible. The first paragraph contains clear instances of free indirect discourse that the narrator, in the second paragraph, presents as direct discourse by claiming that in the third paragraph, Pat will resume writing, although the punctuation dictates she had not been writing. To clarify, it is very clear that Patricia begins writing again with, "She won't listen to me," but when she had stopped writing is stunningly ambiguous (202).[13]

Thus, careful readers might be left scratching their heads. What is going on? We might say, as does critic John Leonard in his review of Paradise for The Nation, "So abundant, even prodigal, is Toni Morrison's first new novel since her Nobel Prize, so symphonic, light-struck and sheer, as if each page had been rubbed transparent, and so much the splendid sister of Beloved [. . .] that I realize I've been holding my breath since December 1993" (Leonard 25). However, I'd prefer to know why; or at least to venture a guess. I believe that as this section describing Patricia's "town project" is drawing to a conclusion, Morrison's employment of free indirect discourse subtly reminds the reader that even Patricia Best-Cato, whom we may have come to regard in the course of this chapter's ("Patricia") narration as an objective historian, an unbiased recorder of events, must rely fully on her perspective to inform her understanding of the information she relates. So believable is Patricia as a disinterested observer, as a teacher and as a self-proclaimed "scholar," that the reader may forget that hers is just

another perspective in this massive collision of perspectives (296). With these instances of free indirect discourse, we finally understand that no one or thing can be free from the constraints of perspective, for even the narrator in Paradise depends upon her/his characters' "world, their personality, their mode of experience" to establish a "bivocal utterance containing elements of both direct and indirect speech" (Pascal 6, Gates 208). In short, by employing free indirect discourse, Morrison has allowed her narrator to establish a series of distinct narratives which demonstrate that perspective is the prime informant on the way these characters experience reality.

Recognizing Morrison's use of free indirect discourse and communal free indirect discourse as a tool through which the narrator presents the specific and limited perspective of a character or of a group is essential to understanding one of the novel's major goals. The narrator, via (communal) free indirect discourse, is alerting the reader that perspective is inherently and perforce limited while simultaneously demonstrating that perspective is the primary informant on the way reality is experienced. Thus, a character's or a group's reality is in large part created by perspective. One of the prime concerns of Paradise is the delineation of the violent ramifications that seem to be necessitated by conflicting perspectives, which provoke discordant experiencings of reality.

Morrison's pervasive use of (communal) free indirect discourse throughout Paradise is no accident, of course; nor is it a "new" technique for Morrison. Monika Fludernik, in her extraordinary cataloguing of different techniques of free indirect discourse in fiction, cites Morrison texts (a minimum of) eighteen times to illuminate for her audience the different ways that free indirect discourse is signaled.[14] I have

only pointed to several of the very many instances of free indirect discourse and communal free indirect discourse in Paradise so that I might demonstrate that Morrison's narrator is consistently operating from the perspective of a particular character, or from a shared perspective of a group of characters. What my discussion demonstrates, as Jeanne Rosier Smith notices, is that rather "than supply narrative commentary that instructs readers how to judge the vast array of perspectives she presents, Morrison reserves judgment, insisting that each reader must establish his or her own bearing on the 'map' of her text" (149). This narration of Paradise is generally limited to the perspective of a particular person or group, and no additional information is available during that narrative form. The knowledge, the insights, the understanding all are reflections of the experiencing of reality of that particular person or group. Referring to Song of Solomon, Morrison explains that "the reader as narrator asks the questions the community asks, and both reader and 'voice' stand among the crowd, within it, with privileged intimacy and contact, but without any more privileged information than the crowd has" ("Unspeakable" 393). And this is the case in Paradise. We are privy to the various perspectives of the characters and groups, but that is all. We witness the violent bloom of the Convent raid, the seeds of which were planted by the dissonance of conflicting perspective.

In Paradise, Toni Morrison is employing a narrative perspective that moves between characters, thereby demonstrating their disparate experiencings of reality that result from their differing perspectives. To achieve the effect of a limited narrative perspective, Morrison utilizes (communal) free indirect discourse as a narrative mode in which the voice of a character or group is fused with the voice of the narrator,

oftentimes so subtly that the exact point of these voices' convergence and/or divergence is difficult to determine. (Communal) free indirect discourse allows Morrison's narrator to employ a narrative mode that places her/him in the experiential field of the character or group while still preserving the authorial mode, thereby limiting the narrator's perceptions to those of the character.

To illustrate that limited perspective and limited understanding result in mis-directed violence as ultimately manifested in the Convent raid, Morrison delineates the differing ways in which the Ruby fathers and sons understand the words on the Oven lip, the Ruby community's shared and inaccurate perception of Billie Delia as a sexually promiscuous youth, the level of crisis for each of the Convent women, and the Convent women's ceremony of unification and salvation, about which the Ruby men know nothing. Through the use of a shifting narrative perspective mostly absent of omniscient commentary, and frequent employment of (communal) free indirect discourse that reinforces the understanding that the fragmented narratives are positioned within the perspective of a particular character or group, Morrison forces her reader to develop her or his own understanding of events as the novel begins, to constantly revise this understanding as the novel progresses, and to finally adopt the privileged position of a non-limited, fully informed narrator with panoramic comprehension of all perspectives. Consequently, Morrison's reader must explain, comment upon, and interpret the events of the novel, thereby participating in the construction of its meaning. Thus, the reader, as Morrison intends, becomes a fundamental component of, and an active participant in, the machinations of Paradise.

Chapter II: Perspective, Perception, and the Experiencing of Reality

> "Beware the Furrow of His Brow." That's what it says clear as daylight. That's not a suggestion; that's an order!" [said Reverend Pulliam.]
>
> "Well, no. It's not clear as daylight," said [Reverend] Misner. "It says '[. . .] the Furrow of His Brow.' There is no 'Beware' on it." (86)

How, then, do the words attached to the lip of the Ruby communal Oven, about which the two reverends are arguing, read? Both Reverend Pulliam, representative of tradition and the Founding Fathers of Haven and Ruby, and Reverend Misner, representative of change and the young sons of Ruby, emphatically believe their differing pronouncements. And in the literal world in which Ruby exists, both cannot be accurate. Yet the narrator informs us that in regards to the words on the Oven lip, from the perspective of the Ruby women, "opinions were varied, confusing, even incoherent, because feelings ran so high over the matter" (83).[15] So, how do the words read?

All of these people literally are looking at the same thing: words forged by Zechariah "Big Papa" Morgan, Stew and Deacon Morgan's grandfather, and one of the original Founding Fathers, from the valuable iron of crooked nails. And they all even agree that the words "the Furrow of His Brow" are still clearly visible. However, these extant words do not mean the same thing to these two disparate groups.[16] The Ruby sons perhaps do not literally see, but certainly do infer, the word "Be" as an antecedent to "the Furrow of His Brow." During the town meeting at Richard

Misner's Calvary church, where citizens of Ruby "all were asked to show up," the tension between the two groups--the Ruby sons and the traditional town elders--has risen to a level heretofore unknown to any Haven or Ruby citizens (83, 84). Not only are the words on the Oven lip being questioned, but the very understanding of history, of what the term "ex-slave" signifies is being contested as well:

> "No ex-slave would tell us to be scared all the time. To 'beware' God. To always be ducking and diving [. . .] . [W]hat kind of message is that?
>
> No ex-slave who had the guts to make his own way, build a town out of nothing, could think like that. No ex-slave--"
>
> Deacon Morgan cut him off. "That's my grandfather you're talking about. Quit calling him an ex-slave like that's all he was. He was also an ex-lieutenant governor, an ex-banker, an ex-deacon and a whole lot of other exes, and he wasn't making his own way; he was part of a whole group making their own way."
>
> [Luther Beauchamp's son, Destry,] was firm. "He was born in slavery times, sir; he was a slave, wasn't he?"
>
> "Everybody born in slavery time wasn't a slave. Not the way you mean it."
>
> "There's just one way to mean it sir," said Destry.
>
> "You don't know <u>what</u> you're talking about!" (84)

As the discussion begins, "the atmosphere was pleasant, people simply curious"; but as the Ruby sons begin to present their views, the founding fathers become offended, then enraged (84). While trying to determine how to read the Oven's message, the

two parties cannot even agree on a term ("ex-slave"?) to identify Zechariah Morgan, the man who forged the words. Jeanne Rosier Smith, speaking generally regarding Morrison's work, points out that Morrison has a strong "impulse toward challenging the possibility of a unified perspective" (7).[17] This town meeting clearly demonstrates that the rift between the sons and the fathers has expanded to the point where common, unified perspective, regardless of what is being discussed, is seemingly unattainable.

Conversely, the Ruby Fathers believe with unambivalent certainty that the lip is a commandment: "Beware the Furrow of His Brow." Whether the word "Beware" is literally visible, even to these men, is ambiguous, however. During the raid on the Convent, the narrator, operating from Arnold Fleetwood's point of view by way of occasional free indirect discourse, remembers that mystery and uncertainty have always surrounded the words on the Oven lip:

> It is still not clear where the words came from. Something he heard, invented, or something whispered to him while he slept curled over his tools in a wagon bed. His name was Morgan and who knew if he invented or stole the half-dozen or so words he forged. Words that seemed at first to bless them; later to confound them; finally to announce that they had lost. (7)[18]

The origin of the Oven's message, it would seem, is just as enigmatic as the words themselves. Perhaps Zechariah Morgan overheard the words--at a church, or at a meeting somewhere. Or maybe he invented the words, like a poem or a verse from a song. Or "something"--some kind of supernatural, even divine, agent perhaps--

revealed the words to "Big Papa" in a dream. All of these, and more, sundry modes of inspiration are viable in the world of Morrison's novel; but which, if any, is correct has always been, and still remains, an elaborate and monumental conundrum to the Ruby community. In the above quotation, which the narrator gathers from Arnold Fleetwood's re-membering of the original forging of the Oven's message, the phrase "half-dozen or so words" also subtly reflects the uncertainty surrounding the message on the Oven lip, intimating that the original words--even the exact number of them, apparently--are indeterminable.[19] Not only are these separate groups presently unable to agree upon the signification of the Oven words, but they, too, cannot determine absolutely what the fractured message literally once said.

Furthermore, this passage expressly reveals that not only do the words presently signify different things to different people--as this town meeting exposes--but also that the words can signify presently, and have signified in the past, different things to the same person or group at different moments in time. Originally, Big Papa Morgan's words blessed the citizens of Haven. But as time's progression demanded change, Haven, and then Ruby, was bewildered and/or confused by the words until, finally, the Oven's message now declares the Founding Fathers have been beaten and beat down. The evolution of the words' meaning traces the path from the utopian Haven to the discontented Ruby. Among other things, change, it would seem, has won, destroying the Founding Fathers' dream:

> From Haven, a dreamtown in Oklahoma Territory, to Haven, a ghosttown in Oklahoma State. Freedmen who stood tall in 1889 dropped to their knees in 1934 and were stomach-crawling by 1948. [. . .] One thousand

> citizens in 1905 becoming five hundred by 1934. Then two hundred, then eighty. [. . .] [F]inally the owners of the bits and pieces who had not walked off in disgust welcomed any offer from a white speculator, so eager were they to get away and try someplace else. [. . .] Loving what Haven had been--the idea of it and the reach--they carried that devotion, gentling and nursing it [. . .] and they made up their minds to do it again. (5-6)[20]

Ruby, in the present, no longer resembles the black man's utopia that was Haven in the beginning, 1889. And as Arnold Fleetwood, one of the raiding men, stands in the Convent kitchen touching "the stove hood admiring its construction and power," preparing to continue the attack he and the other representatives of the Ruby patriarchs have begun, the reader begins to fully appreciate how these same, but devastatingly ambiguous, words and ideas of words, which mean, and have meant, such different things (at different times and to different people), have affected Ruby, and by direct extension the Convent community, which is under assault as the novel opens (6).[21]

An important bit of dialogue clearly demarcates the two most disparate groups and the correspondingly discrete perspectives within the Ruby community:

> "Did [Miss Esther] see them?" asked the sons.
>
> "Better than that!" shouted the fathers. "She felt them, touched them, put her finger on them!" (83).

Here, the narrator is attributing the first question not to Royal or Destry Beauchamp, both of whom speak individually at this meeting of the town, nor to any of the other

Ruby youth present--as he addresses the youth, Deacon Morgan "turn[s] his head to include [. . .] Hurston and Caline Poole, Lorcas and Linda Sands," all children of the Ruby elders (85). It is "the sons"--collectively--who address this question to "the fathers," who likewise respond in unison, as if "the fathers," too, were a single entity. This pluralization of speakers by the narrator serves not only to establish the two main groups in Ruby who are in contention, but also to crystallize the very different, communal perspectives of these two groups. Youth rebels against elder, son(s) usurp(s) father(s), simultaneously individually (Royal Beauchamp is contesting his father, Luther, among others) and collectively (the sons are challenging the fathers); and this very old and often-used motif unites each group in its struggle against the other while coevally establishing the groups' different beliefs regarding the nature of reality, and their suggestion for existing "properly" within it.[22]

Clearly, different groups of people--and here I have focused on the founding fathers and the Ruby sons--believe that the words on the oven, though perhaps the same (or at least nearly the same) in form, demand very different explications. The differences in opinion have caused extreme, and at times even violent, contention between the Ruby fathers and their sons. If different groups are looking at the same words, why do they believe that they say and/or mean such different things? And why do these differing opinions regarding the nature of the Oven's message evoke such powerful, even dangerous, emotions? Why are the words, though literally the same, understood with such disparity? And, once again, how do the words read?

The inherent interconnectiveness and semiotic elasticity of language certainly plays a part in these discrepancies of understanding regarding the Oven words. It is

conceivable that the inability to define with absolute consistency each word in the Oven's brief message does create disagreement, that the metaphorical leapings and connotations of each word prohibits a single comprehension, that any type of objective correlative is in and of itself a fallacy. But more important to the message on the lip of the Oven than the inherent difficulty, if not impossibility, of any "universal" understanding of language is, I think, that the way each person conceives of the message as a whole, with each word informing and being informed by every other word, ultimately depends on each person's wholly unique perspective. For example, Steward and Deacon Morgan, and the other Ruby fathers, conceive the Oven's words so differently than do Reverend Misner and Destry Beauchamp, and the other Ruby youth, because of the vast difference in life experience, a fundamental influence of individual perspective. Perspective can be defined as, and is in fact informed by, those political, social, economic, moral, racial, gender, sexual, and religious positions and ideologies, both public and private, which are internalized so thoroughly as to comprise and to become one's point of view, one's instincts, one's disposition, one's personality, one's consciousness, one's self; and from this socially constructed position, which is informed by every detail--real and imagined, conscious and unconscious, profound and mundane--in life (the remembered and re-membered past, the conceived present, and the forecasted future) and of life experience, one perceives "reality."[23] In a general sense, perspective is what most significantly influences, and finally defines, perception--the interpretation, understanding and apprehension of reality reached through a consensus of the senses, intellect, and imagination--the translation of which constitutes the experiencing of "reality."

Simply put, perspective determines every character's perception, which in turn constitutes her or his unique experiencing of reality. The experience of reality is (or becomes) reality itself. As Valerie Smith explains, "It is a truism of structuralist and post-structuralist discourse that experience is an effect of representation, not its unproblematic referent--that representation, in other words, is inescapable" (343). Thus, no external reality exists independent from, or of, the experiencing of reality itself. Experience is necessarily personal, is necessarily informed by perception which, in turn, is informed by perspective, all of which are unique to the individual. Thus, the paradigm of "reality" is (at least) dichotomous, progressing from perspective to perception and finally to the experiencing of reality; or retrograding from an individual's unique conception of reality back to the perception and finally to perspective. Knowing a character's (or a group's) perspective allows the reader to better understand that character's (or that group's) perception of reality, helps us to see the world as if through her or his (or their) eyes. In Paradise, Toni Morrison has crafted a novel which repeatedly demonstrates the disjointedness of perception among different persons and different communities, and which takes these discordant perceptions through their complete course, from the contradictory perceptions of reality informed initially by perspective to the final action which these discordant perceptions demand, thereby demonstrating the full and horrible ramifications that results from the collision of "perspectified" perceptions of reality and of "perspectified" conceptions of earthly, attainable paradise. A question the novel demands we ask is how and why violence has become a viable, a justifiable, a necessary course of action for the Ruby fathers--those nine men who raid the Convent

to defend their "worthy" cause, to save what, from their perspective, is (or was) paradise.

The answer lies in the dissonance of perception provoked, ultimately, by discrete perspectives, which are clearly identified and adopted by Morrison's narrator. When one perception and experience of "reality" differs so completely from, or is absolutely foreign to, another perception of "reality," violence can, or more accurately, will, occur. When a series of events, large or small, are amplified by the lens of perception, which in turn has been modified by the controlling lens of perspective, the effect is that an outcast, autonomous group of chaotic and at times dysfunctional women are executed by a vigilante mob of men who believe--who emphatically know, rather--that violent action has become necessary: "There were irreconcilable differences among the congregations in town [Ruby], but members from all of them merged solidly on the necessity of this action: Do what you have to. Neither the Convent nor the women in it can continue" (9-10). The various factions within the Ruby patriarchy have come to this communal realization, this shared perspective, articulated by the narrator here via communal free indirect discourse. Thus, the founding fathers of Ruby, who have carried on the traditions of the Haven founding fathers, perceive that their way of life, their self-made paradise, their earthly utopia, has been, and continues to be, threatened. As Patricia Storace explains in her illuminating review of Paradise, the "Ruby men's thinking, motives and actions are shaped and transformed and distorted by the reality of the world outside Ruby which works to thwart their personal freedom and professional ambitions, and hold their lives in mortal danger" (66). As a result of this "shaped and transformed and distorted" experiencing of reality demanded by the

changing world outside (and inside) Ruby, the town patriarchs respond with the rhetoric of finalizing violence in an attempt to resurrect their previously unchallenged, and unchallengable, authority by eliminating any group that attempts to distort or subvert their conception of earthly paradise informed by their unified perspective, and thereby re-establishing the Ruby patriarch's control.[24]

Chapter III: Communal Perception and Unified Belief

Billie Delia was the fastest girl in town and speeding up by the second. (59)

Although not as prominent as the conflicting perceptions regarding the words on the lip of the Ruby communal Oven, the community's perception of Billie Delia Best is similarly telling, and likewise important. As Reverend Richard Misner mediates the meeting between Steward, Deacon, and K.D. (the Morgan men) and Arnold and Jefferson Fleetwood, the town's various perceptions of Billie Delia are made clear to the reader.[25] This veiled discussion ostensibly is about the slap K.D. administered to Arnette at the Oven; but in fact the negotiations on a subsonic frequency address how best to take care of Arnette, who is pregnant by K.D. The pregnancy, however, is not realized by the community in general nor by Reverend Misner, who demonstrates his ignorance as he attempts to begin the discussion with a brief summation: "Let me lay out the situation as I know it. Correct me, you all, if I get it wrong or leave out something. My understanding is that K.D. here has done an injury, a serious injury, to Arnette" (58). To Richard Misner, slapping a fifteen-year-old girl hard across the face is a "serious injury" which constitutes "a problem with [K.D.'s] temper" (58). However, to both the Fleetwood men and the Morgan men, the "serious injury" is not a slap in the face; rather, it is the reputations of both families that are in real danger of "serious injury" because of the baby that K.D. and Arnette conceived and which Arnette is carrying.

To these two powerful, patriarchal founding families, a serious injury to their

reputations is the most devastating type of injury that they can presently imagine. A girl being struck in the face is not necessarily problematic to these men. Steward even suggests that the fact that Arnette, who "ain't been hit since she was two years old," has avoided harsh corporeal punishment "may be the problem" (59). The slap, to these men's way of thinking, at least demonstrates that the male, K.D., holds power over the female, Arnette. The issue that these men are addressing by way of circumlocution deals with their deep-seated fear that they are losing control over the young people in Ruby, that they are no longer able to demand strict, uncompromising adherence to their (the Ruby Fathers') moral and social edicts. Although Arnette is slapped by K.D., the fact that she is pregnant is, more than anything else, a slap in the collective face of the Ruby patriarchs.

These men, here representative of the tradition of strict patriarchy, realize that they are losing their grip on the Ruby that they remember, the idealized Ruby of their youth. The stories of the past, most importantly the story of the Disallowing and subsequent founding of Haven, as Patricia Storace points out, have undergone a "complex evolution [. . .] from history to myth" (66). Thus, these stories/histories have taken on the cultural significance and communal importance allotted to myth.[26] Myth critic Bronislaw Malinowski, speaking generally about myth (and not specifically about Morrison), explains this new significance:

> Myth supplies a retrospective pattern of moral values, sociological order and magical belief [. . .] . It fulfills a function sui generis closely connected with the nature of tradition, and the continuity of culture, with the relation between age and youth, and with the human attitude towards

> the past. The function of myth [. . .] is to strengthen tradition and endow it with a greater value and prestige by tracing it back to a higher [and] better [and] more supernatural reality of initial events. (qtd. in Denard 20)

The stories that surround the Original Fathers and the founding of Haven are indeed a higher, better, and more supernatural reality delineating the initial events. It is from this storied past, this created myth, that the Ruby fathers inform their present mores, their moral values and their sociological order.[27] Haven, in the minds of the Ruby men, was a mythic utopia, which they are striving to regain, which the Ruby sons are subverting, and which the slow, constant march of time is eroding. Billie Delia, later in the novel's timeline as she is standing with Arnette and K.D. at their wedding, demonstrates cognizance of the fathers' unvoiced concerns:

> But to Billie Delia the real battle was not about infant life or a bride's reputation but about disobedience, which meant, of course, the stallions were fighting about who controlled the mares and their foals. Senior Pulliam had scripture and history on his side. Misner had scripture and the future on his. (150)

Although several individual instances have of late provoked the founding fathers, it is the progressively more-often and -intense accumulation of youthful "disobedience" that frightens these men, that portends their growing archaism in an evolving (dilapidating, to the men) world, that emphasizes their loss of control over their wives/"mares" and, more noticeably, their youth/"foals" (150). The founding fathers have only a fragile, evanescent hold on a changing world, and though the men will not admit to it, Billie Delia, among others, recognizes that uncontrollable change is the

common denominator of all their fears.[28]

Billie Delia's awareness of the Ruby patriarchs' foreboding, although articulated later in the course of the novel, makes Misner's comment, "that K.D. here has done an injury, a serious injury, to Arnette," even more striking because although it is literally accurate within the context he intends, his comment is also an astute observation applicable to the situation of the men, who fear that they are being slapped in the face, are being dealt a serious injury, by a youthful contingent that no longer reveres them, nor even respectfully recognizes their dominant authority (58). The narrator, adopting the perspective of the Ruby women and the patriarchs explains: "It would have been better for everyone if the young people had spoken softly, acknowledged their upbringing as they presented their view. But they didn't want to discuss; they wanted to instruct" (84). The narrator here reveals that the Ruby fathers feel accosted by the dawning realization that they are becoming relics of their idealized past. Richard Misner's words ("that K.D. here has done an injury, a serious injury, to Arnette"), then, can signify both meanings while simultaneously maintaining accuracy in relation to the perspective of each party involved (58). The Reverend's comment, because of the semantic complexity inherent to all syntactic structures, demonstrates the multiple meanings of a simple phrase when differing perspectives inform characters' perceptions. This brief sentence--here cast into the role of a "reality" of sorts--is experienced differently, is understood according to perspective, and thus alludes to the discrete understandings which characterize the Oven words.

Certainly the Fleetwood men are legitimately concerned about the well-being of Arnette; but this well-being comes secondary to the real issue being discussed coevally

in the subtle undercurrents of the conversation:

> K.D. continued. "I respect your daughter--"
>
> "Since when?" Jeff asked him.
>
> "I always respected her from when she was that high." K.D. leveled his hand around his waist. "Ask anybody. Ask her girlfriend, Billie Delia. Billie Delia will tell you that."
>
> The effect of the genius stroke was immediate. The Morgan uncles held in their smiles, while the Fleetwoods, father and son, bristled. Billie Delia was the fastest girl in town and speeding up by the second. (59)

K.D.'s comment is a "genius stroke" because by simply mentioning Arnette's closest friend Billie Delia, a girl whom almost the entire community perceives to be extremely sexually promiscuous, K.D. has cast a heavy shadow of doubt onto Arnette's own sexual habits. K.D.'s juxtapositioning of Arnette and Billie Delia causes Arnette's chastity to be called into question because of proximity alone. K.D. has effectively reproportioned the blame for the relationship resulting in pregnancy, which prior to his comment had been primarily K.D.'s own. K.D., aware of Ruby's communal perspective regarding Billie Delia, which is demonstrated by Morrison's employment of communal free indirect discourse with the narrator's declaration that she "was the fastest girl in town and speeding up by the second," has effectively demanded that the Fleetwood perception of him as sexual aggressor be revised by simply mentioning Billie Delia's name. Arnold and Jeff have been forced to recognize (perhaps admit is closer to the truth) that Arnette, too, is to blame.

Although this redistribution of blame may in fact be warranted, if not justified, the

validity of simply declaring the two girls' friendship and thus effectively denigrating Arnette's reputation is brought under investigation.[29] Because Billie Delia is perceived as "the fastest girl in town and speeding up by the second," Arnette is guilty by association (59). But looking at the (in)accuracy of the narrator's statement here questions the legitimacy of perception itself. Billie Delia "earned" her reputation at a very young age. While standing up at Arnette and K.D.'s wedding as the "bridesmaid and maid of honor both [because] no other girl wanted the honor anyway if it meant walking down the aisle with Billie Delia" (203), waiting for Richard Misner to continue with the service, Billie Delia recalls "the memory of a legendary horse race" and how her "life had been maimed by it":

> Hard Goods, the winning horse that K.D. had ridden when Ruby was founded, belonged to Mr. Nathan DuPres. Years after the race but before she could walk, Mr. Nathan had hoisted her on Hard Goods' bare back, which she rode with such glee it made everybody laugh. [. . .] It continued until Billie Delia was three years old--too little, still, for everyday underwear, and nobody noticed or cared how perfect her skin felt against that wide expanse of rhythmically moving animal flesh. [. . .] Then one day. A Sunday. Hard Goods came loping down the street with Mr. Nathan astride. [. . .] When she saw him coming [. . .] she ran out into the middle of Central Avenue, where she pulled down her Sunday panties before raising her arms to be lifted onto Hard Goods' back.
>
> Things seemed to crumple after that. (150-51)

This story, which develops into an imposing, defining, communal memory about Billie

Delia, becomes the prime informant of the town's point of view, their perspective, regarding her. Thus, Morrison has here widened the spectrum of her "reality" paradigm, allowing events that are indeed "true," that literally occurred, to precede the positioning of perspective. Story, and by extension the memory of the story, informs perspective, which dictates perception, that which constitutes the experiencing of reality. Somewhere in the progression from "story/memory" to "reality," "truth" has been altered. The Ruby notion regarding Billie Delia's sexual promiscuity, at least to the point of consummation, is false. The perception is wrong:

> [Billie Delia] knew people took her for the wild one, the one who from the beginning not only had no qualms about pressing her nakedness on a horse's back but preferred it, would drop her drawers in public on Sunday just to get to the thrill of it. Although it was Arnette who had sex at fourteen (with the groom), Billie Delia carried the burden. [. . .] In fact she was untouched. So far. Since she was helplessly in love with a pair of brothers, her virginity, which no one believed existed, had become as mute as the cross Reverend Misner was holding aloft. (151-52)

That "no one believed" her virginity exists is more powerful, and much more persuasive, than the fact that she is indeed a virgin. So profound is the impact of the young Billie Delia pulling down her Sunday panties to ride Hard Goods, and so pervasive is the town's memory of this event, that even Billie Delia's mother, Patricia Best, will not believe her daughter. Patricia is absolutely certain that "[s]he is lying. [. . .] I just meant to stop her lying mouth telling me she didn't do anything. I saw them. All three of them back behind the Oven and she was in the middle" (202).

Because Patricia Best believes, or at least refuses to confront, the town's perception of Billie Delia as "the fastest girl in" Ruby, "[s]he, the gentlest of souls, missed killing her own daughter by inches" (59, 203). The controlling power of perception, regardless of accuracy, has caused a loving mother to attack her (innocent) daughter.

Thus a mis-informed and/or limited perspective necessarily dictates a warped experiencing of reality. Violence, extreme and unrestricted, is the product of Patricia Best's mis-informed experience of reality: "Pat tried to remember how that pressing iron got into her hand, what had been said that had her running up the stairs with a 1950s GE electric iron called Royal Ease clutched in her fingers to slam against her daughter's head" (203). Although there is no legitimate reason, no sound, definitive textual evidence that Billie Delia deserves her "fast and easy" reputation, the solidarity of the town's, and her mother's, perspective demands this skewed perception of reality--one in which, as Billie Delia herself recognizes, her life has been maimed. Although Patricia Best's horrible treatment of her daughter is a result of her own limited, and perhaps mis-informed, perspective that dictates her perceptions regarding Billie Delia, she does realize, too, that the "Royal Ease in her hand as she ran up the stairs was there to smash the young girl that lived in the minds of the 8-rocks, not the girl her daughter was" (204). Pat's realization, then, is that, as is the case with the Oven words, one's perspective informs, in fact creates, one's experiencing of reality. Her perception of her daughter accords with Ruby's communal perception, and as a result of this mis-informed perspective which demands a mis-informed perception, Pat visits terrible violence on her own innocent daughter.[30] Though there is literally only one Billie Delia, of course, Pat's comment makes the distinction between who her

daughter really is and who the Ruby founding families (the 8-rocks) perceive her to be. Pat's attempt to smash her daughter's skull with an iron is not an attempt to kill her daughter. Rather, it is ultimately a symbolic attempt (and perhaps at the subconscious level) to annihilate the mis-informed perception held in the minds of the Ruby citizens, to destroy the town's non-existent, but ever-present, rendering of Billie Delia Best.

Chapter IV: Individual and Communal Crisis: The Convent Women

> Facing extinction, waiting to be evicted, wary of God, she felt like a curl of paper--nothing written on it--lying in the corner of an empty closet. (248)

With the floor in the cellar of the Convent, Morrison has presented another paradigm through which disparate perspectives command distinct experiencings of reality. As the initial telling of the Convent raid is underway in the opening pages of Paradise, the twin brothers', Steward and Deacon's, and their nephew, K.D.'s, belief that the women who inhabit the Convent are corrupt, demented, and evil becomes instantly clear: "Now one brother, a leader in everything, smashes the cellar door with the butt of his rifle. The other waits a few feet back with their nephew. All three descend the steps ready and excited to know. They are not disappointed. What they see is the devil's bedroom, bathroom, and his nasty playpen" (17). Here, the narrator's words are in accord with the perspective of (at least) these three men via communal free indirect discourse, and it is not until later in the novel that we understand the Convent women's perspective, which differs strikingly from that of the men's. What to the men appears to be evidence of the devil's presence, of pornography and sin, becomes evidence that these different women, each of whom has been hurt and abused, deserted and abandoned in some way or another, have confronted the miserable hardships which have characterized their lives, and, finally, have dismissed the controlling memories of past horrors. The narrator explains:

> If a friend came by [the Convent], her initial alarm at the sight of the

> young women might be muted by their adult manner; how calmly themselves they seemed. [. . .] [I]t would annoy [the friend] at first being unable to say exactly what was absent. [. . .] Then she might realize what was missing: unlike some people in Ruby, the Convent women were no longer haunted. (266)

What, to the Ruby men, confirms the presence of the devil and the sinful corruption that they believe necessarily must accompany the devil has here been explicated by the narrator as evidence not of demons, but of the exorcism of demons--of freedom from the abhorrent events of their past. The cellar floor and the "horrible" drawings are evidence of the "horrible" and painful process of expulsion of personal demons, personal ghosts that have haunted these women indefinitely and without reprieve. From the perspective of the Ruby men, the Convent cellar and its floor indicate the presence of evil and of the devil in the lives of these women and thus justify the Convent raid; from the perspective of the Convent women, the cellar and its floor indicate the absence of goodness and of love from their lives in the past. By analyzing the process by which the drawings on the cellar floor are created, the reader agrees with the narrator's comment that as a result of this ceremony, "the Convent women were no longer haunted" (266).

Each of the Convent women has reached a level of crisis. Mavis's ghost children, Merle and Pearl, are controlling, real presences in her life:

> The twins were fond of [ice cream sticks] and ate them right away. But the Christmas toys had been untouched, so Mavis had spent the five-hour wait for the tuneup and repairs exchanging the Fisher-Price truck for a

> Tonka and the Tiny Tina doll for one that spoke. Soon Pearl would be old enough for a Barbie. It was amazing how they changed and grew. They could not hold their heads up when they departed, but when she first heard them in the mansion, they were already toddlers, two years old. Based on their laughter, she could tell precisely. [. . .] Now they were school age, six and a half, and Mavis had to think of age-appropriate birthday and Christmas presents. (258)

For Mavis, the ghosts of her twin babies, whom she accidentally smothered to death by leaving them inside the mint-green Cadillac while she was in the store shopping, are with her all of the time, their presence dictating Mavis's every move, demanding constant attention. Mavis is dominated by a horrible accident in the past. She is consumed by it, and the memory of her loss has actually resurrected Mavis's children, Merle and Pearl. It is not necessary to analyze the "realness" of the ghosts, for Mavis "had no intention of explaining or defending what she knew to be true" (259). It is enough that to Mavis, the ghosts exist, and her dependence on them, in whatever their form, is overwhelming her life: "With swift and brilliant clarity, [Mavis] understood that she was not safe out there or any place where Merle and Pearl were not" (259). Mavis's life is in crisis. She is unable to help herself escape from her torturing past. She is incapable of saving her own life at this point, and if Consolata had not intervened, she eventually would have destroyed herself.

At this crucial point in the novel just before the Convent women begin their ceremony (both in the structure of the novel and in the linear timeline of events), Gigi (Grace Gibson, or "G.G.") also has reached a moment of crisis. Gigi's series of bad

relationships has left her depressed and beaten, has left her without having ever felt truly loved, needed, or accepted:

> She missed [K.D.], now and then. His chaotic devotion, full of moods and hurts and yearning and lots and lots of giving in. Well, she had dogged him a bit. Enjoyed his availability and adoration because she had so little experience of either. Mikey. Nobody could call that love. But K.D.'s version didn't stay fun for long. She had teased, insulted or refused him once too often, and he chased her around the house, grabbed her, smacked her. [. . .] Ah, well. This is a new year, she thought. [. . .] New plans, since the old ones had turned out to be trash. (256)

Gigi intends to leave the Convent, to start fresh. But the reader realizes immediately that Gigi does not have many options: "Her mother was unlocatable; her father on death row. Only a grandfather left, in a spiffy trailer in Alcorn, Mississippi. . . . Neither a high school nor a college student, no one, not even the other girls, took her seriousness seriously" (257). Although Gigi is fantasizing about getting "back in the fray," even she knows that she will only be disappointed in this life (257). While bathing in the dirty, "[l]ukewarm and shallow" tub water, Gigi curses herself: "No, you stupid, stupid bitch," she says. "Because you weren't tough enough. Smart enough. Like with every other goddamn thing you got no staying power. You thought it was going to be fun and that it would work" (257). We realize the seriousness of Gigi's situation as the narrator explains that "Gigi was not the crying type; even now, when she realized she had not approved of herself in a long, long time, her eyes were desert-skull dry" (257). Like Mavis, Gigi has reached the lowest point

in her life characterized by low points. Gigi's memories of past relationships are still tormenting her, are re-membered daily. Just as the Ruby men's perspective is informed by all of the events from the past, all of the stories and memories that are told and retold, Gigi's (and the other Convent women's) perspective is informed by all of the events and memories of the past. This perspective--informed by a compounding personal history of trouble, abuse, and her own various types of disallowings--dictates her present reality characterized by this unmitigated self-loathing. And no Convent woman at this point is able to intercede.

Likewise, Seneca has come to a perilous crux in her young life. As is the case with the other Convent women, Seneca's life has been a constant struggle for acceptance, companionship, and love. Abandoned by her mother, Jean, (whom Seneca had been led to believe was her sister) at age five to fend for herself for "four nights and five days" before she was discovered alone (126), Seneca's life, beginning with this early desertion, has been typified by deception and numbing abuse that becomes so routine that Seneca comes to associate physical pain with pleasure; and thus, she is carving a "map" into the flesh of her arms and thighs:

> The little streets were narrow and straight, but as soon as she made them they flooded. Sometimes she held toilet tissue to catch the blood, but she liked to let them run too. The trick was to slice at just the right depth. [. . .] She recognized with pleasure the [scars] of old roads, avenues that even Norma [Keen Fox, the woman who "hires" Seneca for several weeks as a type of prostitute] had been repelled by. One was sometimes

> enough for months. Then there were times when she did two a day, hardly giving a street time to close before she opened another one. (260)

As horribly tragic as this self-mutilation is, it pales in comparison to the reason Seneca first experienced her "vice" (261) and to the way in which such mutilation becomes "pleasant":

> The habit, begun in one of the foster homes, started as an accident. Before her foster brother [. . .] got her underwear off the first time, a safety pin holding the waist of her jeans together where a metal button used to be opened and scratched her stomach as Harry yanked on them. Once the jeans were tossed away and he got to her panties, the line of blood excited him even more. She did not cry. It did not hurt. When Mama Greer bathed her, she clucked, "Poor baby. Why didn't you tell me?" and Mercurochromed the jagged cut. She was not sure what she should have told: the safety pin scratch or Harry's behavior. So she pin-scratched herself on purpose and showed it to Mama Greer. Because the sympathy she got was diluted, she told her about Harry. "Don't you ever say that again. Do you hear me? Do you? Nothing like that happens here." After a meal of her favorite things, she was placed in another home. (260-61)

This little girl, having been raped by her foster brother, is shown sympathy for a small scratch on her belly and then neglected utterly and removed from the foster home because she was the victim of horrible abuse. She is, by inference, blamed and punished for a rape that she is told never happened. This young girl "learns" from the

Greer foster family that "a jagged cut" will earn her sympathy and compassion, and that abuse acted upon her is ignored and denied. This understanding is only reinforced as she gets older, for Seneca realizes that "if she complain[s] to [her boyfriends] about being fondled by friends or strangers their fury was directed at her, so she knew it was something inside that was the matter" (261). The recipient of seemingly constant abuse--sexual, physical, and mental--that goes unaddressed, or that is mis-addressed, Seneca "learns" that the means to elicit compassion from others exists through "[h]er blood work [because] [s]ympathy was instant" (261). This knowledge, this "vice [. . .] thrilled her. It steadied her" (261). And it is beginning to consume her. As the various Convent women are struggling with--and losing to--their own personal, horrible battles, Seneca's vice is nearly a fetish: "Seneca did another street. An intersection, in fact, for it crossed the one she'd done a moment ago" (262). Her "map," at this point, is growing like a cancer--rapid and uncontrollable.

Pallas, too, has reached a critical point in her life. As she enters the cellar to tell the utterly depressed and constantly drunken Connie good-bye, Connie, via her "in sight," realizes that Pallas is pregnant: "'What will you do about it?' 'Same as always. Diet.' 'I don't mean that. I mean the baby. You're pregnant.' 'I am not.' 'No?' 'No!' 'Why not?' 'I'm only sixteen!' 'Oh,' said Consolata, looking at the moon head floating above a spine, the four little appendages. [. . .] 'Pity,' she said as Pallas fled from the room" (248-49). Pallas is denying the baby's existence, is refusing to admit that she is indeed pregnant. Although we do not know absolutely who is the father of the baby growing inside Pallas, we understand that the baby is not the

product of a loving union. Later, when the Convent women "spoke to each other about what had been dreamed and what had been drawn" on the cellar floor, the other women question Pallas: "When asked who the father was, she said nothing. . . . They pressed her, but gently, without joking or scorn. Carlos? The boys who drove her into the water?" (265). Additionally, during the literal sharing of past experiences, when "they step easily into the dreamer's tale," which the Convent women call "loud dreaming," Pallas shares the following experience with the other women: "Folds the five hundred dollars in the foot of her sock. Yelps with pain from a stranger's penis and a mother's rivalry--alluring and corrosive as cocaine" (264).[31] The clear implication is that this baby was conceived from either rape or prostitution because we do know that Pallas and Carlos never had sex.[32] Pallas's denial causes Consolata to recall the other time a child--Arnette, pregnant by K.D.--screamed "No!" when told she was pregnant, thereby forecasting the potential, the horrible, effects of such a denial:

> [Connie] remembered another girl, about the same age, who had come a few years ago. [. . .] She was not anxious, as might have been expected, but revolted by the work of her womb. A revulsion so severe it cut mind from body and saw its flesh-producing flesh as foreign, rebellious, unnatural, diseased. Consolata could not fathom what brought on that repugnance, but there it was. And here it was again in the No! shout of another one: a terror without alloy. [. . .] The girl [Arnette], sharp in her refusal to have the midwife [Lone] attend her, waited quietly sullen for a week or so. [. . .] Until labor began [. . .] the young mother had been

> hitting her stomach relentlessly. [. . .] But the real damage was the mop handle inserted with a rapist's skill--mercilessly, repeatedly--between her legs. With the gusto and intention of a rabid male, she had tried to bash the life out of her life. And, in a way, was triumphantly successful. . . . Now here was another one screaming No! as if that made it so. Pity. (249-50)

Pallas has not yet taken her denial to this miserable, pathetic extreme; but by juxtaposing Pallas's own denial with Consolata's memory of Arnette's denial and subsequent actions, Morrison intends that we understand that Pallas's mental "dis-allowing" of her child may be penultimate to conduct, horrible and extreme, like Arnette's. The potential for this type of loveless, compassionless, abhorrent behavior is real; this deeply tragic and disturbing mutilation, sadly, is not the stuff of fantasy. Pallas Truelove, whom the other Convent women, and Gigi in particular, call "Divine," the name, in fact, of Pallas's mother, is progressing toward a most un-divine, un-true, and un-loving action. And without help, without someone to demonstrate "true" love and compassion for her, Pallas may take this next step.

At this point in the novel, no one can help. All of the Convent women are plagued, consumed, being destroyed by, their own unique demons of/from the past. Connie's response to her realization that Pallas could, likely will, take action as Arnette had years earlier is striking: "Pity. [paragraph break] Reaching for a bottle, Consolata found it empty. [. . .] Without wine [Connie's] thoughts, she knew, would be unbearable: resignation, self-pity, muted rage, disgust and shame glowing like cinders in a dying fire. As she rose to replenish her vice, a grand weariness took her"

(250). In other words, Connie recognizes then consciously ignores the awful plight of Pallas, instead seeking only to satiate her appetite for alcohol-induced numbness, thereby reiterating that none of these women, not even Connie--particularly not Connie--can help themselves or each other. As individuals and as a community, the Convent women are in crisis, and no Convent woman nor Ruby citizen can or will intercede.

Connie's non-action, her indifferent and intentional ignoring of Pallas's desperate situation ("Pity") nearly shocks the reader (250); for finally, Connie, upon whom these other four women depend absolutely, too, has descended utterly. The death of Mother Mary Magna is the catalyst that precipitates Connie's depression, which results in the nadir of her life. Connie has loved without bounds this woman who saved her from the "shit-strewn paths" of Portugal; in fact, "Consolata worshipped her" (223, 224). When Gigi first arrives at the Convent, having been given a ride in Roger Best's hearse/ambulance, and asks Connie, "Who died?", Connie, referring to Mother Mary, responds: "A love, [. . .] I had two; she was the first and the last" (73). Mother Mary Magna was for Connie the reason for living, and her death almost kills Connie as well:

> When Mary Magna died, Consolata [. . .] was orphaned in a way she was not as a street baby and was never as a servant. There was reason the Church cautioned against excessive human love [. . .] her rope to the world had slid from her fingers. She had no identification, no insurance, no family, no work. Facing extinction, waiting to be evicted, wary of God,

she felt like a curl of paper--nothing written on it--lying in the corner of an empty closet. (248)

Having lost what matters most in this world to her, Connie turns to the vast supply of alcohol in the cellar to distract her from her quickly deteriorating life at the Convent. Connie's depression has struck her at just the time when the other Convent women most need her; and it is just then that she cannot help herself. Connie, the Convent's leader, the mother, the comforter, the confidante, the supporter, the listener, everything to everybody, has given up. She no longer cares, nor even attempts to make life better, livable. The Convent, reflecting the condition of Connie herself, has sunken into a state of dilapidation.[33] Connie, at this miserable moment in her life, decides that she had been lied to by Mother Mary, that her life has been without real value, and that she will not be admitted into heaven:

> "But tell me. Where is the rest of days, the aisle of thyme, the scent of veronica you promised? The cream and honey you said I had earned? The happiness that comes of well-done chores, the serenity duty grants us, the blessing of good works? Was what I did for love so terrible?"
>
> Mary Magna had nothing to say. Consolata listened to the refusing silence, more wondering than annoyed by the sky, in plumage now, gold and blue-green, strutting like requited love on the horizon. She was afraid of dying alone, ungrieved in unholy ground, but knew that was precisely what lay before her. How she longed for the good death. "I'll miss You," she told Him. "I really will." (251)

What Consolata did for love of Mary Magna that was "so terrible," from her perspective, was to use her gift of "in sight" to keep Mother Mary alive for seventeen days (247).[34] Connie believes that "she had practiced [witchcraft], and although it was for the benefit of the woman she loved, she knew it was anathema"; and because "[t]hat bliss of that final entrance was being deliberately delayed by" Connie's "evil" gift, she, at this point, believes with absolute certainty that she will never reach a heavenly paradise (247). At this lowest moment in her life, Connie is convinced that she has been barred from the eternal heaven of Mother Mary Magna's Christian teachings, and she informs "Him," who is Jesus, that "I'll miss You" (251).[35] Because of the spiritual repercussions of Connie's private discussion with her personal, Christian savior, the reader realizes how deeply Connie has fallen into "the maw of depression" and comprehends that she, like the other Convent women, has reached a personal and monumental crisis (223).

These women's individual memories, their previous transgressions, their sins or their perceptions of sinning, their personal demons, in short, their pasts all hover about them in the present, demanding attention. Unregulated, uncontrolled, unrelieved, these personal haunts--be they spirits of the dead, or profoundly effecting memories of past horrors and abuses, or any combination thereof--are presently provoking self-destruction and abuse, inner-turmoil, and hopelessness for each of these Convent women.[36] We readers of Morrison have seen the powerful, and very real, effect that an unaddressed, unassuaged event from the past can demand on the present experiencing of reality. With Beloved, in particular, Morrison delineates life with a ghost, with an event from the past that resurfaces, figuratively and literally, in the

present and, to be brief, raises hell. In order to transcend and ultimately dismiss the horribleness of their pasts, or as Anna Flood says, "to bridle, without being trampled, the monsters that slavered them" (303), the Convent women must address their individual "haunts" directly, or risk being consumed, if not outright destroyed, by them.

Chapter V: Loud Dreaming, Communal Perspective, and Shared Experience

> They enter the heat of the Cadillac, feel the smack of cold air in the Higgledy Piggledy. They know their tennis shoes are unlaced and that a bra strap annoys each time it slips from the shoulder. [. . .] They adjust the sleeping baby head then refuse, outright refuse, what they know and drive away home. (264)

As I have demonstrated in my discussion regarding the nearing-catastrophic level of crisis at which each Convent woman has independently arrived, it becomes clear that without some form of consoling interception, absolute failure and self-destruction are imminent for each of these women. As no person from Ruby will feasibly come to their aid (with perhaps the exception of Lone DuPres; but at this moment in the novel, she is not prominent at all), and clearly the women cannot assist each other or themselves, their collective downward spiral is halted only because Connie has been visited by an unnamed, mythic or supernatural "friend," who effects a palpable transmutation in Connie.[37]

In a brief scene that directly follows Consolata's intimation of utter depression and resounding belief that she has been barred from Mother Mary's heaven ("She was afraid of dying alone, ungrieved in unholy ground, but knew that was precisely what lay before her. How she longed for the good death. "I'll miss You," she told Him. "I really will." The skylight wavered."), Connie is approached by a man who "wore a cowboy hat that hid his features," who then "sat on the kitchen steps, [. . .] a triangle of shadow obscured his face" (251). Although their interaction is quite brief and

characterized by language that should seemingly be difficult to understand ("'Uh uh. I'm far country. Got a thing to drink?'" and "'Look you in the house.'" and "'I don't want see you girls. I want see you.'" and "'You have your glasses much more me.'"), Connie, for the first time since before Mother Mary began dying, seems happy: "Consolata laughed. [. . .] Consolata laughed again. It seemed so funny, comical really, the way he had flitted over to her from the steps and how he was looking at her--flirtatious, full of secret fun" (252) In the presence of this visitor, her depression melts away: "She felt light, weightless, as though she could move, if she wanted to, without standing up" (252). During this brief interaction (the scene in its entirety is one page), Connie has gone from a deep depression and the belief that she has been dis-allowed from ever realizing her conception of Christian heaven, to beginning to prepare, in the very next scene, the supper that begins the healing ceremony for the Convent women. A very real change has overcome Connie, and this unnamed visitor is the catalyst.

Released from her own crippling depression and the paralysis of alcohol, Connie moves back into the kitchen, where she "cleans, washes and washes again two freshly killed hens" (252). In a series of four paragraph-length, present tense narrations, Connie is described preparing a wonderful meal for all of the Convent women. A type of foreshadowing for how, figuratively and symbolically, Connie will "prepare" Mavis, Grace, Seneca, and Pallas, these descriptions of meal preparation detail the time-consuming, difficult, but loving, process that ultimately transforms "young, poor [egg] layers with pinfeathers difficult to extract" into a bountiful, beautiful feast. In a description reminiscent of a snake's molting and shedding of its skin, Connie

> lifts the skin to reach under it, fingering as far as she can. Under the breast, she searches for a pocket close to the wing. Then, holding the breast in her left palm, the fingers of her right tunnel the back skin, gently pushing for the spine. Into all these places--where the skin has been loosened and the membrane separated from the flesh it once protected--she slides butter. Thick. Pale. Slippery. (252-53)

This language alludes symbolically to rebirth, to the demanding process of purifying, then transforming these malformed and "useless" hens into something valuable. In the preparation of this meal, Morrison subtly alludes to a symbolic alchemy, to the almost-magical cooking process that changes these "young poor layers" into the foundation of a sumptuous repast (252). With these meal-preparation scenes (on pages 252-53, 255, 257, and 260), Morrison is signaling to the reader that Connie's preparation of this meal parallels the process, symbolically, of Connie's preparation of the Convent women for their own type of rebirth.

At last, "[t]he table is set; the food placed. Consolata takes off her apron" (262). The gathered Convent women look upon a strikingly transformed Connie. Mavis had recently noticed this change and had in fact "begun to worry. Not about Connie's nocturnal habits, or her drinking--or her not drinking, in fact, for the familiar fumes had disappeared recently. Something else. The way Connie nodded as though listening to someone near; how she said Uh huh or If you say so, answering questions no one had asked" (259). Mavis, who has known Connie longer than any of the other three women, recognizes that a significant change has occurred in Connie's behavior and appearance, but she does not know what to make of it, or even if the change is

positive. There is no ambiguousness regarding Connie's change, or about her purpose at this supper, however; all of the Convent women realize that she is indeed a different person: "I call myself Consolata Sosa. If you want to be here you do what I say. Eat how I say. Sleep when I say. And I will teach you what you are hungry for" (262). This woman, here calling herself Consolata Sosa for the first time, informs Mavis, Grace, Seneca, and Pallas that if they choose to stay with her, they will be entirely in her hands, must trust her completely.[38] Consolata, just subsequent to the unnamed man's visit, intercedes in these women's desperate lives. At the depth of her despair, when no one else in the world can console Consolata, the visitor, not of this mundane world, appears and effects a striking change in her. Thus, when no one else of their world would, or could, care for these four women, and when their need for care is most urgent, Consolata, at last, is able to help.

The women's response, articulated via communal free indirect discourse, to Consolata's declaration that she will prepare them to understand what they truly crave, what is necessary for them to address and dismiss their individual "haunts" from the past, demonstrates how quickly and profoundly Connie has changed:

> The women look at each other and then at a person they do not recognize. She has the features of dear Connie, but they are sculpted somehow--higher cheekbones, stronger chin. Had her eyebrows always been that thick, her teeth that pearly white? Her hair shows no gray. Her skin is smooth as a peach. Why is she talking that way? And what is she talking about? they wonder. [. . .]
>
> "If you have a place," [Consolata] continued, "that you should be in

and somebody who loves you waiting there, then go. If not stay here and follow me. Someone could want to meet you."

No one left. There were nervous questions, a single burst of frightened giggling, a bit of pouting and simulated outrage, but in no time at all they came to see that they could not leave the one place they were free to leave. (262)

The Convent women are willing to stay because of their individual perspectives which have informed each of their experiencings of reality. Because of their experiences with Connie and of the Convent, the women are willing to do as Connie asks, regardless of how bizarre it may be or how uncertain they are initially. Their trust in her is complete in large part because they know the lone rule that guides them at the Convent, which Consolata told Mavis when she first arrived: "Lies not allowed in this place. In this place every true thing is okay" (38). Connie, the four women know, will not lie to them, nor will she hurt them. Experience has informed their understanding of this as "fact." As the narrator speaks from the perspective of the Convent women, at times again employing via communal free indirect discourse, it becomes obvious that Connie had provided seemingly all of the things that are/were missing in the lives of Mavis, Gigi, Seneca, and Pallas:

> And what is she talking about? they wonder. This sweet, unthreatening old lady who seemed to love each one of them best; who never criticized, who shared everything but needed little or no care; required no emotional investment; who listened; who locked no doors and accepted each as she was. What is she talking about, this ideal parent, friend, companion in

> whose company they were safe from harm? What is she thinking, this perfect landlord who charged nothing and welcomed anybody; this granny goose who could be confided in or ignored, lied to or suborned; this play mother who could be hugged or walked out on, depending on the whim of the child? (262)[39]

Because the Convent women have experienced reality in the ways delineated in the above passage, because Connie has been all things to these women, because she has fulfilled every need (seemingly) without having any of her own, they trust her and are willing to be "prepared" by her. As Consolata begins readying these women for the process of purging themselves of their personal "haunts," time becomes irrelevant: "Gradually they lost the days" (262).

With the very next words "In the beginning [. . .]" the purification ceremony begins (263). These women are undergoing a genesis, as this phrase alludes, a new beginning for each of them in which they create themselves anew by freeing themselves from their pasts. As Connie prepared the perceived-worthless hens for the supper, so too do the Convent women prepare: "First they had to scrub the cellar floor until its stones were as clean as rocks on a shore" (263). This floor would be the "template" on which they were "told each to undress and lie down. [. . .] Consolata [. . .] painted the body's silhouette. Once the outlines were complete, each was instructed to remain there. Unspeaking. Naked in candlelight" (263). These women, instructed by Consolata, their preparer, are naked and unashamed in each other's presence. They feel acceptance and trust not only in Connie at this point, but in each other as well, which has rarely been true before this scene. Having been instructed to

remain still, the women "wriggled in acute distress but were reluctant to move outside the mold they had chosen. Many times they thought they could not endure another second, but none wished to be the first to give in before those pale watching eyes" of Consolata (263). At this moment, these women are united through suffering. They feel pain which they believe they may not be able to endure, but now, as a united community, they are aware that they each are suffering simultaneously and correspondingly. This realization keeps them all from giving in or up. They do not wish to fail, to yield, to relent, to let down the other women, particularly Consolata. For the first time in the pain-filled lives of each of these Convent women, they are not alone in their suffering. Their experience is not unique. Others, literally, understand it. Although they feel their own mounting agony, they also empathize completely with the others'. Here, finally, they are not alone. They need not suffer in isolation or in silence, yet words are not necessary, as the understanding of emotional and physical sensation is unified inherently in shared experience. As this ceremony is immediate and unexpected, no perspective other than that of shared trust in Consolata has yet been formed, nor is necessary. This is a virgin experiencing of reality that has been created by Consolata, who completely controls the situation with love, compassion, and acceptance. The Convent women's faith in Connie's loving benevolence allows for their complete submission, which is not in this case to be confused with subjugation. They have been given choice--"they were all free to leave" (262)--and they have chosen to undergo this crucible of the self.

As the Convent women wriggle "in acute distress," but unwilling to "move outside the mold they had chosen," there is no speaking, just the silent, unified experiencing of

a shared reality until, finally, Consolata breaks the silence with a confession of sorts characterized by slightly disrupted syntax (263). In this monologue, Consolata shares the story of her pain that ultimately led to her utter depression and, if unchecked, would have destroyed her, and, by extension, the other women, who would not have had Connie to intercede as she is here doing. Beginning with her miserable time in Portugal, where as a street orphan she'd been subjected to abuses such as molestation--"the dirty pokings her ninth year subjected her to"--Consolata explains why she loves Mary Magna so absolutely before going on to articulate the physical lust she felt for Deacon Morgan and then returns to the pain, fear, and doubt she felt upon Mary Magna's death:

> My child body, hurt and soil, leaps into the arms of a woman who teach me my body is nothing my spirit everything. I agreed her until I met another. My flesh is so hungry for itself it ate him. When he fell away the woman rescue me from my body again. Twice she saves it. When her body sickens I care for it in every way flesh works. I hold it in my arms and between my legs. Clean it, rock it, enter it to keep it breath. After she is dead I can not get past that. My bones on hers the only good thing. Not spirit. Bones. No different from the man. My bones on his the only true thing. So I wondering where is the spirit lost in this? (263)

With this sharing of her own experience, which corrupted and potentially could have destroyed her, Consolata has demonstrated what the narrator dubs "loud dreaming," a process through which "[h]alf-tales and the never-dreamed escaped from their lips" (264). With this "loud dreaming," Consolata's single edict that "every true thing is

okay" holds true (38). They each tell their stories with brutal, unadorned honesty, and the listeners all experience the tale as if it is happening to them. As "they step easily into the dreamer's tale," the Convent women actually share the events on a sensual level:

> They enter the heat of the Cadillac, feel the smack of cold air in the Higgledy Piggledy. They know their tennis shoes are unlaced and that a bra strap annoys each time it slips from the shoulder. The Armour package is sticky. They inhale the perfume of sleeping infants and feel parent-cozy although they notice one's head is turned awkwardly. They adjust the sleeping baby head then refuse, outright refuse, what they know and drive away home. They climb porch stairs carrying frankfurters and babies and purse in their arms. Saying, "They don't seem to want to wake up, Sal. Sal? Look here. They don't seem to want to." (264)

As with this horrible event from Mavis's past, they likewise experience Pallas's hatred for her mother, who slept with and then "stole" her boyfriend, her terror from hiding in the dark water from men who hunt her and then the pain she felt while being raped; Gigi's suffering from being tear gassed and from tearing ligaments in her leg during a riot; Seneca's fear and loneliness at being abandoned and, later, her anguish and abuse resulting from her time as a prostitute (264). As the above quotation delineating Mavis's experience indicates, this "loud dreaming" evokes something far beyond any profound empathy or even true understanding. These women literally experience each other's pasts; and as a result, eventually "They understood and began to begin" (265).[40] What they "understood" is that by sharing their pasts with the other Convent

women, they have finally addressed their individual haunts. What they "begin" is the projection of these horrible events into the silhouette molds which Consolata had drawn around them onto the cellar floor, which will allow Mavis, Grace, Seneca, and Pallas to transpose their demons onto their cellar floor shadows, thereby purging themselves of them. For example, Seneca, a self-mutilator, "duplicate[s] in robin's egg blue one of her more elegant scars.

[. . .] Later on, when she had the hunger to slice her inner thigh, she chose instead to mark the open body lying on the cellar floor" (265). Pallas, who before refused to admit she was pregnant, a denial with potentially devastating repercussions, "put a baby in her template's stomach," and, we later observe, is capable of loving and caring for this baby. These women, who have been abused in so many ways, have finally learned how to expurgate their personal demons and to confine them to their respective cellar outlines. The Convent women no longer hurt themselves, nor will they hurt each other. Through this process of "loud dreaming" these women have formed a community in which, for the first time in their lives, they each feel loved, safe, and secure.

The power of this group of women, then, lies in their cumulative ability to address and then to dismiss the horrible events of their uniquely atrocious pasts: "In loud dreaming, monologue is no different from a shriek; accusations directed to the dead and long gone are undone by murmurs of love" (264). In an extensive, difficult process that takes months ("January folded. February too. By March, days passed uncut from night"), Connie's efforts yield profound and clearly evident changes:

> With Consolata in charge, like a new and revised Reverend Mother [Mary

> Magna], feeding them bloodless food and water alone to quench their thirst, they altered. [. . .] A neighbor would notice [. . .] the charged air of the house, its foreign feel and a markedly different look in the tenants' eyes--sociable and connecting when they spoke to you. [. . .] [I]f a friend came by [she would notice the young women's] adult manner; how calmly themselves they seemed. (265-66)

Thus, as with Consolata's preparation of the malfunctioning chickens--described as "young, poor layers with pinfeathers difficult to extract" (252)--on the symbolic level, she has likewise instructed these societally-deemed worthless drifter women--described by the Convent raiders as "detritus: throwaway people that sometimes blow back into the room after being swept out the door" (4)--and prepared them to undergo an absolute catharsis, a purging of the deeply imbedded, "difficult to extract" demons of memory and of the past that have contemporaneously haunted each of them relentlessly in the present. The end result of Consolata's demanding, time-consuming, and sometimes painful process is, as the narrator explains, "Convent women [who] were no longer haunted" (266). By way of this ceremony, Mavis, Grace, Seneca, and Pallas confront their personal haunts, and with the assistance of their newly compassionate, empathetic, loving community that they trust absolutely, that they realize will never judge or condemn them based on their past, each of these women has successfully exorcised their unique demons.

Chapter VI: Limited Perspective, Limited Understanding, and Mis-Directed Violence

> The driver slowed, maybe to get around the Cadillac hogging the road, maybe to offer help, but he stayed long enough to see outlaw women rolling on the ground, dresses torn, secret flesh on display. And see also two other women embracing in the back seat. For long moments his eyes were wide. Then he shook his head and gunned the motor of the truck. (167-69)

The Ruby men do not know these aspects of the Convent women's lives. To these founding fathers, each Convent woman is the type of "bad woman" that Trudier Harris describes in her entry of the same name in The Oxford Companion to African American Literature:

> Women [. . .] who fall outside that safety and indeed may be judged to be a threat to safety become bad women. It is important to note, however, that a judgment of "bad" is heavily dependent upon perspective. [. . .] It is seldom for inherent reasons of evil that women are thought to be bad; however, sexuality and morality figure prominently. (43)

To the Ruby men, the Convent women are in large part "bad" because of their perceived lack of any morality and their strong, commanding sexuality. K.D. has had a sexual fling with Gigi that she ended; Deacon has had a brief, but intense, affair with Consolata, the knowledge of which caused Deacon's wife, Soane, to miscarry her baby. This knowledge of their own infidelity and sexuality informs their negative

judgment of the women, but their perspectives have not been informed by the horrible stories of the women's pasts. Rather, the Ruby men's very limited perspectives have been established in large part by mis-information. In a paragraph in which the narrator, via (communal) free indirect discourse, delineates the Ruby fathers' perceptions of several events, the reader realizes how dependent upon perspective these men's experiencing of reality is:

> Remember how they scandalized the wedding? What you say? Uh huh and it was that very same day I caught them kissing on each other in the back of that ratty Cadillac. Very same day, and if that wasn't enough to please the devil, two more was fighting over them in the dirt. Right down in it Lord. (275)

Now observe the very same event, here developed and informed by essential background information, from the perspective of the Convent women who are driving home after having been told to leave K.D.'s and Arnette's wedding reception by Steward Morgan:

> "[Seneca's] shaking again. I think she's cold."
>
> "It's ninety degrees! What the hell is the matter with her?" Gigi scanned the trembling girl. [. . .]
>
> "I'll hold her." Seneca arranged Pallas in her arms, rubbing the goose-bumpy arms. [. . .]
>
> Pallas snuggled Seneca's breasts, which, although uncomfortable, diluted the chill racking her. The women in the front seat were quarreling again, in high-pitched voices that hurt her head. "God, I hate your guts. [. . .]

Don't see what that nigger [K.D.] ever saw in you, " Mavis continued. "Or maybe I do, since you can't seem to keep it covered." [. . .]

"Nobody's fucked you in ten years, you dried-up husk."

"Get out!" Mavis screamed, braking the car. [. . .]

"You gonna make me? Touch me, I'll tear your face off. You fucking felon!" and she rammed her cigarette into Mavis' arm.

They couldn't fight really well in the space available, but they tried. Seneca held Pallas in her arms and watched. Once upon a time she would try to separate them, but now she knew better. When they were exhausted they'd stop, and peace would reign longer than if she interfered. [. . .] Under a metal-hot sky void of even one arrow of birds they fought on the road and its shoulder. [. . .]

Feeling again the repulsive tickle and stroke of tentacles, of invisible scales, Pallas turned away from the fighting-women scene and lifted her arm to circle Seneca's neck and press her face deeper into that tiny bosom.

Seneca alone saw the truck approach. The driver slowed, maybe to get around the Cadillac hogging the road, maybe to offer help, but he stayed long enough to see outlaw women rolling on the ground, dresses torn, secret flesh on display. And see also two other women embracing in the back seat. For long moments his eyes were wide. Then he shook his head and gunned the motor of the truck. (167-69)

In this final paragraph, and with the (communal) free indirect discourse of "outlaw women" in particular, the narrator has demonstrated the perspective of the driver of

this truck (and of the patriarchs), who clearly has no real understanding of these fighting women. He does not know the long history of mutual hatred between Mavis and Gigi, who are constantly attempting to injure one another. He does not know that Pallas has not spoken for several days, that she is literally in shock from the horrible experience of being run off the road by drunken men who search for her, whispering "Here, pussy. Here, pussy," as she hides in freezing lake water "Hoping, hoping the things touching her below were [. . .] [n]ot alligators or snakes" (163). The man does not realize that in ninety-degree weather, the horror and shock of the haunting memory makes her seek warmth and comfort by huddling close to Seneca. The man believes the two young girls in the back are grasping each other in a sexual embrace as the other two women fight each other, desperate to share in this man's perception of sexual affection with the two girls in the back of the Cadillac. He is experiencing a reality that, although very real and very accurate to him, is a result of his limited perspective, his finite "knowledge" of these women and of the Convent. Thus, because his perspective has already been mis-informed by incomplete and untrue "stories" regarding these women, the driver of the truck is experiencing a mis-informed reality. Seneca and Pallas are not "kissing on each other" with any of the sexual implications inferred by the driver, nor are Mavis and Gigi "fighting over them," as the man believes and reports (275). However, the lack of a fully informed perspective results in the truck driver experiencing a reality that differs drastically from these Convent women's experiencing of reality, a reality founded on an inaccurate understanding. The man who happens upon the "ratty Cadillac" on the side of the road propagates the mis-information by reporting his limited-perspective story to the

other men, whose perspectives, in turn, will be (mis)informed by this retelling.[41] The other men, who share a similar perspective regarding the Convent women already, will (and do) readily believe this man's experiencing of reality to be accurate, for their own ignorance of these women's pasts and their misunderstanding of the women presently dis-allows any other understanding of the event the truck driver recounts.[42]

In addition to these varying degrees of mis-information, of inaccurate or incomplete stories about these women, which, as I have pointed out, actually serve to pollute perception, these Ruby men have not been a part of the "loud dreaming," which literally allows for a unified experiencing of particular aspects of the women's pasts, for a communal experiencing of their past, horrible reality. The Ruby men do not have this sort of full disclosure, this type of complete understanding that "loud dreaming" allows. As a direct result of limited perspective, the Ruby men who raid the Convent see scrawling pictures on the floor of the cellar that, from their mis-informed perspectives, indicate the presence of evil and of the devil. As the Morgan men slide "long slow beams of a Black & Decker" across the cellar floor, their (mis)informed, limited perspectives manifest an experiencing of reality very different from that of the Convent women who expurgated and confined their awful pasts onto the cellar floor:

> Steward, Deek and K.D. observe defilement and violence and perversions beyond imagination. Lovingly drawn filth carpets the stone floor. K.D. fingers his palm cross. Deek taps his shirt pocket where sunglasses are tucked. He had thought he might use them for other purposes, but he wonders if he needs them now to shield from his sight this sea of

depravity beckoning below. None dares step on it. More than justified in their expectations, they turn around and climb the stairs. (287)

The Morgan men have seen exactly what "their expectations"--here synonymous with the word perspective--have dictated they perceive. The extremity of what they have done ("They shoot the white girl first.") and of what they soon will do ("Men are firing through the window at three women running through clover and Scotch broom. Consolata enters, bellowing, 'No!' [. . .] The bullet enters her forehead.") is, as the Morgan men say, "justified" by what they see on the cellar floor: "Satan's scrawl" (3, 289, 303).

Steward, Deacon, and K.D. are, perhaps, at least partly correct; what they see is "the devil's" work (to maintain their language) in that these women's lives have indeed been characterized by "defilement and violence and perversions beyond imagination," by a series of personal dis-allowings similar in effect to the central, defining "Disallowing" of the nine families from the town of Fairly, Oklahoma (287). But rather than indicating continuing corruption in the present, these horrible events that in the past have corrupted these women, have made them dissatisfied with their lives, have made them question the validity of the concepts of love and acceptance, indicate the corruption of their past, and the move beyond these demonizing haunts. These women have created for themselves a loving, accepting community as a result of their "loud dreaming." Their shared experiencing of past miseries, of their varying types and degrees of dis-allowings, unifies the group in a common cause, thereby making them strong. This unification and total acceptance in turn results in their conception and subsequent realization, albeit brief, of a real paradise on earth. Having never been

truly loved, having never felt absolute acceptance and the total freedom to be "themselves," the Convent women finally have achieved, through the instruction of Consolata, that which they were most "hungry for" (266, 262). Having realized an earthly paradise--a strong, unified community in which they can love and are loved, in which they feel total acceptance, in which they are totally free and autonomous, and in which they can be completely themselves--they celebrate their transformations into "holy women" by "dancing in hot sweet rain" (283). In this dance-celebration symbolizing their self-actualization, the women leave behind forever and completely the pasts which have so haunted them:

> Seneca embraced and finally let go of a dark morning in state housing. Grace witnessed the successful cleansing of a white shirt that never should have been stained. Mavis moved in the shudder of rose of Sharon petals tickling her skin. Pallas, delivered of a delicate son, held him close while the rain rinsed away a scary woman on an escalator and all fear of black water. Consolata, fully housed by the god who sought her out in the garden, was the more furious dancer, Mavis the most elegant. Seneca and Grace danced together, then parted to skip through fresh mud. Pallas, smoothing raindrops from her baby's head, swayed like a frond. (283)

This scene announces the Convent women's success. After months of struggle and lifetimes of pain, these women each are completely free from all constraints.

Ironically, although the particular events differ, of course, the original families' experience shares striking similarities with the experience of the Convent women. Instead of many, various disallowings which characterize the lives of the women, a

central, massive "Disallowing" evokes a unification of purpose and a solidarity of community that ultimately results in the founding families unified, and unifying conception of paradise: "Afterwards the people were no longer nine families and some more. They became a tight band of wayfarers bound by the enormity of what had happened to them" (189). Having heard those "disbelievable words formed in the mouths of men to other men, men like them in all ways but one," the founding families shared "the clarity of their hatred" for the light-skinned black citizens of Fairly who dis-allow them, who insult "them in ways too confounding for language: first by excluding them, then by offering them staples to exist in that very exclusion" (189). The shared pain of being disallowed crystallizes the conception of paradise for the original founding fathers--Haven. With the founding of Haven, the "Old Fathers" have realized the luxurious freedom, which they equate with paradise:

> An amplitude of soul and stature that was freedom without borders and without deep menacing woods where enemies could hide. Here freedom was not entertainment, like a carnival or a hoedown that you can count on once a year. Nor was it the table droppings from the entitled. Here freedom was a test administered by the natural world that a man had to take for himself every day. And if he passed enough tests long enough, he was king. (99)

For the Old Fathers, then, Haven was paradise because there they could be men--they were not slaves, they could not be told what to do or how to do, and most importantly, they could not be disallowed. There, in Haven, the Old Fathers made the rules; they decided what color of skin would be privileged; they dictated who would be

"allowed" and who would be "disallowed." In Haven, hard-working and God-fearing patriarchs with skin the color of the "deep deep level in the coal mines," skin so dark it was "blue-black," were kings, who "denied each other nothing, bowed to no one, knelt only to their Maker" (193, 99). As the Ruby pageant re-enacted each year at Christmas time demonstrates, finding a home, a true community, in which they are accepted unambivalently, in which they can love and are loved regardless of the past, in which they are united in mutually shared experiences, is the equivalent of earthly paradise for the founding families, a conception articulated at the crux of the pageant:

> Amazing grace, how sweet the sound. In a shower of gold paper stars, the families lay down the dolls, the staffs and form a ring. The voices from the audience peal as one. I once was lost but now am found. (212)

During this magnificent and subtle blending of an African American spiritual and the rhetoric of the Bible, a circle is formed, symbolic of eternal unity, and in which the audience of contemporary Ruby citizens utter sonorously their agreement, the founding families' and the present Ruby families' conceptualization of an earthly utopia coalesce.[43]

Paradise on earth, once "lost" with the Fall of Adam and Eve, has been "found" again with the Eden-like Haven.[44] And while the citizens of Haven were able to maintain this beatific vision for several years, the unrelenting advance of change eventually eroded their town and created the need for a second diaspora, this time deeper into Oklahoma, more isolated. The founding of Ruby was an attempt to duplicate exactly the Original Fathers' founding of Haven, thereby, it was hoped, re-establishing the patriarchal paradise once realized in Haven. The Ruby fathers,

however, have failed. The Ruby sons are in an uproar for change. The communal Oven is no longer sacred ground: "A few young men had taken to congregating there with 3.2 beer, people said, and the small children who liked to play there had been told to go home. [. . .] Then a few girls (who Soane thought needed slapping) found reason to be there" (101). Someone has gone so far as to vandalize the Oven, painting a "fist, jet black with red fingernails [. . .] on the back wall" (101). This Oven, which has often stood as a barometer of public sentiment and is so important to the Ruby men that it "became a shrine," can symbolically indicate the condition of Ruby itself (103). During the Convent raid the Ruby Oven demonstrates that, once again, paradise has been lost: "The Oven shifts, just slightly, on one side. The impacted ground on which it rests is undermined" (287). What was once the symbolic foundation of Haven, the literal and figurative center of a strong, unified, and loving community, has dilapidated and begun to crumble, like Ruby itself.

What the Ruby men do not realize, perhaps can not realize, is that the Convent cellar is not a threat, that it can not be used as a justification for becoming what the Original Fathers themselves used to fear so deeply--a vigilante posse;[45] but rather, the Convent cellar is real evidence that these women have finally found an earthly Paradise of their own, that through the process of this remarkable ceremony directed by Consolata Sosa, who had become "fully housed by the god who sought her out in the garden," these women have found total acceptance, have understood love, have realized what it means to be completely accepted regardless of past transgressions and abuses of others and of themselves (283). Here, in one of the most biting ironies of the novel, after a life of suffering and deprivation of love, acceptance and belonging,

these women's realization and acquisition of a utopian community antecedes the Convent raid by only a very brief time. The Ruby men's perspective, limited, mis-informed and powerful, has demanded that they perceive a reality in which the Convent women are "Bitches. More like witches," who, from the Ruby fathers' perspective, corrupt the entire town ("Before those heifers came to town this was a peaceable kingdom"), and worst of all, commit what to these Ruby men are the most heinous of sins, here listed in order of importance: "They don't need men and they don't need God" (276). Lone DuPres is absolutely correct in her assessment that, to Ruby men, these women are portents of the devil:

> So, Lone thought, the fangs and the tail [of the devil] are somewhere else. Out yonder all slithery in a house full of women. Not women locked safely away from men; but worse, women who chose themselves for company, which is to say not a convent but a coven. (276)

To the Ruby fathers, the wild Convent witches represent the temptation and corruption that, if the men fail in their attempt to eradicate them, will result in the utter demise of Ruby. If the Convent women live, then the Ruby patriarchs will have lost paradise, or at least their conception of it. Limited perspective has repeatedly mis-informed the Ruby men's perception and have mis-directed their action. To the highest degree, mis-informed perceptions of reality caused by dissonant perspectives have resulted in mis-understanding, in devastating violence--the Convent raid, which is a climactic crux that begins and ends Paradise.

Morrison places the initial Morgan/Ruby male perception nearly two-hundred and fifty pages apart from the diametrically opposed Convent perception regarding the

cellar floor.[46] However, when Anna Flood and Richard Misner go to the Convent after the raid to investigate "the convenient mass disappearance of the victims," the stark contrast between the Ruby men's and the Convent women's perceptions of reality, here articulated by Anna Flood, are thrown into sharp relief:

> Anna, [. . .] examining it as closely as her lamp permitted, saw the terribleness K.D. reported, but it wasn't the pornography he had seen, nor was it Satan's scrawl. She saw instead the turbulence of females trying to bridle, without being trampled, the monsters that slavered them. (303)

Perception, what different persons "see" and how they experience reality, is being carefully scrutinized. K.D.'s perception of "Satan's scrawl" is contradicted by Anna's comprehension of females trying to free themselves from their own personal demons. These varying comprehensions of reality are wholly dependent on perspective. Of the mass of perspectives, the reader comprehends that Anna Flood's perception is more accurate, as her perspective is a more completely, and a more accurately, informed understanding of the Convent women. Realizing that each of the Convent women, including Connie, had reached a moment of profound, literally life-endangering crisis helps the reader, as it has helped Anna, gain "proper" perspective (or, a more fully developed perspective), which in turn informs our understanding of the Convent cellar floor. We, like Anna Flood, realize that the templates are the fossil remains of the "horrible" past. Like chalk outlines police draw around dead bodies, the drawings on the cellar floor too reflect death: the symbolic "death" of the women as they were before the ceremony--contemporaneously being mauled by the past while subsisting in the present--which necessarily precedes the women's symbolic rebirth. What the cellar

floor and the outlines do not reflect, and what the Ruby men's perspective does not allow them to realize, is the genesis that results from this "death"-- the symbolic rebirth of these women now freed from "the monsters [of that past] that slavered them" (303).

Keeping in mind that limited perspective effects misunderstanding, we can return again to the words on the lip of the Ruby communal Oven. Regarding the message on the Oven, Deek explains to the congregated youth: "Me and my brother [Stew] lifted that iron. The two of us. And if some letters fell off, it wasn't due to us because we packed it in straw like it was a mewing lamb" (86). Deek seems to be admitting here that perhaps the Oven does not literally read, "Beware the Furrow of His Brow." It does seem clear, and agreed upon by all parties, that the words "the Furrow of His Brow," at least, remain literally visible on the Oven lip. For Deacon and Steward Morgan--who demonstrate the communal perspective of the Ruby elders--a perspective informed by the Original Fathers' stories and the (re)memories lined with persecution and suffering, with the mythic "Dis-allowing," with sundry acts of racism and hatred performed by both whites and blacks, all of these informants of perspective commingle to dictate their perception of reality. And from the perspective of Deacon and Steward Morgan's reality, the message's command is explicit and unmistakable: "Beware the Furrow of His Brow." So, too, is the meaning of the words explicit and unmistakable for the Ruby sons: "Be the Furrow of His Brow." These two communal perspectives have collided, and the sons and fathers are fast approaching their own violent collision. With the examples that I have here discussed (and many others that I have not), Morrison has demonstrated unequivocally that perspective determines the

way in which the experience of reality is perceived. Because of the perspectives of each group and of the individuals that comprise them, the Oven's message "reads" exactly how each group believes it should "read," just as the Morgan men's expectations control the way they perceive the Convent cellar floor. As Morrison demonstrates in Paradise, perspective, formed by every impulse in a person's life, informs all perception, thus dictating the experiencing of reality. In the world of Morrison's novel, the result of misinformed perspective is always misappropriate, misguided violence.

Chapter VII: Conflicting Perspectives and the Construction of a Narrator

> Other than Deacon Morgan, who had nothing to say, every one of the assaulting men had a different tale and their families and friends (who had been nowhere near the Convent) supported them, enhancing, recasting, inventing misinformation. (297)

Finally, even the men who have raided the Convent refuse to agree upon what actually happened, as the above epigram indicates. As a mob, the group of nine men shared a unified perspective in which they regarded the Convent women as dangerous and evil, as women that, at all costs, must be eliminated. And the men have acted accordingly. In retrospect, however, each person's discrete perspective causes them to regard the raid differently, to try and rationalize and justify the attack that in the frenzy of the raid had seemed so rational and justifiable. With the dissolve of the mob's collective mentality, virtually every Ruby citizen explains and recalls the raid differently. Lone DuPres recognizes the reason for the disparate "editions of the official story" and is angered by the town people's self-serving, manipulative nature: "As for Lone, she became unhinged by the way the story was being retold; how people were changing it to make themselves look good" (297).

Although we recognize that Lone DuPres has the most fully informed perspective of any of the novel's characters because she is a go-between of sorts, existing fully in neither Ruby nor the Convent, but excluded completely from neither, we simultaneously recognize that she is not able to promote her own version of the story, that she "could not prevent altered truth from taking hold in other quarters" (297).

The key word in this quotation is "altered," as a qualifier of "truth." We realize, then, that depending on who recounts the story of the raid, "truth" differs. "Truth," we understand, is necessarily dependent on subjective perspective. As Katherine A. Nelson-Born explains in her article in which she addresses the "constantly shifting [. . .] narrative point of view in Jazz, which allows Morrison to retain focalization while disrupting the reader's attempts to appropriate her story," an array of subjective narratives "decenters power and dissolves the possibility of a totalizing narrative" (5, 4).[47] With these many perspectives, Morrison has disallowed any one character's or group's narrative to dominate. The very notion of an unified, objective perspective is not only called into question, but is subverted completely. As Nelson-Born argues regarding Morrison's (and Margaret Atwood's and Louise Erdrich's) novels generally, we are forced to confront the very "issue of 'meaning'" (3). Thus, there is no "correct" experiencing of reality, nor is there an "incorrect" experiencing of reality. Instead, Morrison's fragmented narratorial focalizations, which adopt specific perspectives, oftentimes via (communal) free indirect discourse, demonstrate that there is only the experiencing. Morrison's narrative structure takes us through the full course of events that begin with those components in life which inform conflicting perspectives and end with the extreme violence provoked as a result of conflicting perceptions of reality.

But we understand that perspective necessarily predicates perception, just as we ultimately realize that Morrison's narrator most often operates from the positioned perspective of a specific character or community, and from this limited perspective, the narratorial point of view goes no further, offers nothing more, than that character or

community is able. In so doing, Morrison forces readers to approach the text as if they were entering into the Ruby community and learning about the town, the people, the stories, the legends, without having the luxury of an omniscient voice to inform their understanding of the novel. Thus, in this book largely devoid of omniscient narration, no omniscient narratorial analysis, explanation, or interpretation supplements any character's or group's experiences. We must simply continue on, compounding different points of view and different experiencings of reality derived from the characters' unique perspectives, until finally, at novel's end, we are able to hold in our minds the Convent women's, the Ruby fathers', the Ruby sons', and even the Ruby women's, vastly different perspectives. In fact, there is no major character, nor community, whose (communal) perspective we do not ultimately apprehend. Thus, as the novel nears its conclusion, the reader achieves a privileged perspective, a perspective more fully informed than any individual or group in the novel.[48] We understand what events, what memories, what fears, what experiences, what beliefs, have led these characters to their current perspective. As a result of our fully developed comprehension, we realize a heightened level of understanding regarding the story itself--something approaching, but not quite, readerly omniscience. Ultimately, it is we--and not Morrison's narrator--who fulfill the role of the more traditional narrator, the kind "allowed the right of access to all secret places," who "continually intervenes in [the] story to explain and make moral comments, to interpret [the] work to [the] readers" (Pascal 3, 5). No such narrator pervades the pages of Paradise; instead, we peruse them. For Morrison's various narrative focalizations ultimately force the reader into the unlikely, and at times undesired and uncomfortable,

position of privileged narrator/reader. In Black Women Writers at Work, Morrison explains that her writing "expects, demands participatory reading," that her language has "holes and spaces so the reader can come into it" (125). Indeed, Morrison leaves the arduous task of explaining, of interpreting, of clarifying the events of the novel to the reader.

Thus, at novel's end, Morrison has conjured a subtle, but absolutely profound, transformation in her readers. Morrison, like an authorial Consolata Sosa, has prepared and directed her readers, through her focalized narrative structure and through her pervasive use of (communal) free indirect discourse, to experience a process akin to loud dreaming to an extent not even the Convent women are privy to; for we not only partake in a loud dreaming along with the Convent community, we also "step easily into" the subjective (communal) narrations of each major character and each community (264). By revealing completely each character's perspective and perception, Morrison has taught us what we "are hungry for" in the context of this novel: understanding (262). We desire to understand the novel, to engage with the currents of meaning that we sense pulsing beneath the surface as we progress and that grow more palpable as we near the conclusion until, finally, we realize readerly omniscience. Through the reading of the text, the reader has undergone an internalization of the different characters' motives, thoughts, perspectives, and perceptions. Simply put, Morrison's narrative technique forces us to know, to understand, every character and every perspective completely so that the reader, as narrator, may come to order the novel itself.

To be clear, this is not to say that Morrison somehow neglects her responsibilities,

or even that she avoids all "omniscient" narration.[49] But Morrison has created a text that is largely devoid of interpretative, explanatory, omniscient narration. Rather, the narration is most often biased, subjective, and founded on a particular (or communal) perspective--and is thus quite limited. We are on our own, forced to sort through the varied and varying accounts of experiences and the innumerable influences which inform perspectives. We push blindly forward as readers, trusting that Morrison intends us to struggle, and that the labor will provide a substantial yield. And, as we expect, we are indeed rewarded, for at the end of Paradise, readers have actually become that entity whose absence has caused such dis-ease during the process of reading. We ultimately and literally have become capable of readerly omniscience. We are finally able to fully understand each character's and each group's motivations and all of the urges which inform the diverse perspectives. As the novel concludes, we are able to offer an informed explanation as to why this tragedy at the Convent has occurred. Our privileged position as reader/narrator enables us to offer commentary and interpretation retrospectively. Our questions which the narrator fails and/or refuses to answer, we now are capable of answering. Morrison's desire to force her readers to actively engage with her text, to struggle participatorily with her work, has reached a stunning apex. We, as privileged, informed narrators of Paradise, must take each of the fragmented, perspectified, subjective focalizations and create for ourselves the missing omniscient narration to which we are accustomed and without which we feel dis-ease.

Aligned with the Ruby men during the initial telling of the Convent raid, we understand only the monotone perspective of these men. During the second telling of

the raid, our developed panoramic understanding of each character and community allows us to fill in the "holes and spaces" of the story, allows us, in effect, to omnisciently narrate the story for ourselves. Morrison alerts us that with this second telling of the Convent raid, we will understand the same event differently: "Suddenly a woman with the same white skin appears, and all Steward needs to see are her sensual appraising eyes to pull the trigger again" (my emphasis, 285). We realize that as with the first account of the raid, we are now viewing this event from the Ruby men's perspective; but also we are viewing the "same" event "again," this time from our own revised, fully informed perspective as narrator/reader. The men's perspective has not changed. They still experience a reality in which "sexualized infants play with one another through flaking paint [. . .] [on] the walls of the [Convent] foyer," a reality in which this white girl has "sensual appraising eyes" (285). Indeed, it is the reader who has changed. Now we fill the void of the absent omniscient narrator, who would normally interpret these events for us; now we comment on the action for ourselves, explain why this raid is happening, explicate meaning from the text. In this second account of the Convent raid, the narration jumps between the Ruby men's perspective and the Convent women's perspective, and offers no explanation (285-89). Readers, now fully equipped with the necessary panoramic understanding of all the unique perspectives, narrate the second telling of the raid, and by retrospective extension the entire novel, for themselves. Through the use of a shifting narrative perspective mostly absent of omniscient commentary and the frequent employment of (communal) free indirect discourse which reinforces the understanding that the fragmented narratives are positioned within the perspective of a particular character or group,

Morrison forces her reader to develop her or his own understanding of events as the novel begins, to constantly revise this understanding as the novel progresses, until, finally, as the novel concludes, the reader adopts the privileged position of a non-limited, fully informed narrator with panoramic comprehension of all perspectives, who explains, comments, and interprets the events of the novel, thereby participating in the construction of meaning.

Notes

[1] This sort of misdirection might recall Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s ideas regarding the signifyin(g) monkey, and more particularly, Gates's analysis of Roger D. Abrahams' definition of signifyin(g):

> The name "signifying" he concludes, "shows the monkey to be a trickster, signifying being the language of trickery, that set of words or gestures achieving Hamlet's "direction through indirection." The Monkey, in short, is not only a master of technique, as Abrahams concludes; he is technique, or style, or the literariness of literary language; he is the great Signifier. (54)

Jeanne Rosier Smith develops this idea of the great Signifier and seems to equate it directly with Morrison's narrator in Tar Baby, explaining that

> "signifying language creates a worldview that allows for paradox, contradiction, and multiple perspectives. In calling attention to metalevels of experience, masking or signifying language embodies a trickster aesthetic, which seeks to destabilize absolute perspectives and essentializing definitions" (143).

And more specifically about the narrator, Smith writes, "By presenting so many competing perspectives, Morrison's tricksterlike narrative voice effectively undermines the stability or plausibility of any single point of view" (147-48).

[2] Henry Louis Gates, Jr., identifying moments of free indirect discourse in Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God, discusses a like moment: "Moreover, the presence of the adverb here ('yes, indeed, right here in his pocket') as

opposed to there, which would be required in normal indirect speech because one source would be describing another, informs us that the assertion originates within and reflects the character's sensibilities, not the narrator's" (210).

[3] This text is often referred to by other scholars working with free indirect discourse. Part One, "Theory," was of particular use to me. This section traces the beginnings and then the evolution of free indirect speech, which is synonymous with free indirect discourse. For a useful discussion of scholarship on free indirect discourse (up to 1978), see Brian McHale's "Free Indirect Discourse: A Survey of Recent Accounts."

[4] As Vaheed K. Ramazani points out, Pascal's term style indirect libre, which he translates as "free indirect speech," can lead to some confusion, as "speech" can be misunderstood to mean only vocalized words. Like Ramazani and most other contemporary scholars, I prefer "free indirect discourse," because "discourse" can mean either "spoken or silent verbalization" (139). I will use the term free indirect discourse throughout my own analysis; Pascal's term, however, should be understood to be synonymous with free indirect discourse (139).

[5] The section to which Gates refers (on page 239 of Their Eyes) and which he quotes is as follows: "They looked back. Saw people trying to run in raging waters and screaming when they found they couldn't. A huge barrier of the makings of the dike to which the cabins had been added was rolling and tumbling forward. [. . .] The monstropolous beast had left his bed [. . .] . The sea was walking the earth with a heavy heel" (Gates 212).

[6] The following schema, taken from Ramazani, "illustrates the essential relationship

between [the three] types" of discourse:

STATEMENT

Direct discourse:

He said (thought), "I am happy."

He said (thought), "I was happy."

He said (thought), "I will be happy."

Indirect discourse:

He said (thought) that he was happy.

He said (thought) that he had been happy.

He said (thought) that he would be happy.

Free indirect discourse:

He was happy.

He had been happy.

He would be happy.

QUESTION

He said (thought), "Am I happy?"

He asked himself (wondered) if he was happy.

Was he happy?" (37-39).

See also Gates's demonstration of the differences between these types of discourse in which he cites examples from Their Eyes (209-11), and Greenbaum's "Direct and Indirect Speech" in The Oxford Companion to the English Language, for additional clarification of these modes of discourse.

[7] The section from Hurston's text (pages 47 and 48) to which Gates refers is:

> Joe Starks was the name, yeah Joe Starks from in and through Georgy. Been workin' for white folks all his life. Saved up some money--round three hundred dollars, yes indeed, right here in his pocket. Kept hearin' 'bout them buildin' a new state down heah in Floridy and sort of wanted to come. But he was makin' money where he was. But when he heard all about 'em makin' a town all outa colored folks, he knowed dat was de place he wanted to be. He had always wanted to be a big voice, but de white folks had all de sayso where he come from and everywhere else, exceptin' dis place dat colored folks was buildin' theirselves. Dat was right too. De man dat built things oughta boss it. Let colored folks built things too if day wants to crow over somethin'. He was glad he had his money all saved up. He meant to git dere whilst de town wuz yet a baby. He meant to buy in big. (qtd. in Gates 210)

[8] During the second telling of the Convent raid, we are told, "Deek gives the orders. The men separate" (286).

[9] I am reminded by my own phrasing here of Gates's comments regarding the following lines from Alice Walker's The Color Purple: "It's hot, here, Celie, she write. Hotter Than July. Hotter than August and July. Hot like cooking dinner on a big stove in a little kitchen in August and July. Hot" (qtd. in Gates 250). Regarding these lines, Gates writes,

> Who said, or wrote, these words, words which echo both the Southern expression 'a cold day in August' and Stevie Wonder's album Hotter Than

> July? Stevie Wonder? Nettie? Celie? All three, and no one. These are Celie's words, merged with Nettie's, in a written imitation of the merged voices of free indirect discourse, an exceptionally rare form in that here even the illusion of mimesis is dispelled. (250)

[10] A non-exhaustive, non-exegetic list of instances of (communal) free indirect discourse would include the following:

> "Like the clothes of an easily had woman." (4); "That nothing inside or out rots the one all-black town worth the pain." (5); "No clothes in the closets, of course, since the women wore no-fit dirty dresses and nothing you could honestly call shoes." (7); "[. . .] in a place that once housed Christians--well, Catholics anyway--not a cross of Jesus anywhere." (7); "These rooms are normal. Messy--[. . .]--but normal at least." (8); "Do what you have to. Neither the Convent nor the women in it can continue." (10); "Who could have imagined that twenty-five years later in a brand-new town a Convent would beat out the snakes, the Depression, the tax man and the railroad for sheer destructive power?" (17); "God at their side, the men take aim. For Ruby." (my emphasis, 18).

I have not eliminated any applicable or defining punctuation marks in this list.

[11] Ramazani is here discussing free indirect discourse generally and not Morrison's work. The full quote is as follows: "Thus, while the separation of narrator and reflector is conceptually sound, we cannot expect that it always be clear-cut, since narratorial discourse, as the exclusive purveyor of both perspectives, may obfuscate to varying degrees the exact point of their divergence" (36-37).

[12] I include this quote from Fairy DuPres because if this passage were direct discourse, the entire section would be enclosed in quotation marks (it is not), in which case, Fairy's curse would be enclosed by a single quotation mark.

[13] The only other option is that, when Patricia "continued to write," she was picking up where she left off when she "stopped and rubbed the callus on her middle finger" (202, 201). Even if this is the case, this is still a stunning move from direct discourse to indirect discourse to a sustained and virtually irrefutable instance of free indirect discourse. While I believe that this is an instance of free indirect discourse that the narrator, in the second paragraph, presents as direct discourse, the second option delineated in this note, though less exceptional, is still striking.

[14] Fludernik uses examples from The Bluest Eye, Sula, and Song of Solomon.

[15] I claim that this comment is from the perspective of the Ruby women because the section refers to Dovey, who "had talked to her sister (and sister-in-law) about it; to Mable Fleetwood; to Anna Flood; to a couple of women in the Club. Opinions were varied, confusing, even incoherent, because feelings ran so high over the matter" (83). So to the men of Ruby, the words are absolutely clear, just as they are distinct--and different--to the youth of Ruby. These two, differing perspectives regarding the words on the Oven's lip cause the women, then, to have "varied, confusing, even incoherent" opinions regarding the words.

[16] As Marilyn Sanders Mobley points out in her article-length, biographical entry on Toni Morrison in The Oxford Companion to African American Literature, Morrison, in her Nobel lecture, "eloquently demonstrated that the visionary force and

poetic import of her novels reflect her worldview and understanding of how language shapes human reality" (510). With the words on the Oven lip, we are witnessing language shape the disparate experiencings of reality of the Ruby sons and the Ruby fathers.

[17] Although Smith is referring specifically to "trickster" characters in Morrison's work in this passage, I believe this "impulse" transcends any single character type.

[18] I attribute this recollection to the narratorial perspective of Arnold Fleetwood because this narration occurs during his flashback: "He remembers the ceremony they'd had when the Oven's iron lip was recemented into place and its worn letters polished for all to see. He himself had helped clean off sixty-two years of carbon and animal fat so the words shone as brightly as they did in 1890 when they were new" (6). It is not until page 286 that the reader can definitively identify that the "He" being referred to is in fact Arnold Fleetwood: "Minutes pass. Arnold and Jeff Fleetwood leave the kitchen and notice a trace of wintergreen in the air." Arnold, the father, and not Jeff, would be old enough to remember this ceremony.

[19] For an excellent discussion of Morrison's use of "remembering" in Beloved, see Marilyn Sanders Mobley's article, "A Different Remembering: Memory, History, and Meaning in Beloved," which appears in Toni Morrison: Critical Perspectives Past and Present. There Mobley writes:

> Morrison's text foregrounds the dialogic characteristics of memory along with its imaginative capacity to construct and reconstruct the significance of the past. Thus, while the slave narrative characteristically moves in a

chronological, linear narrative fashion, Beloved meanders through time, sometimes circling back, other times moving vertically, spirally [sic] out of time and space. (358)

This analysis of the functioning of memory and story-telling is applicable to Paradise as well. For an additional discussion on "re-membering," see Elizabeth Cooley.

Also, the phrase "half-dozen or so words" is an instance of free indirect discourse. The narrator has adopted the idiom of Arnold Fleetwood.

[20] Another clear textual example of this exploding rift caused by change occurs as the narrator, speaking for/as Soane via frequent free indirect discourse which then moves into communal free indirect discourse (which I've emphasized below), is remembering the events of the town meeting and recalling what Soane and the others Ruby "elders" believed would happen:

> When Royal and the other two, Destry and one of Pious DuPres' daughters, asked for a meeting, it was quickly agreed upon. No one had called a town meeting in years. Everybody, including Soane and Dovey, thought the young people would first apologize for their behavior and then pledge to clean up and maintain the site [the Oven, which had been vandalized]. Instead they came with a plan of their own. A plan that completed what the fist had begun. Royal, called Roy, took the floor and, without notes, gave a speech perfect in every way but intelligibility. Nobody knew what he was talking about and the parts that could be understood were plumb foolish. He said they were way out-of-date; that things had changed everywhere but in Ruby. He wanted to give the Oven

> a name, to have meetings there to talk about how handsome they were while giving themselves ugly names. Like not American. Like African. [. . .] She had the same level of interest in Africans as they had in her: none. But Roy talked about them like they were neighbors or, worse, family. And he talked about white people as though he had just discovered them and seemed to think what he'd learned was news.
>
> Yet there was something more and else in his speech. Not so much what could be agreed or disagreed with, but a kind of winged accusation. [. . .] As though there was a new and more manly way to deal with whites. Not the Blackhorse or Morgan way, but some African-type thing full of new words, new color combinations, new haircuts. [. . .] Because the old way was slow, limited to just a few, and weak. This last accusation swole Deek's neck and, on a weekday, had him blowing out the brains of quail to keep his own from exploding. (104)

As this passage demonstrates, the Ruby youth are proponents of change (social, political, ideological); they disagree with the founding fathers' methods: isolation, total autonomy, avoidance of confrontation, etc. These Ruby sons do not have the stories, the myths, the understanding of the "Dis-allowing," of the Walking Man leading them to an isolated utopia where men can live free of fear, free of anything but his own capricious spirit. These myths and stories and memories (Deek and Stew's in particular) inform these founding fathers' shared (or communal) perspectives.

[21] I believe that it is important to clarify that even though there are several younger men in the group--Menus, K.D., and Jeff--these nine men who raid the Convent all

share the perspective of the Ruby patriarchs.

[22] I do not intend for this comment ("very old and often-used motif") to have any negative connotations, but rather to point out that a Father/Son dichotomy is indeed a motif rich in literary tradition.

[23] Clearly, one can be apolitical, or anti-political, or amoral, or immoral, etc. I use these adjectives very generically here and intend that they allow for every potential derivative of the base word.

[24] The Ruby patriarchs are willing to eliminate, or to disassociate from, any person or group that presents a challenge to their power, whether it be the Convent women, white society, the Ruby sons, etc. Here, Steward ponders what he and the other Ruby fathers can do regarding the Ruby youth movement:

> He spat again, thinking how much of a fool Misner turned out to be. Foolish and maybe even dangerous. He wondered if that generation--Misner's and K.D.'s--would have to be sacrificed to get to the next one. The grand- and great-grandchildren who could be trained, honed as his own father and grandfather had done for Steward's generation. (94)

[25] While K.D. (whose real name is Coffee, "aka K.D. [as in Kentucky Derby]" for the horse race he won as a young boy) is technically not a "Morgan" because his last name is Smith, I will refer to him throughout as a "Morgan" because his mother, Ruby Smith, was Steward and Deacon's sister, and because Stew and Deek have taken K.D. on as their heir (191).

[26] Regarding the importance of stories and storytelling in Paradise, Storace writes:

> the histories of both populations [Ruby and the Convent] have been

> shaped and continue to be shaped directly by the kinds of stories told and believed about them. Paradise is, among other things, about the complex uses of storytelling, religious, political, ethnic, legal, personal, in the life of a community--the events the novel describes bear witness to the sometimes terrifying, sometimes inspiring phenomenon of the governing power of stories, as they reshape the world, influencing laws, wars, citizenships, massacres, and marriages, stories that persuade and justify, save and doom, take possession of those who created them. (65)

[27] Patricia Best is the town's mythographer, of sorts. Her "history project [. . .] a collection of family trees; the genealogies of each of the fifteen families," is very much like a Ruby bible, and in fact the language that describes her genealogy project is similar to the language that describes the Bible that Seneca brings to her imprisoned boyfriend, Eddy Turtle (187).

[28] Dovey, too, recognizes that her husband, and the other patriarchs, are losing their control over Ruby: "Dovey didn't have to wonder what else he [Steward] would lose now because he was already in a losing battle with Reverend Misner over words attached to the lip of the Oven" (82-83).

[29] I say this redistribution of blame is perhaps justified because when K.D. and Arnette separate themselves from the others at the Oven to discuss the fact that Arnette is pregnant, the reader discovers, via free indirect discourse, that K.D. is thinking, "You [Arnette] cornered me at more socials than I can remember and when I finally agreed I didn't have to take your drawers down you beat me to it so this ain't my problem" (54). Arnette actively pursued K.D.

[30] That most of Ruby shares a unified perspective regarding Billie Delia is made clear in the following excerpt: "Suddenly there was a dark light in the eyes of boys who felt comfortable staring at her. Suddenly a curious bracing in the women, a looking-away in the men" (151). Because of the informing memory of what the innocent three-year-old Billie Delia did, the communal perspective of Ruby is limited.

[31] I believe that this "loud dreaming" shared experience is Pallas's because the words "mother's rivalry" can be explicated to indicate Pallas's mother, Dee Dee, who steals, from Pallas's perspective, Carlos when Pallas and Carlos come to stay with Dee Dee after having run away.

[32] The passage which informs my claim that Pallas and Carlos never had sex is as follows: "They saw each other every weekend after that. She did everything she could think of to get him to make love to her. He responded passionately to their necking but for weeks never allowed more. He was the one who said, 'When we are married'" (167).

[33] The usually immaculately tended land around the Convent is described as follows:

> Consolata surveyed the winter-plagued garden. Tomato vines hung limp over fallen fruit, black and smashed in the dirt. Mustards were pale yellow with rot and inattention. A whole spill of melons caved in on themselves near heads of chrysanthemums stricken mud brown. A few chicken feathers were stuck to the low wire fencing protecting the garden from whatever it could. Without human help, gopher holes, termite castles, evidence of rabbit forays and determined crows abounded. (251)

[34] Connie calls her gift "seeing in" and Lone calls it "stepping in;" so they agree to call the gift "in sight [which is] [s]omething God made free to anyone who wanted to develop it (247). Also, Morrison writes: "For seventeen days Consolata had been inside, alone, keeping Mary Magna's breath coming and going, the cool blue light flickering until Mary Magna asked permission to go" (249).

[35] I base my claim that Connie is here speaking/praying to Jesus Christ here based on the fact that "Him" and "You" are each capitalized; and earlier, the narrator, speaking for/with Connie, writes: "Christ, to whom one gave total surrender and then swallowed the idea of His flesh, to a living man" (my emphasis 240). The masculine pronoun "His" is capitalized in this passage as it refers to "Christ."

[36] Perhaps I here need to clarify that "haunts," for my purposes, can refer to any event, person, place, or thing from the past which serves to inform perspective, which dictates one's perception of reality. "Haunts" are those horrible events in the past which continually "haunt" these women's present, which have led to the crisis that each of these women are presently experiencing, and which I've attempted to codify to a small degree. Mavis, for example, is literally haunted by the spirits of Merle and Pearl, while Connie is haunted by the belief that she will be dis-allowed from heaven because of her "wicked" practicing of "stepping in," or "seeing in" or "in sight," (247).

[37] This mythic or supernatural visitor is akin to the Friend that has repeatedly visited Dovey Morgan at her and Stew's other house on St. Matthew Street in Ruby, and also to the Walking Man with the satchel who led Zechariah "Big Papa" Morgan and the other Original Families to the place that became Haven.

[38] Names often hold great significance in Morrison's work, as Genevieve Fabre

points out in her discussion of names and naming in Song of Solomon (see particularly page 109). With this in mind, looking closely as "Consolata Sosa" yields some additional meaning. In Portuguese, "consolar" means "comfort, console"; "consola" means "consolation." Additionally, "sossegado" means "calm, quiet"; "sossegar" means "repose, rest"; "sossego" means "calm, quiet, silence." These variations (perhaps manipulations) of Connie's full name are appropriate, and for her to disclose her full name at this moment, too, is fitting, as she is here offering comfort, consolation, calm, quiet, repose, rest, silence for these Convent women.

[39] This passage, which is a clear instance of communal free indirect discourse, constitutes another excellent example of perspective dictating the experiencing of reality. As this passage is from the perspective of Mavis, Gigi, Seneca, and Pallas, this constitutes the ways in which they have experienced life with Connie, which has been informed by each of their perspectives. Connie, conversely, has experienced something much different: "Over the past eight years they had come. The first one, Mavis, during Mother's long illness; the second [Gigi] right after she died. Then two more" (222). The fact that all of the women arrive as Mother is sick or after she has died is important because this indicates that they have only known Connie as she has been growing more and more depressed and dependent on alcohol to numb her own pain, yet none of them realizes that they are burdensome. From Connie's perspective, often demonstrated by way of free indirect discourse, the passage continues:

> Now and then one or another packed a scruffy little bag, said goodbye and seemed to disappear for a while--but only a while. They always came back to stay on, living like mice in a house no one, not even the tax

collector, wanted, with [Connie] a woman in love with the cemetery. [. . .] When she was sipping Saint-Emilion or the smoky Jarnac, she could tolerate them, but more and more she wanted to snap their necks. Anything to stop the badly cooked indigestible food, the greedy hammering music, the fights, the raucous empty laughter, the claims. But especially the drift. [. . .] Not only did they do nothing except the absolutely necessary, they had no plans to do anything. Instead of plans they had wishes--foolish babygirl wishes. Mavis talked endlessly of surefire money making ventures. [. . .] One [Gigi] thought she had found a treasure chest of money or jewels or something and wanted help to cheat the others of its contents. Another [Seneca] was secretly slicing her thighs, her arms. [. . .] One [Pallas] longed for what sounded like a sort of cabaret life. [. . .] Consolata listened to these babygirl dreams with padded, wine-dampened indulgence, for they did not infuriate her as much as their whispers of love which lingered long after the women had gone. One by one they would float down the stairs, carrying a kerosene lamp or a candle [. . .] to sit on the floor and talk of men who came to caress them in their sleep; of men waiting for them in the desert or by cool water; of men who once had desperately loved them; or men who should have loved them, might have loved, would have.

On her worst days, when the maw of depression soiled the clean darkness, she wanted to kill them all. Maybe that was what her slug life was being prolonged for. (222-23)

I quote this large block of text to demonstrate how discordant the Convent women's perception of reality is from Connie's. No Convent woman is aware of Connie's perspective, though Connie seems aware of theirs. "Reality," necessarily experienced uniquely, differs depending on perspective, as these contrasting perceptions demonstrate.

[40] Mark Ledbetter, discussing Beloved, describes his understanding and experiencing of the trauma which Sethe endures, writes the following:

> I am not suggesting that any one of us can know totally the experience of the other, whether other race, gender, geography, and so on. I am suggesting that we take a pernicious and frightening posture when we do not try to engage and understand the experience of the other. Perhaps the best we can do is attempt to make the metaphors of the other an intimate part of our lives and the way we see the world. (49)

Although I might agree with his claim that none "of us can know totally the experience of the other" in the "real" world, I would argue that in the world of Morrison's fiction, in the world of Paradise, "loud dreaming" is a technique that literally and figuratively allows for a total experience of another. As Ledbetter continues, trying to offer a way by which we can come close to "the experience of the other," I believe his method is in fact similar to the effect of "loud dreaming": "when we use the metaphor of the other, we must do so from the posture of vulnerability, as an offering to know and with the willingness to be corrected" (49).

[41] Perhaps a simple analogy will suffice: if, say, Lone DuPres had come upon the scene of Mavis and Gigi fighting on the side of the road, her more fully informed

perspective would in all likelihood form her perception of the event more accurately, which is to say, she would not infer sexual overtones to this scene. Lone DuPres, aware of Mavis and Gigi's mutual hatred (at this point), would understand the fight as an eruption between these two "enemies" and would stop and offer any assistance she could.

[42] Another, more brief example of discordant perceptions of reality as a result of perspectives that differ manifests itself when Wisdom Poole and Sargeant Person "walk the hall and examine the four bedrooms" during the Convent raid (7). These Ruby men find "a letter written in blood so smeary its satanic message cannot be deciphered" (7). What these men's limited perspective does not allow them to realize is that in fact this "letter" is the note left by Jean (Seneca's mother, who claimed she was her sister) for Seneca:

> Demoralized by unanswered prayers, bleeding gums and hunger she gave up goodness, climbed up on a chair and opened the bread box. Leaning against the box of Lorna Doones was an envelope with a word she recognized instantly: her own name printed in lipstick. She opened it, even before she tore into the cookie box, and pulled out a single sheet of paper with more lipstick words. She could not understand any except her own name again at the top, "Jean" at the bottom, loud red marks in between.
>
> Soaking in happiness, she folded the letter back in the envelope, put it in her shoe and carried it for the rest of her life. Hiding it, fighting for the

> right to keep it, rescuing it from wastebaskets. [. . .] Over time, it became simply a sheet of paper smeared fire-cracker red, not one decipherable word left. But it was the letter, safe in her shoe, that made leaving with the caseworker for the first of two foster homes possible. (127-28)

This letter, from the men's perspective a "satanic message" that was "written in blood," is understood by the reader to be a pathetic and meaningful memento that Seneca found five days after being abandoned and by which Seneca can remember Jean (7). Limited perspective demands that the Ruby men's experiencing of reality, based on mis-information, is not accurate.

[43] In Maryemma Graham's article-length entry, "Novel," in the Oxford Companion to African American Literature, she explains that

> Morrison's role in the development of the novel is to bring multiple traditions together in the art novel. Drawing upon African American and Latin American forms, African myths, male and female myths, iconographies, and modern and postmodern techniques, Morrison makes the novel a narrative event in which one must confront the complexity of the novel's structure alongside that of its meaning. (545)

While this quote is applicable for many aspects of the entire novel, here, in particular, we recognize the blending of the vernacular tradition and sound inherent to the Negro spiritual and of the language inherent to the King's English of the King James Bible.

[44] I use the rhetoric of Christianity here (and at other places) because Morrison, quite intentionally, has employed this vast reservoir of symbolic language herself in her

novel. Codifying the biblical allusions in Paradise could fill several theses. I use this vocabulary occasionally for convenience, not (only) to explicate biblical correspondences.

[45] Storace believes that in "showing us a lynching party entirely made up of black men," Morrison is presenting "another of the shocking and brilliant inversions that are the engine of this novel" (68).

[46] During the initial "telling" of the Convent raid, the reader apprehends the cellar floor from the Morgan men's perspective:

> Now one brother, a leader in everything, smashes the cellar door with the butt of his rifle. The other waits a few feet back with their nephew. All three descend the steps ready and excited to know. They are not disappointed. What they see is the devil's bedroom, bathroom, and his nasty playpen. (17)

Much later, privy to the Convent women's stories and memories of their pasts, the reader apprehends the development of the cellar floor from the women's perspective. The pictorial representations of the personal atrocities in these women's histories could easily be taken out of context, could easily be misunderstood, as Steward, Deacon, and K.D. clearly do, if the knowledge of why the images appear and how both the drawing and sharing of the stories are cathartic. Interestingly, with the first telling of the raid, Morrison has presented the men's mis-informed perception before demonstrating that they are mis-informed. That is to say, if the novel were to end after the initial telling of the Convent raid, the reader would have no reason to believe that the men's actions, although extremely violent and final, could not be rationalized or, as

they say, "justified" (287). By beginning in this way, Morrison demands that her reader enter the novel as if we were a character coming into Ruby, hearing all the different stories and perspectives of those stories, and ultimately forces us to decide which perspective is most accurate, thus demanding that we create our own experience of the novel's reality.

[47] Nelson-Born defines "focalization" as "the point of view from which the story is told" (4).

[48] It is worth briefly mentioning that Lone DuPres does seem to have the most fully informed perspective, for as the third person narrator informs us, "Lone understood these private thoughts and some of what Steward's and Deacon's motive might be: neither one put up with what he couldn't control" (278-79). But even she is not privileged with full understanding:

> But she could not have imagined Steward's rancor--his bile at the thought that his grandnephew (maybe?) had surely been hurt or destroyed in that place. [. . .] Nor could she have imagined how deep in the meat of the brain stem lay the memory of how close his brother came to breaking up his marriage to Soane. [. . .] Nor did Lone know the glacier that was Deacon Morgan's pride. [. . .] She knew about his long ago relationship with Consolata. But she could not have fathomed his personal shame or understood how important it was to erase both the shame and the kind of woman he believed was its source. (279).

[49] Three such moments will suffice: "If ever there came a morning when mercy and simple good fortune took to their heels and fled, grace alone might have to do.

But from where would it come and how fast? In that holy hollow between sighting and following through, could grace slip through at all?" (73). And, "There are great rivers in the world and on their banks and the edges of oceans children thrill to water. In places where rain is light the thrill is almost erotic. But those sensations bow to the rapture of holy women dancing in hot sweet rain" (283). And also, the novel's final page, importantly, is completely third-person narration that is not from a particular character's perspective (318). Because of the relative rarity of these modes of narration, they readily draw attention to themselves and alert the reader to this differing narrative mode, and thus throw the non-omniscient, limited-perspective narration into sharp relief.

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